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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS, SOCIOLOGY, AND EDUCATION

UNDERSTANDING THE ROLES AND MOTIVATIONS OF NONNATIVE
PROFESSIONALS WHO WORK WITH NATIVE AMERICAN COMMUNITIES

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DEDICATION

I dedicate my thesis to two Ojibwe elders whose stories and wisdom inspire me. I will never be able to repay you for the lessons you have taught me. This is my gift to you,

Dennis Banks and Nancy Kingbird.

Miigwitch.

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I would like to thank each of the Nonnatives professionals who participated for your time, openness, and willingness to share your stories.



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ABSTRACT

Colonization of the United States ignited a flame of distrust by Native Americans towards Nonnative Americans. After hundreds of years of genocide, assimilation, broken treaties, reservation creation, and the ongoing adverse effects of institutional colonization, a lack of trust still exists between Native and Nonnative communities. By sharing the stories of ten Nonnative professionals who work with Native American communities, my thesis is a tool for other Nonnatives who might question their role in this field. As a forewarning, this thesis does not contain the answers to what the “right” way to work with Native American communities is. However, what it can offer is a starting place towards discovering your role as a Nonnative professional who works with Native American communities.

This thesis is my contribution to the ongoing dialogue about what the role of Nonnative professionals who work with Native American communities is and what it should be. It offers my interpretation of the themes I identified across the ten practitioner profiles: Colonization: Historical and Ongoing Effects, Listen to Learn, Trust takes Time, and It’s the Small things. Furthermore, it provides an opportunity for you to draw your own conclusions, engage in dialogue, and think critically about your role in this complex and interdependent world. Since we each come to the table with our own experiences, values, and worldviews, the pathways toward strengthening Native and Nonnative relationships and collaboration lie within our individual and collective capacity.

PREFACE

I would like to preface my thesis by acknowledging my biases and explaining why this topic is so important to me. I am a twenty-two-year-old white female. I grew up in a military family and moved seven times throughout my childhood. Despite the numerous homes we lived in, I grew up very sheltered from most social inequalities.

I attended high school in Northern Virginia at a diverse and inclusive school. It wasn't until I came to college that I recognized that diversity is not everywhere. Furthermore, diversity does not necessarily mean inclusivity. My eyes were opened to many of the oppressive social structures in American society during a race relations course I took my freshmen year. This class encouraged me to take a course about indigenous knowledge in the Great Lakes Region.

During the class we learned about Ojibwe culture and worldview. Over the summer we travelled to Northern Minnesota where we spent two weeks on three Ojibwe Reservations. It was during my time in Ojibwe country that I saw the beauty and resilience of indigenous culture paralleled with unsettling poverty and other adversities. The people who I met during this trip changed my life.

One day, we were invited to home of Dennis Banks, co-founder of the American Indian Movement (AIM), for a sweat lodge ceremony. Following the ceremony, Dennis invited our class to participate in a walk across the United States led by AIM to help conduct a research project. For whatever reason, I felt like I was supposed to go on this walk. So, I took a semester off of school, packed my bags and flew to La Jolla, California to begin the Longest Walk 5.

During this time, I was immersed in numerous Native American cultures. I was welcomed by most, but not all. It was on this walk that I began to question the role of Nonnative

professionals who work with Native American communities. Upon returning from the six-month journey, I reflected deeply on my experience. I wanted to learn more about where I best fit in supporting Native-lead initiatives rather than perpetuating a harmful “white savior” attitude. My heart stands in solidarity with Native American communities as an ally. This thesis was a way for me to further reflect on my position as a Nonnative who wishes to work with Native American communities. I hope that it can help others who find themselves in a similar position.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Historical and modern-day Native and Nonnative relationships are complex. Native American communities have been marginalized and oppressed for centuries by the “white man.” The purpose of this study is to understand the modern-day role of Nonnative professionals who work with Native American communities. To understand this role, it is crucial to recognize the complexities of the challenges faced by modern-day Native American nations. This includes higher than average rates of poverty, substance abuse, diabetes, unemployment, and suicide (Sarche & Spicer, 2008). Acknowledging these adversities and how they came to be will require a critical look at the history of colonization and its ongoing effects.

I hypothesize that by understanding the motivations of Nonnative professionals who have worked or currently work with Native American communities, training and educational programs have the potential to be revamped and made more effective which can lead to stronger relationships between Native American and Nonnative American communities.

There are many resources available which provide guidelines for Nonnatives working in Native communities. Such resources come from federal government (U.S. Department of Energy, 2000), universities (Grossman, 2012), and tribal governments (Navajo Tourism Department, n.d.). These “rulebooks” are funded by various entities (Office of Economic Impact and Diversity, n.d.) and their goal is to provide individuals who have limited experience working with Native communities knowledge about the do’s and don’ts of working with Native People. Most of the information in these resources is obtained through surveys. Very few, if any, of these rulebooks use narratives or personal accounts as part of their methodologies.

The insight provided in the existing literature is valuable and should not be undermined. However, it lacks personal connection and a deeper understanding of why these rules are in place and how they came to be. My thesis aims to fill the gap by using narratives to accomplish similar goals to those of the existing resources. Storytelling fosters empathy and gives readers the opportunity to find something they can connect with on a personal level.

To reveal these motivations, this study utilizes a practitioner profiling method of “narrative inquiry.” Ten key informants who met the criteria of a Nonnative professional who works with Native American communities were identified and interviewed. Interviews sought to answer the following primary research questions:

- What do Nonnative professionals find rewarding or valuable about their experiences?
- What challenges have Nonnatives encountered while working with Native American communities and how did they overcome them?
- What advice would Nonnative professionals give to other Nonnative professionals entering the field?
- What are the impacts of working in Native American communities on Nonnative professionals?

Due to limitations such as time, money and resource constraints, I was forced to narrow the scope of my thesis to strictly focus on the experiences of Nonnative professionals who have worked or currently work with Native American communities. This thesis is my contribution to the ongoing dialogue about what the role of Nonnative professionals who work with Native American communities is and what it should be. By sharing the stories of Nonnatives who work with Native American communities, my thesis will be a tool for other Nonnatives who might question their role in this field. After reading the practitioner profiles and my interpretation of the common themes, I hope you feel prepared to learn. As a forewarning, this thesis does not have

all of the answers to the “right” way to work with Native American communities. However, what it can offer is a starting place towards discovering your role as a Nonnative professional who works with Native American communities.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Colonization

I don't know a single American who is unfamiliar with Christopher Columbus. He is considered a hero in our society who is praised for discovering the United States. He is one of two people in American History who have a holiday named after them. The other person is Martin Luther King Jr. We teach our children about him in our public schools. Without a critical eye, it is easy to believe that "in 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue," stumbled upon vacant land, and was a catalyst for the settlement of the land we call home today. Why would we believe any differently? This is the story many of us have been told since we were children.

What if you grew up hearing another version of the story? A version of the story where a strange-looking white man washed up on the shores of the land your ancestors have inhabited for generations dating all the way back to the creation of Turtle Island. Your ancestors welcome this man in, care for him, and teach him how to survive in unfamiliar terrain. In return, your land is swarmed by settlers claiming the land, forcing your family to leave your sacred places, raping your women, and killing your loved ones. This is the story which the indigenous people of the United States know all too well. This is the true story of the United States. It is the story they don't tell children in the public-school system. It is a story that is still ongoing.

There is a plethora of literature about the history of the United States. Much of it is from a colonial perspective that begins with Christopher Columbus accidentally discovering America. I could write an entire thesis about colonization and its ongoing effects. However, for

the scope and purpose of this paper, I only seek to introduce topics I believe are pertinent to the discussion on what the role of Nonnative professionals who work with Native American communities should be. Therefore, in no way am I suggesting that this is a complete and comprehensive analysis. The history of colonization in the United States is complex. Genocide, assimilation, broken treaties, and reservations advantaged colonists and disadvantaged the indigenous people of this land. Contrary to popular belief, the colonial era is not over. Modern-day colonization in the form of institutions and power structures continues to advantage colonist and disadvantage the indigenous people of this land.

Genocide

Since the first colony was founded in Jamestown, Virginia in 1607, the Native American population has dropped from 100% to a mere 1.7% of the total U.S. population as of 2010. Of the 5.2 million people who claimed NA/AI on the 2010 Census, only 2.9 million (0.9% of the total U.S. population) identified as being full Native American or Alaskan Native. The other 2.3 million (0.7% of the total U.S. population) acknowledged being American Indian or Alaskan Native in combination with one or more race (Norris, Vines, & Hoeffel, *The American Indian and Alaska Native Population: 2010, 2012*).

In the pursuit of Manifest Destiny- the belief that the expansion of the U.S. throughout the American continents was both justified and inevitable, Native American people underwent genocide. The ethnic cleansing of Native American people was purposefully and methodically executed. Native people were considered “uncivilized” and “savage.” They were not considered to be humans by Christian settlers.

The United States' government has a history of cruel and unusual tactics used to decimate and destroy the Native American population. Colonists gifted Native people blankets laced with Small Pox disease, committed multiple massacres, forced migration such as the devastating Trail of Tears, developed reservations where enemy tribes were forced to share land together, and more. For centuries, Native American tribes have been oppressed by the United States' Federal government. The abuse continues today.

The small percentage of Native Americans living in America today are subject to higher than average poverty, unemployment, health disparities, suicide, and substance abuse. The American Indian and Alaskan Native population living in poverty is 28.3% which is nearly double that of the National Average (United States Census Bureau, 2016). High poverty is related to high unemployment rates. Over the years 2009-2011, the unemployment rate for American Indians was 14.6% while the white unemployment rate was only 7.7% (Austin, 2013).

Assimilation

When the United States realized that they could not kill off all of the Indians, they resorted to assimilation to "take care of the Indian problem." Assimilation is a tactic aimed to civilize Native American communities and socialize them to behave like Europeans. One of the United States primary efforts to "Americanize" Native American populations was through boarding school education of Native youth. "Kill the Indian, save the man," is an infamous quote by Capt. Richard H. Pratt on the Education of Native Americans in the late 17th century (Prucha, 1973).

During the boarding school era which began in 1880, Native children were stolen from their homes and forced to learn in Christian, English-speaking schools. The U.S. government believed that in order to be “civilized,” young Native American children should be taken away from the harmful “uncivilized” influence of their families (Reyhner, 2013). Many indigenous languages were lost during the time of assimilation. If a child was caught speaking their Native tongue, corporal punishment was used to quite literally beat the language out of the children. Language is closely tied to culture and identity. Therefore, as the language began to die, it became hard for indigenous people to hold onto their cultural identity.

The children were unhappy in the boarding schools and many of them ran away. At some schools, the administration would let them go- figuring they would either come back or die trying to find their way home. The schools were purposefully located geographically far away from tribal communities. At other schools, they would go searching for the children. Those who were found were subject to harsh punishments. Students who were caught running away were often subject to confinement punishments in small, isolated, areas called the ‘jails’ (Margolis, 2004).

Additionally, boarding schools would confiscate the mail the children sent to their families and vice versa. The intention was to make both the children and the families feel like the other party had forgotten about them and strengthen the assimilation process. The boarding schools were very traumatic for both the children’s and the parents. Although the children never truly forgot about their families, the effects of growing up without parent-figure role models had long lasting effects. At no fault of their own, many boarding school survivors struggled when they moved into adulthood and had children of their own. These individuals were not only deprived of loving parents, but they were also detached from understanding of their culture.

Boarding schools deprived Native families of traditional parenting role models, impairing their capacity to parent within an “indigenous healthy cultural milieu” (Brave Heart, 1999). The traditional knowledge, culture, and language that was lost during the board school era may never be recovered.

Broken Treaties

Treaties were important to settlers because they legally gave the property rights of the land to the settlers. Upon first contact, indigenous people were confused about why settlers wanted to sign treaties. The concept of owning land was foreign to indigenous communities because it was not a part of their culture or worldview. Asking an indigenous person if you can own their land is like me asking if I can own the air above your head. You might look confused and agree because even if I own the air above your head, it is still the air that you breathe.

To get what they wanted (land), settlers would negotiate treaties with tribal leaders. Due to the patriarchal nature of European society, male settlers immediately looked to male chiefs to develop treaties. However, in many tribes, the chiefs were the public speakers of the group, but the clan grandmothers were the decision-makers. The patriarchal settlers did not understand this power structure and disregarded the women. The settlers only signed treaties with men. When the chiefs refused to sign the treaties in order to respect the grandmother’s decision, settlers would bribe chiefs and interrupters into signing treaties anyways (Ojibwa, 2016). In some cases, Europeans would even “appoint” chiefs whom they would do business. Although these so-called chiefs held no real authority in the tribal leadership structure, their signature was considered legitimate in the eyes of American law.

Lastly, when colonists were making deals and writing treaties with indigenous people they often strategically forced two enemy tribes on the same reservation. The goal of this tactic was to let the tribes destroy themselves by fighting amongst one another. For example, the Federal government failed to give the Northern Arapaho reservation land of their own. Instead, they forced them to live on the pre-established Wind River Indian Reservation in Wyoming with their former enemies the Shoshone (Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes, 2014).

Reservations

At the same time treaties were being developed with certain tribes, others were forcefully being kicked off their land. Tribes were forced to move westward to make room for European immigrants entering from the Eastern shore. The 1830 Indian Relocation Act forcibly relocated over 70,000 Native American people (VMFA Art and Education Division). Thousands of Native people died along the journey which is commonly referred to as the Trail of Tears.

Those who survived the treacherous journey were challenged to quickly adapt to a new environment with unfamiliar terrains and hunting grounds. Since Native American culture and spirituality is intimately connected with land and location, those aspects of daily life were also ripped from displaced communities. Tribal homelands were places of ancestral burial grounds and sacred sites. Losing these lands meant that tribal nations “lost their identities, and their purpose” (Hemenway, 2017).

The areas where tribal communities were pushed into became known as reservations. Reservations are bounded areas that tribes were given to resettle. The creation of reservations was problematic for indigenous communities. First, many of these communities lived nomadic

lifestyles (within a certain region). For example, the Havasupai tribe traditionally lived inside of the Grand Canyon during the winter because temperatures are warmer inside. They would migrate outside of canyon during the summer where game was plentiful and the air was cooler (Bohl & Hirt, 2010). So, while the tribe was nomadic, they remained in a certain regional territory which was culturally significant.

Forcing tribes to remain in a single territory harmed their ability to live out their lives traditionally. One example is how reservations limited Native hunting grounds. Game does not know boundaries. The migration of deer, elk, caribou, and other animals which support Native American diets is restricted by geography and weather, not invisible lines. However, after reservation boundaries were drawn, it became illegal for tribal people to hunt off of the reservation. Native people then became dependent on government commodities. Many of these foods have little nutritional value and have contributed to modern-day obesity rates. American Indian/Alaskan Native youth have the highest obesity rate of any racial or ethnic group (American Heart Association, 2013).

Institutional Colonization

Many Nonnatives (and likely Natives as well), believe that the colonial era is a thing of the past. Colonists were white men with wigs and top hats. They travelled by ship to claim land in the pursuit of manifest destiny. While these things were once true, the colonial era has not ended. Colonists, like Native Americans, are still here today. However, they do not look like the stereotypical colonists. They look like police men, professors, lawyers, and teachers. They look like you and me.

Modern-day colonization happens institutionally. It can be witnessed through our legal systems, political systems, public education systems, and more. Tuck and Yang write about how the “invisibilized dynamics” of “settler colonialism” (which I refer to as institutional colonialism) dominate governance, curriculum, and learning assessments (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Western knowledge prevails as dominant and thus perpetuates a society that tolerates such oppression for disenfranchised communities. However, “science itself is a form of human action” and is thus nothing more than a social construct and a single way of knowing (Fisher F., 2000).

In an attempt to address institutional colonialism, there have been numerous “decolonizing efforts” aimed to highlight the validity of indigenous knowledge. Since traditional indigenous knowledge “lies at the heart of identities histories, legacies, and responsibilities for generations that have been here before and those to come,” indigenous Professor Linda Smith seeks to incorporate these knowledge systems into decolonized research methodologies (Smith, 2012). Smith’s methods account for the unique and distinct indigenous cultural norms that are often unaccounted for in dominant research methodologies.

Researchers have found that not only how you conduct the research, but also when you conduct research with indigenous communities plays a vital role in how you will, or will not, be accepted by the community. In their article, *Doing Whitefella Research in Blackfella Communities in Australia: Decolonizing Method in Sports Related Research*, authors Rossi, Rynne, and Nelson reflect on how critical their experience “just hanging out” with the indigenous communities they sought to work with was critical to the overall success of their project because the researcher, they were seen as “strangers” to the community (Rossi, Rynne, & Nelson, 2013). Like most Nonnatives seeking to work with indigenous communities, Rossi,

Rynne, and Nelson learned much about the ways institutions propel colonial messages experientially during their time working with indigenous people.

Until our eyes are opened to the reality that we are perpetuating a colonizing agenda, we remain part of the problem. Though, enlightenment or the ability to see that we operate in a society of colonizing institutions does not necessarily remove us from the list of perpetrators. Rather, it gives us the ability to think critically about our actions and decide how we should best use a decolonizing lens to navigate through our personal and professional lives.

Native and Nonnative Relations

Colonization of the United States ignited a flame of distrust by Native Americans towards Nonnatives. After hundreds of years of genocide, assimilation, broken treaties, reservation creation, and the ongoing adverse effects of institutional colonization, a lack of trust still exists between Native and Nonnative communities. Historical trauma, which shapes Native and Nonnative relationships today, is a deeply painful, historical distrust that lives inside the DNA of today's indigenous people (Pember, 2016).

Historical trauma is an important consideration for working with historically oppressed communities. It has been studied in numerous populations including Jewish descendants of Holocaust survivors, Japanese-American descendants of internment camps survivors, and Native American and Alaskan Native populations (Evans-Campbell, 2008). Those suffering from historical trauma often experience depression, self-destructive behavior, suicidal thoughts and gestures, anxiety, low self-esteem, anger, and difficulty recognizing and expressing emotions

(Brave Heart, 2003). This unresolved grief permeates into communities as the effects of traumatic events compound over time and across generations (Evans-Campbell, 2008).

Historical trauma has adverse effects for individuals, communities, and race relations. Historical trauma and racism go hand in hand because “the history of a racial/ethnic group affects the relationship between the group and wider American society” (Harrell, 2000). A healthy respect for marginalized racial groups, Native American groups in particular, starts with breaking down stereotypes about Native people, highlighting the resilience of Native people *today*, highlighting the diversity among Native people, providing historical foundations, and recognizing and understanding privilege (Miller, 2016). For Nonnatives who wish to work in Native American communities, it is important to understand and respect the fact that many Native communities distrust Nonnative researchers (Duran & Duran, 1995).

Storytelling and Narrative Research Methods

Indigenous professor, Chi'Xapkaid, believes that storytelling is an effective decolonization method (Peters R. , 2008). The oral tradition of storytelling has been at the heart of Native American culture since the beginning to time, hence the creation stories. Since settlers arrived, many Native American stories have been cast off as “myths” and “legends” by mainstream western society (Bruchac, 2016). However, indigenous people counter that there is great power and education in the stories that have been passed down for generations. After a long history of exploiting indigenous traditions and culture (Berkes, 1999), it is not surprising that the western world is finally recognizing storytelling as a legitimate form or research.

Storytelling is a relatively recent research method in the social science field. Narrative research gained acknowledgment as a respectable method of qualitative research during the 1980s in what is commonly referred to as the “narrative turn” (Spector-Mersel, 2010). At this time there was a resurgence of interest in storytelling as a research method because it is diverse and includes the human experience. Since then, storytelling has gained appreciation among a number of fields including, but not limited to psychology, anthropology, sociology, folklore, history, sociolinguistics, communication, cultural studies, gender studies, gerontology, community development, and more (Spector-Mersel, 2010). Storytelling is appreciated by a wide range of professional fields because “it is one of the few human traits that [is] truly universal across culture and through all of known history” (Hsu, 2008). Practitioner profiles, considered a form of “narrative inquiry” allow stories to be drawn out, documented, and constructed by researchers in order to illuminate, analyze, and interpret their meaning (Peters, Alter, & Schwartzbach, 2010).

Stories are powerful. They act as frames that connect real-life experiences to theoretical concepts (Fisher, 2009). These frames provide an opportunity for values, culture, and worldviews to surface and be explored. Furthermore, stories are a tool for empowerment because they give voice to people who might otherwise be silenced (Rappaport, 1995). It is a shame that our society has largely silenced indigenous voice through our history and colonial institutions. Now, we seek to “empower” the disenfranchised group through storytelling, their traditional knowledge dissemination method.

Chapter 3

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODS

The discussion on institutional colonization and decolonization efforts leads to fair critique of my work. I am a white female writing about the role of Native and Nonnative relationships while using an academic thesis as my medium. Is that colonial and hypocritical? You might argue that it is. I might even argue that it is. However, it wasn't until I began this research endeavor that I realized the constraints of Western society and the oppressive potential of inaccurate education. Acknowledgment of these concerns has lead me to thoughtfully approach my methods. Therefore, after careful consideration I decided that storytelling through the use of practitioner profiles was the most appropriate method.

Key informant interviews were used to collect data for this study. Key informant participants were chosen due to their professional experiences working with Native American communities. Participants were identified using a snowball sampling method. An e-mail explaining the nature of the study and an invitation to participate was sent out to each of the potential interviewees. If a potential key informant did not respond, a follow-up e-mail was sent two weeks after the initial e-mail.

In total, ten key informants agreed to participate. Upon agreeing to participate, phone interviews, lasting no longer than one hour, were scheduled. Verbal consent was obtained from all participants. Participants were given two options for consenting. They could opt to use their real first and last name in association with their profiles or they could opt to use an alias name to protect their identity. Two of the ten key informants opted to use an alias name. However, you

will notice that three of the key informants have alias names. I have used my editorial license to create an alias names for an individual who opted to associate their real name. I did so because I critically questioned their responses and want to highlight the issues without slandering their name.

The goal of the phone interviews is to gain insights from the key informants which could answer the primary research questions. The objectives of this research study are to understand:

- What do Nonnative professionals find rewarding or valuable about their experiences?
- What challenges have Nonnatives encountered while working with Native American communities and how did they overcome them?
- What advice would Nonnative professionals give to other Nonnative professionals entering the field?
- What are the impacts of working in Native American communities on Nonnative professionals?

Due to the nature of the subject, setting the parameters of the study was complicated. Complex questions such as what defines an indigenous person? Is a Native American community restricted to the reservation or does it expand beyond that? Who is considered a professional? There is no “correct” answer to any of these three questions. Due to the colonial nature of western society and the history of Native American communities being studied and defined for centuries, I did not feel comfortable as a white researcher defining who counts as an indigenous person and what constitutes a Native American community.

Therefore, I let the potential key informants decide for themselves if they felt like they qualified as a Nonnative professional who worked with Native American communities. Since I was using the snowball sampling method, key informants who I interviewed suggested other people they believed would be a good fit for the study. I ran into an interesting situation when I was referred to speak with a woman who was a quarter Native American, but did not identify as

Native American. She shared her unique situation with me and told me that I could decide whether or not she qualified. I felt that it was not my decision to determine who is or is not Native American. I expressed my concern with the potential key informant and allowed her to decide whether or not she wished to participate. She decided that she did not fit the Nonnative criteria and was not interviewed.

One parameter I did set, however, was that at least half of the individuals interviewed must have cross-cultural experience (have worked more than one tribe. There are currently 567 federally recognized tribes and it is important to note that the culture, economics, and governmental structure varies greatly from tribe to tribe. Six of the ten key informants interviewed for the study had cross-cultural experience. Lastly, all key informants were over the age of eighteen.

With consent from the key informants, the interviews were recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions were then edited into profiles. The profiles retain the voice of the individual. This empowers the key informants to tell their own story in their own words. Edits are made to help the flow of the profile and ensure key insights are articulated clearly.

Included in the profiles is the key informant's occupation when they worked with Native American communities. This may or may not be the key informant's current occupation. Their age, gender, and ethnicity is also included in their profile. This information is included in the profiles to highlight the diversity of the various key informants. Furthermore, it provides readers an opportunity to find a Nonnative professional who they feel like they can identify with.

The profiles act as a dataset. They are qualitatively coded for common themes across the various profiles. Qualitative data, by its nature, can never be completely objective. Therefore, the themes that I identify may or may not differ from the themes you identify. The themes I coded

are influenced by my upbringing, experience, education, and worldview. I invite all readers to think critically about the information provided in the profiles. I encourage you all to draw your own conclusions based on what resonates with you and your identity.

Chapter 4

PRACTITIONER PROFILES

Amy Mondloch

Occupation: Toxic Taters Coordinator

Age: 45

Gender: Female

Ethnicity: White

“Working with Native folks has taught me a lot about who I am and has helped me find my way back to the fire.”

I'm the coordinator for Toxic Taters. We help Native and Nonnative folks who've been impacted by large-scale industrial potato farming in rural Minnesota. We have about 45,000 to 50,000 acres of potatoes in Minnesota. This is problematic because potatoes are a chemically intensive crop. They get sprayed with pesticides about every week and a lot of folks get really sick because of that. This pesticide pollution began around Pine Point and Osage; right here on the White Earth Indian Reservation. A lot of folks around this area have lost family members and lost friends because of the pesticides. There have also been huge environmental changes over the years because of all the pesticides that are being used here and the amount of poison that's going into our water, into our air, and into our soil. Folks have gotten tired of it. They've gotten sick of getting sick. So, they began organizing a movement against this.

A number of years ago, they created Toxic Taters. I was living in Wisconsin at the time. I grew up there in a pretty rural area. I worked in non-profits and did organizing work. Wisconsin had been a political mess for a number of year, so at the time, there really wasn't funding for me to be doing much there. I was looking for work and feeling pretty burnt out with what I was

doing. I decided to look at Minnesota and found Toxic Taters. I felt like I was being called to come here. Particularly after my interview.

In that interview call, I talked a little bit about having been to the Highlander Center. If you're not familiar with Highlander, it's where Rosa Parks, Dr. King, and many of the other civil rights organizers were trained. I've been there a number of times. I take a lot of my organizing philosophies from them. When I spoke about that experience, my interviewer immediately said that he had been there too. It was an immediate connection.

I had never worked in Indian Country, but I had a feeling that this was where I was supposed to come to do something. I wasn't 100 percent sure what, but I thought I could help to connect people, Native and Nonnative, to move the organizing work ahead. That's kind of how I wound up here. I had a piqued interest in working with Native communities due to my activist work in college.

I'm a graduate of the University of Wisconsin Stevens Point. I went to school there originally thinking that I was going to get my degree in environmental education, but I ended up switching my degree a number of times. I wound up with a degree in sociology with a minor in psychology and philosophy. I think that's what I wound up with. Or, did I end up with a degree in psychology and a minor in sociology and philosophy? In any case, I think the degree name really doesn't matter all that much. A lot of times I tell folks I actually wanted to major in student activism.

At the time when I was going to school in Wisconsin in the early 90s, we were fighting the Crandon Mine. The Crandon Mine was a huge political experience in Wisconsin and really brought together Native and Nonnative folks. We had just kind of wrapped up a big fight around spear fishing. A court battle declared that Native people didn't have the right to spear fish. Folks

were coordinating efforts for Native folks to practice their traditions. There was a lot of violence happening in northern Wisconsin at this time. When Native people went out spear fishing, white folks came out and threatened their lives.

In the 80s there was an effort to begin spear fishing again. There was a movement towards non-violence. The same people who organized this movement, created an organizing base in Wisconsin. It slowly built into an effort to fight the Crandon Mine which was then proposed to pollute Mole Lake, an Indian reservation in Wisconsin. The fight around the Crandon Mine became a state-wide issue. This mine wasn't just going to affect Native people. Folks began recognizing that this mine was going to affect everyone's water. This was important because it helped us change the message and how we framed the issue. We started to change the whole message to focus on the water that we all share.

So, I was going to school but really focusing a lot on activism around that and quite a few other issues. I eventually graduated, went to work as an organizer for a while, and have done some master's work in adult education. I have not finished my master's, but there's probably a few things in there that I learned that have helped me continue to organize and teach other people about organizing, too.

I am grateful for my time in college because it allowed me to start learning a lot more about the world in which I lived in. I began to see a whole lot of things that I hadn't seen growing up. For example, my high school only had 300 students. During my time in school, I always thought that I went to an all-white high school. However, when I really think about it, some of my friends were actually Latino and there was a Native guy who lived down the street from me. Going down the list of my old classmates I realized, wow, I thought our high school was all white and I thought the only people of color were the immigrant workers who were at the

canning factory right next to the high school. I knew there were two other Latinos there, but that was it. The reality was I was just one of the white kids who didn't see anybody else even if they were right there. Even if they were my friends, I didn't see who they were. My time at university helped me open my eyes to all the people I had overlooked in my youth. My experience in college and my time at Toxic Taters has taught me a lot about myself. Working with Native folks has taught me a lot about who I am and has helped me find my way back to the fire.

There's a story that I've learned from Native people that we all come from around the same fire. That story talks about how people come to this elder and say, "tell me *my* story, tell me *my* story." The elder responds, "I can't tell you *your* story, I only know my own story." People came from all over the world to talk with this elder. There were people who came from Asia. There were people who came from Africa. There were people who came from Europe. There were all sorts of folks who came. The elder spoke with with them all and told them, "I can only know my own story, but as we all come from around the same fire, it seems like all of our stories should be similar."

I think there's really something to that. I think us white folks tend to be perhaps furthest away from our own roots. I talk a lot with folks about racism, both through my work and through my life. I have come to recognize that as white folks, we have a lot of fear in the way that we approach the world. We know that we've done wrong for a long, long time. We're really afraid of what's going to happen if everybody else realizes all that we have done wrong and comes back at us for it. I don't think anybody is out there to attack. I just think we need to rebalance and find our way back to that fire.

It's been told to me that as white people, we tend to look at things as if we don't live here. We tend to keep running away and not connecting to our place. However, we need to be

connected. It is important that we recognize that we are part of not only our biological family or only part of our little group of friends. We are a part of the place in which we live. We are part of that water and part of that space. We have got to treat those things as our home and show them respect. I think it is the key to changing the whole paradigm in which we live. We tend to live in this world of disposable. We can get rid of it, we can move on, we can dump this stuff off. We can't. There's nowhere else to go to. We have to take care of it where we are.

Stories like this are the reason I tend to think that we need to shut up, listen, and learn. I think there's something to be in awe of after the past 500 plus years of genocide. The fact that indigenous people, people who are of that place, are still here just shows an incredible strength and resilience. We have a hell of a lot to learn. My advice to other Nonnative professionals would be to listen a lot and be ready to laugh at yourself when you are critiqued.

I'm sure that that there's been lots of times when I broke a cultural norm. There have been times where I didn't handle tobacco correctly, didn't know what to do with prayer ties, or went the wrong direction in a talking circle. Usually it's small stuff in which maybe somebody gives you the quick look or whatever. However, there is often somebody who is kind enough to say, "You screwed that up," and corrects you. It's not that people are going to be cruel. Folks understand you're white and that you don't get it. As long as you're coming to the space with a good heart and behaving in a respectful manner, they'll accept that and help you a lot. Then, I guess just be patient. A lot of the lessons that you learn are going to take a while. It's going to be confusing as heck. It'll drive you nuts, but it's going to be worth it.

I have worked with some Native folks who, at times, drive me up a wall. But then I realize, you know, they are absolutely right. That's true working with a fair number of Native people who give you a little piece of information here or there, but they'll let you work things out

for yourself. It'll drive you nuts. An example that's coming to my mind is from when I first moved up here. I was supposed to go have lunch with my new boss and get to know a little bit about what's going on here and stuff. He told me to meet him at the restaurant in Toilet. He had me looking at my map for a place called Toilet. Luckily, I was staying with some folks who knew him and were able to say, oh, you mean the Tri-Lakes?

They explained it to me, but it was one of those things that he just handed to me and was like let's see if she can figure it out. Let's see if she can do it. I think that happens a lot when you're working in Indian Country. People hand things to you and see what you'll do with it. They want to see if you're willing to work for it. It's all about trust building, so you've just got to go through those things and just kind of laugh about them. Building that trust has enhanced my experience working in Indian Country and impacted my life.

I've got to know and love some really great people. Some of my dearest friends have come through my work with Native communities. I have learned lessons in how I do organizing work. I also learned that listening to myself and listening to what others have to say is really important. Working with Native folks over the years has really encouraged me to keep thinking about how we can change the systems rather than just short-term immediate fixes. When I first began, I was introduced to the concept of the seventh generation.

I think a really simple way of looking at that is to imagine that you're looking down a long tunnel. At the end of that tunnel you see a baby. That baby is the seventh generation. That baby is about 150 years down the line and you take your actions for that baby. Whatever you do right now is for that baby.

I think the way that we tend to look at solving problems is solving them as quickly as we can. We need to fix this problem today and that problem by next week without any consideration

of that child sitting at the end of the tunnel. If we look at solving the problems for that child, we're going to create the real solutions. That worldview has really impacted who I am, what I do, and how I work.

It has helped me understand my role as a Nonnative professional who works with Native communities. I think there's a lot of different things that Nonnative people do in Indian country. A lot of times they are in service positions. I think one of the problems about this work in non-profit land, where I work, is that Nonnative people tend to provide too much of an expert role. They tend to tell Indians how to live and what they should be doing with their lives. I don't believe this should be the role. I believe the work should be collaborative.

This can be challenging because a lot of folks want to work in the land of the color blind. I've had folks talking about our work and say, "I'm not here to work on races. I'm here to work on pesticides." That was really a huge struggle for Toxic Taters to go through because we had to recognize that pesticides and racism are the same issue. Native folks and other groups of color are more heavily impacted because the poverty and all sorts of other social components. We had to recognize that you can't separate those things. It's a real challenge to get past that stuff because there's a whole history of it.

Since I work here and live in a town that borders the reservation, I see how people are treated differently depending where they are from. Where I live, just a few miles outside of the reservation, even community leaders from White Earth are followed in the stores. They are treated like criminals. That's just a reality of their life and it's wrong. It is a challenge to figure out how to address this shameful reality in a way that is respectful to the Native. Personally, I try to just follow their lead and not cause more damage.

As an organization, Toxic Taters tries to address this issue by naming it and admitting that it is there. First, we constantly do little things to bring attention to this issue. On all of our brochures and materials, it states that we are a Native and Nonnative multi-generational organization. This little statement ended up being a big issue for a while. We actually had one Nonnative person leave our organization over this issue. During the controversy, one Native guy said, "Maybe it would make things easier if I just go and you don't have to deal with us anymore." At that time we were a small group and didn't have very many Native folks involved. Luckily, I convinced him to stay.

With the Nonnative person, it was one of those situations where he is insisting he's not racist, but he just doesn't want to talk about the issue. He believed Toxic Taters shouldn't be a group that has to deal with racism or talk about Indian stuff. No. We have to recognize who's being impacted, how they're being impacted, and how we can operate together because Natives and Nonnatives operate differently. We come to meetings differently. We communicate with each other differently. We have to acknowledge those differences.

I was just at our advisory committee meeting last night. We were discussing whether or not we are ready to get our own non-profit status in the community. We were discussing by-laws and organizational structure things, when some of the Native folks commented on the leadership structure of other organizations they worked with in the past. They did not like the idea of board chairs, presidents, vice presidents, who had to follow strict rules and things. They were really concerned about this because it was following a structure that they wanted to get away from. It was following a structure that was harmful to them. I don't think the harmfulness of such organizational structures is something white folks really think about.

Furthermore, the white members of our organization refer to ourselves as Nonnative instead of saying white. It frames things a little differently. It puts Native people in the center. It is different than saying white folks are the normal and then we have people of color who aren't. Additionally, we make sure that we have meetings on the reservation include more Native folks in leadership positions.

This is my experience in the Native American community that I am in. There are over 500 tribes in the United States and their members live in many different places. There are a whole lot of different belief systems and traditions in the various tribes. However, there are also numerous intersections of all of those different tribes. Community means a whole lot of different things depending on who you ask.

Carly Presher

Occupation: Associate Researcher on the Longest Walk 5

Age: 24

Ethnicity: White

“I think there will always be things that we don’t know and don’t understand. It’s not our job to understand everything, but it is our job to listen and observe.”

My involvement with Native communities began during my time at Penn State as an undergraduate student. I took an indigenous knowledge class that particularly focused on Ojibwe culture but also explored Native American relations to the world in general. In this course I learned about a lot of different aspects of the indigenous worldview- relational knowledge, spiritual knowledge, traditional knowledge, and local knowledge. It pretty much encompassed an entirely new way of knowing and seeing the world.

During the class, we did a field experience where we actually visited multiple Ojibwe reservations for two weeks. That experience allowed me to meet a lot of different local Native people. One of the people I met was Dennis Banks, the co-founder of the American Indian Movement (AIM), and a highly respected individual in Indian Country. We had a sweat lodge ceremony at his house, and he invited us on the Longest Walk 5, a six month walk across the United States.

He had done walks like this in the past. So, this wasn’t the first walk by any means. He talked to our class and invited anyone who was up for the challenge to come on the walk and help conduct a research project. At that point, I didn’t know very much about it. However, as we

got closer to the walk, I learned that it was a war on drugs and domestic violence and how these things affect Native American communities and their families.

When I decided to participate in the walk, it was a decision that I made from my heart. It just felt right. Also, it was something that I was really interested in learning more about. I had a taste of that culture in the field experience, and I wanted to know more. I wanted to know the people on a more personal level than just two weeks. I wanted to physically be there walking with them for all that time.

There were about twenty-five people who completed the entirety of the walk. At times we had maybe forty or more people walking with us. Sometimes we only had ten people. It just depended on the time, the number was constantly fluctuating depending on people's availability. The majority of walkers were Native from different tribes, but there were also Caucasian people, we had some Japanese people, a German man, a family of indigenous people from Mexico, and I think there was even an Australian person at one point. Participants ranged in age from children to elders. However, a large majority of people were in their thirties and forties. The only real criterion for being a participant was that you must be able to support yourself financially and you must be sober. There was a zero tolerance policy for drug and alcohol usage. If you were caught drinking or smoking, you were immediately kicked off the walk.

During the course of the walk, I worked as an associate researcher alongside three others. We collected data through the form of a four-page survey which covered the basics of surveying methods. Our survey sought to deeply address family, individual, and community impact associated with drug abuse, domestic violence, and alcoholism.

As we passed through different communities, we passed out the surveys. They were anonymous and individuals could fill them out if they wanted to. Participation was optional. At

the end of all of that, we combined our own individual observations with the survey response statistical data to put together a final report. The report was published, but I am not sure if it is published in an academic peer-reviewed journal or anything like that. It was funded and executed by the American Indian Movement. So, the report we wrote is available and can be accessed through the AIM organization.

Our report is only one piece of a larger researcher endeavor. The overarching project is not yet completed. AIM is doing two more walks. On those next two walks there will be a new team of researchers who will be continue surveying the Native American communities they pass through. The goal is to collect data from every state so that AIM, an indigenous-run organization, controls the data being published and studied about indigenous people in the U.S.

I think the first challenge that is always expected for someone who is Nonnative who is going into a Native community is acceptance. Will Native communities accept me as a genuine person? Will they accept that I am coming in doing and this work out of my heart or will they see me as just another researcher coming in to poke and prod around? Will they accept me for who I am and what I am doing? That is always a challenge.

The way that I overcame this challenge was by having a knowledge of what it means to be indigenous in this society. An indigenous person is someone who was born to the land. They are an original occupant of land. Their family roots, cultures, and traditions stem through the generations. I had to be very mindful of how it looks for a white individual to come into that realm. I just try to remain aware of my position. I understand that when people get to know me that they might change their tone and thought process. Sometimes, this change in attitude takes a long time. I have been in this situation numerous time. In my experience, once people got to know me they could understand me and trust me.

The trust piece is extremely important. Once they could fully trust me, I was able to fully communicate and dive a little bit deeper. Unfortunately, there were some people who just didn't trust me and never learned to. I learned to be okay with that. You just continue on with your job and work with the people that want to work with you.

One of the biggest things I learned was pathways for gaining such trust. I learned that trust is often gained when you are respectful and willing to listen. It was important to just listen, not to make any judgements, talk out of turn, or say that I already knew something. Just listen. We passed through roughly 150 communities and visited over one hundred tribes.

The communities that we passed through embraced us with open arms. They were more than willing to accept us, reach out to us, and help us to understand and to learn. You always had those bad apples that just didn't want anything to do with you, but for the most part people wanted to reach out and help you understand. Community in the word itself encompasses this idea that there are people working together for a greater cause. They are a group of people who share the same traditions and values.

We encountered so many different people the only way to understand was to listen. Every tribe was different. Even if they had similarities, every tribe was distinct in their customs, cultures, and traditions. Listening was the key factor to building that trust and rapport. Once people saw that you could have a genuine and meaningful conversation without being too noseey, they were more willing to share their story.

While I found listening to be a helpful tool for navigating my way through Indian Country, I still made mistakes. I can't exactly pin point an instance when I broke a cultural norm, but there were definitely a few instances I was called out for something I did wrong. I can think of times at ceremonies when maybe I stood up when I shouldn't be standing, went to dance when

I shouldn't be dancing, or ate when I shouldn't be eating. I have never really been reprimanded in a horrible way. More so, perhaps an elder would nudge me and say, "it's not your time, not yet." My mistakes were not too wild. They were subtle. My mistakes were rarely confronted to me directly. I usually found out I did something wrong after my action was addressed in a more passive way to all members of the Longest Walk during our nightly meetings.

It was challenging for me because everything that I had learned about Native American culture prior to the walk was specific to Ojibwe culture. There were times when something that I learned was okay in Ojibwe culture was not okay in another tribes' cultures. When I stepped into someone else's cultural realm, the actions which I thought were culturally acceptable ended up upsetting or offending people. That clashes because I am not Native. I am white. I think a lot of times there is a geographical component that affects whether or not someone is a part of a Native American community. However, if I was a Native person from California who travelled to North Carolina, I think more likely than not I would be accepted into that community because I am Native anyways.

I understand that Native American culture is something that is not mine, and it will never actually be mine. However, I can be invited to be a part of it. I find this very valuable. I think more than just the research, what was really rewarding was the ability to learn a different spiritual aspect of life. Furthermore, I valued the opportunity to meet people who are different than me, to make connections, and to share different life stories. It's a beautiful thing to know that we all suffer in our own way and we all struggle in our own way.

Because of the walk and because of the work that I have done with my colleagues, I have seen people who used to be struggling with addiction and domestic violence who are now clean. These people are still clean and sober today because they joined the walk. They joined in the

mission. If you were going to be on the walk that meant that you were going to be clean. That is something that I have directly seen as a result of having the walk.

This is not to say that it was easy. It was absolutely challenging for people to stay clean on the walk. You could see a lot of people struggling to battle withdrawal from their addictions. You saw that play out in many ways. Withdrawal from addiction caused some people to get angry and blame the problem on someone or something else. People would take that energy from not having their itch, their scratch, and put it into something else. Some people were able to channel that energy into good and use it in a way that it was helpful for the walk. They became very fruitful members of the walk who assisted in the research and other tasks.

When I look back at all that I learned from my experience on the walk, there honestly isn't anything I wish I had known beforehand that I didn't. I say this because I think the tradition of listening was something that was taught over and over again from beginning. I learned this in the class at Penn State, and it was reiterated numerous times over the course of the walk. I think there will always be things that we don't know and don't understand. It's not our job to understand everything, but it is our job to listen and observe. That is a practice that is taught in Native American culture again and again. If you don't know something you listen and you observe. Nobody is going to tell you how to do it.

So, for anyone wishing to work with Native American communities, I would advise you to come in with big ears, a big heart, and a small mouth. That's not to say that you don't stick up for yourself because it can also be very easy to be belittled or become kind of an object subject to people thinking that you don't know anything. Just listen, but also keep your ways about you and keep your strengths. Never back down from what you are and what you know.

You might find this challenging. I did. Finding the balance of when to listen and when to speak up for yourself was a constant challenge. A time when I would perhaps back down and listen more would be when I am entering a new community. You don't want to come off as someone who is a know-it-all or whatever, so you just want to listen and be respectful and patient. At the end of it I learned that I know what I know and people who don't know me won't understand that. That doesn't mean that I can't still be who I am. It came down to being respectful and staying true to myself.

Who I am is impacted by my life experiences, including my experience on the Longest Walk 5. I think a lot about Native communities in my daily life. My involvement with Native American communities has impacted my white privilege and how I see myself society. It has changed the way that I am then able to teach others about what that might mean. It has allowed me to be able to better empathize with minority groups and really understand what they are going through. Although I didn't completely change my life and move to a reservation, I am still active in the way I think about the lessons I learned, talk about my experience, and reflect on the ongoing consequences of colonization.

Reflecting on my experiences has absolutely changed my worldview. I see things with a broader scope now. I am able to really open my eyes and see the various challenges that a lot of different ethnicities face. I've learned being a white person really does have a dominance in this society. I have just taken a step back and reflected on that and where oppression came from. The point where you can humble yourself is the point where you begin to gain that broader understanding. It doesn't happen overnight. It is a process.

A lot of Nonnative professionals who work in the communities come in and they don't have their worldview changed. They come in and kind of just see a one-tracked life. The mistake

is that they go into the communities to point and to tell rather than to listen and to learn. I think If they were to sit down with Native people and really hear what it is that the community wants rather than what they think it wants, then they could have a greater, more positive impact.

Cinnamon Catlin-Legutko

Occupation: President and CEO of the Abbe Museum

Age: 45

Gender: Female

Ethnicity: "White as hell"

"At the Abbe Museum, we are shocked daily at what people don't know. Academia keeps you well shielded from what the average person thinks. So, when I came out of grad school I had this big, throbbing head of knowledge and was unable to find the language to talk with many people about what I knew."

I am the president and CEO of the Abbe Museum. I got my undergraduate degree from Purdue with the intention of designing an education that would feed into museum work. I double majored in anthropology and art history with a minor in history. I continued on to graduate school in Arkansas where I studied anthropology and specialized in museum studies. I have always been interested in Native American groups. I lived in Oklahoma as a child. So, being in Indian Country was comfortable to me. I had many Native friends growing up. My upbringing helped me to understand nation to nation relationships from a young age.

The Abbe Museum is perfectly aligned with my academic goals. It's the job I had always hoped to get and I finally got it. I've been in this position for eight years. My role is in strategic planning and making sure that the vision and the mission of the organization is fulfilled. I do a lot of fundraising, administrative work, research, and grant writing. It is my responsibility to point our small team of seven year-round employees in the right direction. It is my job to make sure that we are all on the same page. Lastly, I have significant duties working with the board of trustees and our Native advisory council.

The Abbe is a museum that has been on the Bar Harbor Island since 1928. It was created as a division of radiologist Dr. Robert Abbe. Dr. Abbe had a peaked interest in archeological

materials. He bought many Native American artifacts throughout his life and sought to create a public museum for these items to be displayed. He teamed up with George Dorr, the founder of Acadia National Park, to create a trailside museum inside of the National Park.

The idea was that someone who was hiking along and then could hop off the trail and see something curious. The money was raised and the museum was visualized. Unfortunately, Dr. Abbe died shortly before the museum was opened. The Abbe Museum operated in the parks for a couple of decades. During that time, its primary focus was on archeological materials. It was a unique institution because it was the first to do archeology in Maine.

Fast forward to the late 1990s and the organization knew that it needed to do something different. It had grown steadily throughout the years and began working more and more with Native people. However, there was very limited space. It was just a tiny place within the park. There was no indoor programming space. So, if you had school groups and it rained, you would be stuck in the rain. A campaign was conceived to start a museum in Downtown Bar Harbor. The campaign was successful and the Bar Harbor location was opened in 2001. In many ways the museum was reborn at that point.

At the new location, we believed that it was fundamental for our early exhibits to be highly collaborative with Native people. It was important to us that our early exhibits were engaged in contemporary and historical and art. In the beginning it was somewhat informal. There was no mandate demanding that we be inclusive or contemporary. It was just something we believed in. It wasn't until three years after I was hired that we formalized our decolonization initiative.

I was hired in 2009 because the Abbe Museum wanted someone to improve tribal relationships. We work with the Wabanaki Nations which is a confederacy of four tribes- the

Maliseet, Micmac, Penobscot and Passamaquoddy. The Maliseet and Micmac are bands of a larger tribe that are significantly recognized in Canada. The board's relationship had been waxing and waning with tribal communities but it was only representational. It wasn't collaborative and that was problematic. I don't think they knew that, but I knew that.

It was developed in the interview process that I would create a new advisory council and talk that through after I got here. We talked about what that would look like and how I thought we could reformat. We came to the conclusion that our best option was to have a diplomatically formed Native council. We ended up having tribal leaders appoint two people from each main community creating a council of ten members. That model has worked and been really good for us.

Our first convening was great. Everyone was very excited to be there and was very open in their conversations. We took really intensive notes so we could document what was happening and be transparent about it. The big question that we were asking was, what does governance look like at the Abbe Museum? What is the best way to involve Native people? The recommendation was very clear- so clear. It was that we should have a representative from each community who is on the board. The chief can appoint it, or not, but there is always a seat for each of the tribes in the Wabanaki Confederacy. I thought wow- that's great. I looked at my board member Sandy at the time and said, we didn't even think of that and she said "we weren't supposed to." We took that to the next board meeting and we thought that we had a slam dunk. This is great. Everyone is going to love it.

The board became quite upset. There were factions that began. There was a big group on the board that said no way. What if there is a voting block? My response was, "if there is something we are trying to do and there is a block telling us not to do it from the tribal

communities, then we should listen. There are these really strange fears that were bubbling up. Believe it or not, there were people who voiced concerns about Native people's ability to follow their responsibilities on the board. This was a terrifying statement. People's racism really shined in that moment. All I had been asking for in that meeting was the opportunity to talk with tribal leaders. I wanted to make sure that they were on board for this.

The board's hesitation led us to hold a day long retreat on Native Sovereignty which was led by an indigenous woman. Out of that retreat, there was an emotional shift. People started to really understand that something needed to change. There had to be a moment of shock and dismay where people really had to reveal themselves for our board to reach this point. It didn't just happen one day. We had to get to a dark place first. It was at our very next meeting that we decided on our decolonization initiative.

When we created our decolonization initiative back in 2012, we also created a task force to find out what we needed to learn and figure out what our blind spots were. We sought to blaze a trail and figure out where we wanted to go with this. We did some great research and interviewed a number of both tribal and nontribal museums to figure out what level of decolonization work is happening. We learned that not much is happening. In the spaces where decolonization efforts are happening, it is within exhibits and they don't use that word decolonizing. In my opinion, this is the word that we really need to be using. We kept at it. At this point, the board was really in walk step with us on this. It was a joint effort to change the organization and do things differently. It was a very conscious decision to do things differently.

We spent over two years in that process of learning, studying, planning, and thinking. Then, we began our strategic planning process. We hired a facilitator that could help us to move in a decolonizing way and could help us figure out what our movement would look like. There

was nobody out there who claimed to be an expert in decolonization. However, the consultant that we hired was incredibly adept at working with cultural groups in the northeast. She just gets it. I knew her and she knew me, so she was a perfect fit. Additionally, she had clearly done her homework.

She led us through a year's worth of planning. During this time, the board retreated three times. Each retreat was a day long and the Native advisory council was in attendance. Furthermore, we had a couple of staff retreats. It was intensive work. It required a strong commitment to do work differently and the development of a plan that we could execute. It was important to us that this plan, our strategic plan, was transparent. It can be viewed on our website so people can get a sense of where we are at.

We are building something out of thin air, but we have made decolonization our vision and everything has to run through that lens. We are also very cautious about building systems that are durable beyond the board and staff members that are immediately involved. For example, if I leave in a year this museum should continue as a decolonizing institution. It shouldn't leave with me. That would be a complete failure.

To accomplish this vision we first created a decolonization policy where we made the commitment to this idea. Now, we are working on creating protocols. Protocols will only become actionable if they are approved by the board of trustees AND the Native advisory council. This is where we are right now. We are now actionable about decolonization. It is a daily conversation around here. We are currently figuring out what exactly all of the moving parts are. However, I do believe that what we have in place now has the durability to take us forward. We will keep on trucking.

This work does not come without its struggles. It has caused us to run into some challenges. We ran into this chicken in the egg situation. If decolonization should start with Native people, why does it start with the board of trustees when they are all Nonnative people? We are going to be meeting very soon with our decolonization committee and our Native advisory council to map that out so we have a more robust strategy for decolonization. Moving forward we have put together a museum decolonization institute. Since there is nothing that truly exists like this, there are a lot of people who come to us to learn. In return, we are learning from them and strengthening our initiative.

Decolonization is not a cookie cutter approach because your tribal relationships are your starting point. So, our starting point would be very different from a museum in California. They are in a completely different place than we are. What we can do is help them get started. What we can't do is tell them how to do it. Since decolonization is a new field, we help each other strengthen our programs because nobody knows that perfect way to decolonize.

One way we have embraced a decolonizing vision that is specific to the work we do at Abbe is revising how we conduct our archeology. As I mentioned before, archeology has been a huge part of what the Abbe Museum is founded on. However, after we consulted with our Native Advisory Council, they helped us to understand that we should not be arbitrarily digging without a research agenda. Over the past several years, we have always had a very good collaborative relationship with tribal archeologists. However, we hadn't been digging with a plan. This is pretty common with nonacademic field schools. We were doing "real archeology" with "real archeologists" involved, but we didn't have a strategic agenda informed by Wabanaki people. So, we stopped. We haven't run one in two years. Instead, we are holding off until we can convene an Archeology Advisory Committee to set that agenda and its parameters.

Some of the work that we do that can more broadly be extrapolated to decolonization efforts in other parts of the country include creating positive economic impact for tribal communities. I am interested in finding ways for museums to open economic channels to Native communities because museums have a problematic history for Native people. In general, museums are not comfortable spaces for Native people and they can be very upsetting. I would really like to see that improved. It shouldn't be a taking relationship. It should be a giving relationship.

Regardless of the fact that I am at the Abbe and we have worked really hard on relationships with the tribes we represent, the history of museums as uncomfortable spaces for Native people poses challenges for collaboration. We are not going to be on the top of the list for a Native person to collaborate with. The people we work with have other priorities such as their full time jobs and the responsibilities that come with tribal leadership. So, little old Abbe museum is not always going to be on the top of the list.

I think that the biggest challenge is to keep at it. I have to realize that the tribal officer isn't getting back to me because he has five thousand other things on his plate. It's not something I did wrong. His priorities are with the tribe. I have said before and I'll say it again- Native people don't need museums. They don't. I think it can get very frustrating talking with tribal communities if you don't understand this perspective. We have also been working very hard on building relationships with tribes that transcend time and understand that people are busy. People should be able to come and go. Relationships with the organization should stay.

I think that the biggest challenge is for us to get a piece of someone's time when they have a very full life. That life continues in exciting and vibrant ways. However, that doesn't always mean that Abbe gets to be involved. It's this constant connection that we have to nurture

and support. The closest Native community is over an hour away. It's not like we are surrounded by a tribal community. All of us at the Abbe have to really work to keep those relationships strong. One our employees is in the field at least once a month or more. They talk to people across the state to work on exhibitions or other initiatives. Our educator is the same. She is out meeting people and talking on the phone to make connections.

While there are challenges to working with Native people, they are miniscule to the challenges I face while working with Nonnative people. When we were getting really intense about our decolonization work, we were shocked when we finally realized that we are dealing with racism at the Abbe every day. The racism is found in how people come in and their expectations of Native people. Every day there is some shocking statement. It will melt your face. You can't believe what was just said.

We work really hard to recruit Native people as employees. Then, we put them into those situations. We are really putting them into harm's way. It is different to be a Native person and meet someone elsewhere. But when you are a Native person working at a Native museum you are literally in the crosshairs of unadulterated racism. Therefore, we have been working to develop supports for people working with the public.

At the end of the day, it is really about all of us going through these trainings. We have a racial bias training where we have been doing dialogue facilitation training. Furthermore, we have been doing more work around inclusion. By next year we hope to be doing more work on cultural competencies. These types of trainings give us the structure and skillset to respond to these racist moments. It gives us the toolset needed to turn them into educational moments. Our initial reaction is to be defensive, but that pisses people off even more. People do not like to be told that they are wrong. People don't like to be told that their perspective is off. They may be

the best intentioned person in the world, but they have had no exposure to Native American culture or history until they came here.

The unique thing about Bay Harbor is that it is a destination location. It's not like you come to Bar Harbor and say "Oh, I'm going to spend a little time here." People have worked really hard to get here. They are not just dropping by. They are coming here for Acadia National Park. So, they don't always expect the museum to be something they are going to pass through. Unlike visitors of the National Museum of the American Indian, our guests are usually not prepared to learn about these topics. They are on vacation. So, that is by far the most difficult challenge. We run into this same problem with our donors. We are asking somebody for money and they whip out their racism bone. It is tough, very tough. It takes a lot of training.

We recently did some visitor studies. During the study, we gathered contact information that allowed us to follow up with visitors a week after they visited. The results were really exciting because we learned that people really did go and read books or did some more research. They really showed up in terms of taking that next step which was exciting.

We have made it our mission that every visitor that steps foot in to the Abbe Museum leaves knowing, at the very least, that there are Native people in Maine today. There are indigenous people living here today. People who are the original inhabitants of this place are indeed still here. There is an assumption that they are gone because of the deep context period. This is a common misconception. In reality, you have multiple communities that have never been removed. It is an extraordinary situation here.

At the Abbe Museum, we are shocked daily at what people don't know. Academia keeps you well shielded from what the average person thinks. So, when I came out of grad school I had this big, throbbing head of knowledge and was unable to find the language to talk with many

people about what I knew. They had no idea. These were people who didn't understand policy much less Native concerns. That was a huge obstacle to break down.

I get frustrated really easily when people don't understand cultural differences. So, I have to keep in mind that the exposure I have is extensive and most people have never had a class in anthropology much less a course in cultural bias or racial sensitivity. I swear every person should take a cultural anthropology class because it completely breaks the mold of your head and helps you understand culture around the globe. As Americans, we are not that different than everyone else, we just have differences in culture. I think that has been a very influential framework for me. Building those systems of learning and understanding academically and in the workplace has definitely shaped my worldview.

However, I wish I had an opportunity to learn my anthropology frameworks in the 21st century mindset. The program I went through in anthropology was the pre 21st century anthropology. I was at the tail end of old school methodologies. There were anthropologists who were practicing applied anthropology which is really the great stuff that is happening today's programs. My academic work, however, was heavily influenced by white narrative. That was the realm that I was in. Of course, I am a free thinker and have other experiences which have shaped my views.

My colleague who is around my age says the same thing, but we have been re-learning. We have been reading new publications and studying the leading experts in applied anthropology. We didn't have this type of expertise in our coursework during the time we were in college. It doesn't mean that this knowledge wasn't out there, but we had to study what our professors were recommending. Having more coursework in applied anthropology would have been really helpful because now have had to learn it on the job. It can be really tough. It is one

thing to have to learn finance on the job, but it is very different to learn a new way of thinking on the job.

To deal with these frustrations, I do a lot of personal work. I am focused on being an inclusive leader. I have to really work with my own patience level and remember why I am doing this work. It's not about me. It's about the organization and our mission. I have always been very servant oriented, so it's not that hard to make that adjustment. However, it can be harmful because sometimes I feel overused and overtaxed. I have a hard time balancing my time. Now that I am getting older, I am getting a little better at it.

Furthermore, I make sure that I am connected to a leadership group of some sort. Right now I am connected with a group called the Dorrell Roundtables. It is a museum leadership cohort that gets together three times a year. We help hold each other accountable for what we said we were going to do and lift each other up. I find this group supportive and useful because museum leadership, and any type of nonprofit leadership, is really tough work. It is a very lonely job, so having a peer group like that is very important. For me, it is not only is the loneliness of being at the top. There are cultural components added to the mix. It can be really overwhelming and intense, so I need that release.

I also go to a lot of conferences. Our board is really great at making sure that our staff has that exposure. We're way the heck east. We might as well be on Atlantic Time we are so far east. So, it is really hard to connect with other colleagues and Native people. The board here has been really supportive financially to make sure that we are able to get out, connect with, and learn from each other.

I value this time for collaborative learning. I value anybody that I work with because of the relationships that we build. I am very committed to helping people to understand the

importance of Native communities. It is important to me that Nonnative people see early Native history as being a mark in time, not a start in time. I am interested in ensuring that we see the whole picture of history, not just what we want to see. I am not real keen on keeping things out.

My work and involvement with Native American tribes has influence the way I have raised my seventeen year old son. My husband is from Arizona, and he has always known about what tribal communities have to offer and how reservation life is very different than non-reservation life. Together, we have worked to expose our son to Native American communities and culture. We want to teach him that by and large Native American communities are defined by cultural identity. Tribal communities are formed not only through kinship, but also through cultural affinity, marriage, and other things. A tribal community is born through some type of affiliation and it is self-determined. It is not determined by a Nonnative person.

Not only does his Mom work with tribal communities, but we also visit a lot of tribal communities when we travel. This exposes him to a whole different world than his peers are exposed to. We can see the evidence now that he is a teenager. He has a very inclusive soul and is a really curious guy. I think that he will fight for what is right and that's really exciting. It has definitely enriched the way that I have been able to raise him.

I have seen that his generation up through millennials are so much more adept at working with cultural groups, working with differences, and working collaboratively. For example, the young people who we hire who are in their twenties to early thirties get it so fast. That age group is programmed to be very inclusive. Generation X, which I am a part of, is pretty inclusive, but we are also pretty grumpy. We are pretty cranky as a generation. And the baby boomers are not very helpful at all when it comes to cultural difference. Giving advice to twenty somethings is tough because that age has really figured it out. I would just reiterate showing respect to elders.

The elder structure in tribal communities is very significant. That might not be easily relevant to a younger person in the field. Diplomatic relationships are critical. It is important to not make assumptions and be a really active listener.

I am constantly listening far more than I am ever talking when I am working with tribal groups. It's at the point that my ears are worn out because I want to talk so bad, but I sit on my hands and stay quiet. I don't care if I have heard the story before. It is very important for me to hear it again. I always check my white privilege. When people get upset and defensive about acknowledging their white privilege that is called white fragility. That is a horrible thing too. So, I would suggest maybe just doing some things around inclusion and white privilege. Unpacking that is smart and will help future professionals in this field. It's really the work that you need to do when you work with people of different socio-economic status. You really have to consider what your worldview is like and how privileged it may or may not be compared to the person you are working with and keep it quiet.

I believe that the role of a Nonnative person has to be in service. It cannot be in savior mode at all. I think about teaching cores and things like that that end up working in Indian Country. There is so much training that goes into those and those are great. There is a role for that. However, there is still a challenge to have economic opportunity for Native people. I think that it is a great role for Nonnative people to enhance that. That is why we are so committed to what we can do to open the economic pipeline and bring opportunity to the communities through the artists for example. We hire over thirty Native educators, artists, and performers to help build our program every year. We also work with over eighty artists in our gift shop.

Furthermore, I think that there is always going to be a role for white allies because they are the perpetrators. Sadly, sometimes only white people listen to white people. White people

need to be the ones that made reparations. We can start to do this by restructuring how things have been done, rethinking colonizing relationships, rethinking the benefits that tribal communities deserve. This is good work. This is the work we should all be doing in the Nonnative community.

At the same time you have to know your place. Were you invited in? What's your relationship with that agency? You must really keep your eyes and ears open for any landmines that you weren't aware of because they certainly do exist. I have days where I have this conversation with friends of mine who are of color and I say "Is it me who should be doing this work? Does it make sense?" Certainly in a perfect world one of the metrics of success would be that I am replaced by a Native person. A friend of mine who is African American working in Detroit said very clearly to me "don't ever underestimate the importance of a white ally." Since that conversation, I feel like there is a role for Nonnative people working in Indian country.

Cory Thyre

Occupation: Carpenter and Licensed Contractor

Age: 40

Ethnicity: White

“You must be willing to learn.”

I am a carpenter and a licensed contractor for the state of Minnesota. I do general remodeling both residential and commercial. I moved here to Northern Minnesota to the White Earth Reservation and volunteered at a local radio station. The radio station ended up to be housed in the same building as the White Earth Land Recovery Project (WELRP). That was my connection. One day, I went to grab some syrup and wild rice from the WELRP gift shop. While I was there I ran into the executive director, Bob Shimek. That is where the connection to working with him began.

I started off by fixing some broken windows in WELRP building. During this time, I got to know the people who worked there and they started asking me for help on other projects. I was recently asked to help construct an outhouse for the Sugar Bush (the maple forest where trees are tapped for sap that is then made into maple syrup and sold by WELRP). It was a great experience. Assuming they reach out to me again when they need help, I plan to continue working with WELRP.

I also work with the tribe directly. I worked with them to do some finish-up work on a couple of larger projects. Working with the tribe has also been a great experience. They have been very kind and understanding. It's not really different than working with people from the world I came from which is the 'burbs of the Minneapolis area. The difference is that they are a little more mindful of the environment and the impact they will have on it before they do certain projects. Additionally, the projects are very goal-oriented. They are not a materialistic or

superficial projects. They will go fix things when they are broken. They do things when they are needed and are very efficient when doing so. I admire that and look forward to continuing to learn from them.

I moved up here last summer after having my fair share of the busy suburban lifestyle. It's not a bad lifestyle, it just didn't keep a smile on my face anymore. I was tired of the same routine and wanted to transport my roots someplace more slow-paced. I did not know that we were moving out to the reservation. When my wife and I decided to move, I had called up here for some permitting information and that is when I found out the permitting process is through the county. Then, they said something about the tribe and that is I looked at the map and realized, oh hey dummy, you're right smack dab in the middle of the reservation borders. Certain maps don't show it others do. I think it's pretty funny. Most of the Natives will ask me when they meet me, "how did you end up smack dab in the middle of an Indian reservation?" They kind of laugh and say, "That's kind of weird. We don't know anyone who wants to move here, smack dab in the middle of it."

About ten years ago, I went camping up here with my wife. I just thought, oh, we are way up north in the woods and there is a casino on one of the reservations. That is about all I knew. We were just there to go boating and fishing, and to hangout. I knew it was someplace I would like to live, but I didn't really understand the whole thing. I didn't have as much knowledge about things like the relationship between Natives and Nonnatives at the time. Now, ten years later, I am living on the reservation.

Nonnative people can buy land within this tribal boundary because it is an open reservation. Similarly, Native people don't have to necessarily live within the reservation boundaries to be a part of the community or be considered Native. Other reservations are

different. On closed reservations, you cannot purchase land unless you are enrolled in the tribe. For example, on the Red Lake Reservation, you cannot buy land unless you are Native. This one you can. However, I am careful not to use the word “buy.” When people ask me questions like, “where are you at, how many acres do you have, who did you get it from?” I don’t like to say, oh, we bought this. If they say, oh, how long ago did you get it, I just don’t ever say the word “buy” because it is here on their reservation and the people never really understood wealth or accumulation of stuff. The land was everybody’s. The animals were everybody’s. There was no visible boundary line saying this side belongs to me and that side belongs to you. The land belonged to everyone communally. That is the one thing that I could have crossed the line in terms of breaking a cultural norm if I would have been arrogant and said, oh, this is mine! I bought it and I’m putting up a fence. That would probably be the closest I’ve been to breaking a cultural norm.

At this point I haven’t, to my knowledge, I haven’t broke a cultural norm. I might have and someone might think, oh well this person did this, but they haven’t brought it to my attention. So, I haven’t really had to go through that experience. In my opinion, it would be sort of awkward. Most of the relationships with people that I have established, I can ask some of those questions that might be taken as naïve or arrogant. There are some things that you obviously don’t do. You don’t call people certain names that could get you into a situation. They would put you in your place. As long as I am respectful, I haven’t crossed that line luckily.

I’ve only been here for about a year. It’s a brief period of time in the long run, but long enough to kind of figure out how they work. And they have kind of figured out how I work. They kind of understood me more than I understood them at first. Once I learned their different

ways of doing things, I could move on. I started meeting local people who live in the tribe and Nonnatives too.

The most rewarding thing I can say so far is learning from them firsthand while also helping to teach them certain things. I find they are teaching me more than I am teaching them because of the way that they do things. They are Native to this land and they are the indigenous people of this area. Their ancestors are from this part of the world. So, they would have been the first people there. They shared with me a lot of history. Their view on history and the way that I was taught history are a little different. It is like there is a whole separate set of history that you can learn about the area.

Also, I just enjoy their perspective on things. I enjoy seeing how they look at where they are at, what they do, and how they have given their best attempt to preserve their traditions. Being a part of that experience and them allowing me the opportunity to learn is what I find most rewarding. They are willing to teach me and share some of their wisdom even though I am not Native and not from here.

The first challenge I encountered was just being looked at differently. When you are white or lighter skinned you are just looked at differently. I was the predominant majority where I came from and coming here I was the minority and the outsider. That was the first thing that I had to get over- the fact that I was the minority in some situations. I just needed to start seeing things from that perspective. The best way that I dealt with it and overcame it was not making a big deal out of it. Once people got to know me on a human level, it wasn't a big deal and everyone was "colorblind" if you will. They didn't really see me as a certain group of people. They knew I was up here to do some good and they taught me. I'm not very arrogant or super-opinionated which made it easier to get along with and listen.

In my perspective, relationships with the community were easy to build. I haven't been here very long and the people that I met are kind of on small notes. I will go out for certain projects that only last 2 or 3 days. I go in and work directly with people. By working together for those couple of days, I really get to connect with people. It's nice because it is on the non-where are you from basis. It's just like, oh, we're kind of similar. We live similar lifestyles and share interests in certain things. Each of us have our little bits of knowledge that we have gained over the years that we can share with one another. So, most of my relationships with people have been short term, but a couple of them have been a little longer term.

I think some of the relationships which are harder to foster are those with people who were born and raised on the reservation. I have a little more in common with the people that were raised elsewhere and moved back here. The difference between us is that although they did not grow up on the reservation, they are still indigenous. I am not. I didn't come here to be with relatives- but I am glad that I ended up here.

Our lifestyles are similar in many ways. One way is that they acknowledge that we need to change the way that our foods are grown. In my lifestyle, I go for things that are not genetically modified and without a lot of chemicals. I try to live a pretty clean lifestyle. So, whether that comes from how I eat, how I heat my house, or how I go to the store, I aim to still enjoy the conveniences of modern life while trying to be conscious about the environment. I have noticed that that their lifestyle shares these ideas.

Most of the people are very conscientious about how they impact the land when they do this and that. They don't have huge extravagant homes. It is pretty realistic. However, while many houses are kept up, there are other places where you are like, "holy buckets I don't know how anyone even lives there."

People talk about being caretakers of the land. However, there are some areas up here that are not quite being taken care of that are on tribal land. That is where sometimes I know they are normal, too. There are some people who aren't as traditional as others. That is sometimes how I get confused because most people are conscientious of the land and don't litter, but sometimes I will just go down the road and see a couch and be like what the heck? Why would you just throw that out on the side of the road? Why don't you use the Garbage Disposal? There is free garbage disposal for anyone who is Native to the land.

Despite the challenges, working with Native people has impacted my life. It has helped enhance my lifestyle. I have learned a lot, but this is not through work. I haven't learned a lot of technical work related skills. It is mostly in the personal realm. People from the community have taught me a lot about foraging and looking for different medicines in the forest and in the woods. In my family, it has been very beneficial. We have enjoyed the opportunity to go out and learn how many different things are around the woods out here in different places. Their willingness to share that has really helped us on a personal note.

One gentleman took our entire family out into the forest into these deep trails. He said, "as long as you don't go showing everyone I will show you a cool spot." He took us some burial grounds where the blueberries grow. People don't really share all these little secrets with people, so it was nice that he brought us out there. Another gentleman told us about swamp tea and where we could harvest it. We tried it out, and it was really good. It is also a very good blood cleansing tea which has other health benefits. The man told us that any time you get any type of illness whether it be a cold or even beyond that, you can use the tea because it cleanses the blood a little bit. It was very neat because that he shared that with us and was willing to take us out and show us where they grow it. He was telling me about that and some other ones that are good.

They have a lot of cancer medicines in the forest that are around here. I couldn't believe that because some of them are considered weeds where I am from. People will spray them and kill them, but if you pull them and use the roots of certain ones they have strong medicinal properties. It was amazing.

Experiences like these have started to change the way that I view things in general. I had kind of thought that we were coming up to the middle of nowhere when we came up here and that we wouldn't know anybody. I thought that it was a lot more rural than I found out. Things are further away, but people are a little closer and tight knit. I was used to huge groups of people and the tension that it has caused. So, it was nice to come up here and meet a group of people that are spread out, pretty quiet, and keep to themselves. However, once you get to know them through the few interactions that you have with them a month, you learn that they are just really good people. They will do nearly anything for you. They are very helpful. It is more of community living than I have ever known, and it has given me a change of perspective. There are a lot of really good people out there. Not everyone is greedy and after the dollar. I think that is partly because of how connected their culture is. I don't know very much about my culture. I haven't studied it, and I don't feel very connected, but I find it interesting to learn about theirs. When I see generations of family members getting together it's neat. It lets me know that there are good people out there everywhere.

I don't really know too much more other than my experience. But, I would say that in general, it is helpful anytime Nonnative people can further educate themselves and see past stereotypes. Going forward, people who are not from Native culture can benefit hugely by learning the way that the people who used to live on this land live today. We are on their territory. They have so much knowledge and wisdom to share, but a lot of Nonnative people who

I know have just had their ears closed and their eyes blind. Because of this, a lot of Native people feel like their voices are lost. There are a few of us Nonnative people who hear it. I can hear it and the more that I listen the more I am able to spread it. So, in a nutshell, if someone was working in the area that's Nonnative, I would say share deeply the experience. Let others know that it is not a real nasty, rough, deprived area. It can be a lot more than that if you get to know the people and the area.

My advice is just to have an open mind, but I think that someone who is going to be working with people who are not Native to their culture already have a predisposition to an open-mind and perspective. So, I would say keep an open mind and be willing to learn. Also, open up and share your perspective whether it is something you think people want to hear or not. I can talk about certain things about culture and background with some of the people who I have met up here. I would say that it would probably be weird if I didn't know them. So, it is important to get to know them and be supportive. You must be willing to learn. After that, you just kind of figure it out based on the personality of the person you are working with.

Derek Parenteau

Occupation: Community Chaplin

Age: 37

Gender: Male

Ethnicity: French Canadian

“I have identified things that I thought were a part of my faith, but they were actually just a part of my culture. I had to let some of those things go.”

Originally my wife and I worked in an urban setting in Toronto. We ran a program for sex trade and gang members. We did that for about ten years and during that time about half of the women that we supported who were involved in street level prostitution were indigenous. We started to learn history and hear stories. We began to learn more about the history of colonization that us as Nonnative people had been involved in. Before that time, we were fairly ignorant to all that. We developed a passion for justice in that area and a passion to do more. We moved several hours to the Georgia Bay Region in Ontario where I began my new role as Community Chaplin for the Canadian Brotherine of Mennonite Churches in partnership with a local organization called Rugged Tree.

There is a high concentration of indigenous communities here. When I took this role five years ago, there were no programs. The organization I work with was not even present here at that time. That is part of the reason that I came here. I wanted to fill some gaps in service, and I had a few contacts in this area. So, we came and started from scratch in this role of serving in 6 different first nations (the Canadian term for Native American) communities that are within an hour of where I live. About a quarter of the people in the town I live in are indigenous. The three major aspects of what I do are promoting truth and reconciliation, community development, and leading a program that is faith-based.

First, I support Canada's initiative to promote truth and reconciliation. In Canada over the last several years there has been a commitment to truth and reconciliation to revitalize relationships between Canada and its aboriginal communities. It was an indigenous-led initiative with a lot of funding and support behind it by the federal government. The goal was to try to get a better understanding of what the residential schools did to indigenous people. People were given funds to tell their stories which were recorded and put in the national archive. So, it's kind of making a record out of it.

Out of that, locally, a big part of what I do is working with people who want to promote truth and reconciliation. A big challenge with truth and reconciliation was not many non-indigenous folks came out to be a part of that conversation. About 99% of the people who came were indigenous or politicians who kind of just showed up and left. There wasn't a lot of engagement by average Canadians. Part of what my role is here is connecting the Nonnative community with the Native community using the relationships that I have fostered. I try to promote education on the part of Nonnatives by promoting better ways of relating to Natives. This is an important and challenging task because there is a significant amount of racism here. The racism is not just systemic. It is also sometimes just blatant. So, I deal with these things to develop communication and promote a better way of being together. I promote this through churches, schoolboards, hospitals, and through other avenues.

Second, I work as a community developer focusing not on deficits, but on strengths. I come alongside communities where they have identified problems and try to add capacity to the things that they are already working on doing. It is all indigenous-led. I don't get any outside funding besides my paid staff position. It is all initiated by the community. I believe that the role of Nonnative professionals who work with Native American communities is as an ally. Things

need to be owned by indigenous folks right from the beginning. I don't think that we are supposed to build things, physically or metaphorically, and then pass them over. So, I just come alongside to help add capacity that is customized by each community and what they are asking of me. So, in some communities I am doing restorative justice programs. For example, developing diversions for young people who have charges in the legal system. In other areas I am doing language revitalization projects. I work with elders to record their stories in Ojibwe. These stories are used to develop language learning material for the younger generations. In other areas we are doing addiction prevention work. It really depends on the community and what they are asking for.

Third, my work is led by my Christian faith. I come alongside the indigenous people who also identify as Christian. My goal is to help folks explore what it means to live out their faith as indigenous people. There has been a strong colonization mindset with the churches involved. So, people have felt like they had to abandon their culture to live out their faith. I am trying to do things in a better way so people can, as indigenous people, live out their faith in a way that makes sense. So, I work on developing different ways of meeting and being together that aren't so "churchy" in the western sense. I try to support the Christians who are there who don't always have a lot of support.

I find a lot about my work to be rewarding and valuable. It is such a huge privilege to be able to come and learn. It is an area that five years ago I knew so little about. Folks have been so incredibly gracious. People have been very warm, embracing, and welcoming which has been a real positive thing. I have been able to learn so much from people opening up their minds and their homes to me. I have also learned what community means- that is a huge gift. To be able to come along and be a part of really authentic, deeply rooted community has been hugely

rewarding. Raising my kids here is a huge gift because they are able to get a true sense of what community is.

Now that I have experienced community with indigenous people, I realized that previously I looked at community more as a club. If I had shared interests I would sign on, but if I didn't have interest or didn't like the people I could leave or go somewhere else. It was very elective. My indigenous friends are so rooted in the land, the physical place, and the traditions of their ancestors. Because of that, the community has a lineage that goes far back and far forward.

The Ojibwe have a teaching called the seven generations teaching. The idea is that everything we do is linked seven generations back and seven generations forward. So, it is very much not an elective community. It links the past and the future together in place. With that, communities are rooted for better or for worse. Sometimes people feel like they are stuck or trapped and cannot leave. However, there are also times when there is a lot of hope with that kinship and connectedness with one another. There are days where it is good and days where it is really hard, but I think that it is more human and how we are supposed to be. Overall, I think that it is a positive thing.

Learning about such teachings and spending time within Native communities has affected my worldview a lot. Some ways I can't even articulate. I think that my understanding of what listening means has changed. We as Nonnative people talk about awkward silence. A lot of my indigenous friends talk about awkward talking. There is a real comfort with quiet and creating a space for people to speak into. Part of listening is creating that space and not just listening to people talking. It is about creating an environment where you can hear well. I think that has very much changed the way that I interact with my marriage and with my kids as father. When I counsel, I have changed a lot of things. There is a much deeper way of listening that I hadn't

been exposed to before. I believe it has really become a part of me. How to listen deeply beyond the surface and creating spaces where you can truly hear people is a big worldview shift I have embraced.

As embarrassing as it is to admit, I would say that as a Nonnative person I always prioritize task over relationship. I wouldn't want to admit that even to myself in the past, but it is true. Now that I am with people who genuinely prioritize relationships over tasks, I am working on incorporating that more into my own life. I don't know if I fully made that switch, but it has changed quite a bit. I am really realizing the value of relationships and how to put relationships first with time, energy, sacrifices, finances, and more.

In the faith perspective, it has very much affected my faith. I read my bible completely different than I used to. I see things in it that I never saw before. I see strengths in my faith that I never acknowledged before. I have identified things that I thought were a part of my faith, but they were actually just a part of my culture. I had to let some of those things go.

For example, I think that culturally, North Americans need to feel exceptional. We feel like it is our place to fix things and correct things. We believe that we know better and have the answers. I think that that is incorporated into North American Christianity. We feel like part of our job is to go with things that we know that others don't to fix them or their situation. I have had to let go of this sense of having all the answers and I think that that was incorporated into my faith. I have to be ready to acknowledge that there are things that I don't know and don't understand. While this was challenging for me at first, I acknowledge that it is okay and it is not a threat to my faith. That's what faith is- trusting even when you don't know and being comfortable with not being in control.

Additional challenges I have faced during my time working with indigenous communities are the huge historically rooted racial barriers. Where we live, there is a high population of indigenous people living next to an area that is mainly non-indigenous. Not only is there deep historical trauma from colonization and history, but there have also been recent clashes between the communities. These clashes have resulted in these kind of invisible walls that are here.

Coming in as an outsider, I wasn't a local in either sense. I wasn't an indigenous person and I also wasn't a local nonindigenous person. I came from the city, so I had a more multi-cultural background. Coming in, I assumed relationships wouldn't be as hard to build as they were. Everything is segregated. Education systems are different. A majority of healthcare is separate. Employment is either indigenous owned or non-indigenous owned. There is hardly any overlap. Building relationships was very challenging. Even just starting a conversation initially was very difficult because people just assumed that you didn't want to talk to them. It was hard to strike up conversations or get involved. That was one major challenge in the beginning.

It didn't take too long to overcome that after a bit of me showing up and going into indigenous spaces. I was not asking people to come to my spaces where I was comfortable, but rather going there being open and ready to learn. When I am in their community, I have a student posture which has helped relationships flow very easily now. I have been identified as an ally. Even people who I don't know personally know that I have been accepted by the elders of the local leadership. So, the walls quickly broke down in the spaces where indigenous people were in control.

It is sometimes hard to figure out what these spaces or "their community" is though. Defining a Native American community can be challenging because there are different storylines happening at the same time. In the urban areas, indigenous people are developing their own

community centers and sense of community. For example, in Toronto there is indigenous housing, employment, and schools. Native people who live in the city are developing new webs of relationships and sense of rootedness.

However, most of my friends here on the reserves would see those folks as less legitimate. Most of my friends would say that someone who goes to the city for twenty years and then comes back is looked at as if they have broken the chain. They have broken from the web of relationships from the local community. The indigenous people who do not leave often look down upon the people who do leave for disconnecting themselves from the sacred social web.

I don't think that average Canadians look at it that way. They look at it more as blood quantum. If you have it Native heritage in your blood, then you Native. There is a lot of talk about this blood quantum thing here. Some of the communities I am in have enrollment policies based on blood-quantum amounts.

In one of the communities that I work in, it used to be that you needed at least $\frac{1}{2}$ Native blood quantum to be an enrolled member. They are dropping that to $\frac{1}{4}$ because if they don't, their community will be just about gone in ten years. I have also seen these enrollment policies go the other way. Another community just got big money from the government. Each band member will be receiving a \$20,000 cash payout. So, in anticipation they are upping the blood quantum requirement to $\frac{3}{4}$ to be a part of the community.

However, there are other ways to define indigenous people. The conversations that I hear the most respected elders having are about rootedness. Are you rooted in the people? Are you rooted in the land that you are from? Personally, I agree with the elders and think that it has to do with being rooted with a specific community and the land. An indigenous person is of the land

and of the community. I wouldn't go the blood quantum route even though that is the route that most people would go.

It is interesting because there is an author here from Canada named Joseph Boyden. He wrote a lot of books from the indigenous perspective. Early on in his career, he didn't identify as indigenous. As his career progressed, he started to identify as indigenous. It ended up like he was 1/16th Native or four generations removed and he was now representing indigenous people in Canada. He got a lot of funding grants and prestige as an indigenous author.

People are quite upset about this. His books are good, but he kind of just showed up and was like, "hey I'm indigenous." People praised him at first. A lot of my indigenous friends played music at his book launch and really got behind him. They were excited to have someone who was accepted by mainstream Canada and even the world telling their story.

Then, their opinion changed and they feel like he kind of crossed this line. People now believe that he was only indigenous so he could sell books. They feel that he took on an identity because it privileged him in the literary world. He didn't live his life or identify as indigenous until he was evoked to be an indigenous author. People feel like he falsely took on an identity just to push himself forward. The problem is that now he is sitting on panels for the government and speaking on behalf of the indigenous perspective. He has a stronger voice for indigenous people than indigenous people. It was very upsetting to people. They feel like, of course the most famous indigenous person isn't actually indigenous. No wonder everyone likes him so much.

This is especially hurtful because it further reinforces the dominant western-style leadership structure that holds immense decision making power in these communities. In the communities that I am in, there is a 100% separation between the tribal government and the elders as leaders in the community.

People typically believe that the traditional leadership is more authentic. The traditional leadership comes with age. Additionally, the Ojibwe are a matriarchal society, so the women are at the top of that chain of authority. It is the grandmothers who call the shots for day to day life and set the direction of the community. However, they don't hold power besides relational power.

Most of the decision-making power lies within the tribal government. It is almost always middle-aged men who are elected to the tribal council. Some of those middle aged men really respect the elderly women. So, they try to bring forth their voice. However, I don't know any grandmothers who are in political office. The political officials are seen as puppets of the government. They are pawns for the federal government to enforce the government's will. That is how people look at them. In the political model, leaders are elected and given the power whether they have the knowledge and the relationships or not.

These two distinct groups of leaders in the community are usually in conflict with one another. More often than not, they are going down two different paths. However, there are times when they line up and agree with one another. That is when you can see amazing things happen. And with huge challenges facing these communities such as the suicide crisis and addiction, it is important that the two groups can come together for the greater good of their community.

The Canadian indigenous youth have the largest suicide rate of any group of people in the world. That is a huge thing, but people see these things and as outsiders with no connection, no grounding, and no relationship want to come in and fix things quickly. People think these things are really bad we need to go in and fix and it and honestly I don't know a single story of that going very well. Many millions of dollars and many well intentioned people later- it doesn't do anything.

Furthermore, addiction has come alongside the stories of a lot of indigenous people here. Close to 100% of the people I know here are either addicted (actively engaged with their addiction) or had an addiction in the past. It is a very high number. The addiction makes community development and growing faith-based communities challenging because it has gotten tangled up and intertwined with everything. It's tricky to pull out one thing from the next because it has taken over so many people's lives. It affects leadership capacity, stability of mind, and so many other things in so many ways.

I was with a group the other day of a dozen women and they are all sharing and all of them had been sexually assaulted at least 15 times. That was the lowest number...15. There is a lot of pain that has come out of the addiction. People want to affirm indigenous strength, history, culture, and traditions, but it is difficult because for some people that is mixed in with a lot of pain from the community as well. It is very messy and tangled. Addiction is a major challenge. I want people to realize that their addiction is not who they are nor what their culture is. However, it is a reality. So, it is important to acknowledge the reality and the pain that comes with that while also acknowledging that a more positive story exists. Trying to help people to identify both and live in the more positive story is the most effective thing that I have seen. It is easier said than done. Trying to support people through that is hard when it is so all encompassing in the communities that I am working in.

It is the same people who are experiencing such heartache who are the people who have welcomed me and opened up to me despite my flaws and limited understanding. I have broken lot of cultural norms, but not on purpose. I was naïve. There is the culture that you can see on the outside that is pretty easy to identify. There is also deeply embedded worldview stuff that is sometimes even hard for people to articulate when you are asking about the culture. So, those

things are usually the most important things in my experience. It has been a huge process of trial and error, asking questions, and trying to learn. So much of it is unspoken. It takes time and some very gracious friends to help you through all of that.

One big thing that I've noticed is that the communication style is very indirect. As a North American, I would value assertive, straightforward questions with straightforward answers. My indigenous friends where I am here are very indirect. Asking a yes or no question here is considered rude. You ask indirectly by making a statement or telling a story. The person can read between the lines and understand what you are saying. So when you ask a yes or no question, they will say yes even when they mean no. If they actually meant no, then they just won't follow through.

I have, many times without thinking, just blatantly asked, "Do you want to volunteer for this program? Do you want to go to a training for this? Do you think this is a good idea?" People will always just said yes. Then often that has led to strained relationships. If someone says yes out of politeness and then don't follow through, I am left feeling like I am pushing things that I thought they wanted but they didn't. I have strained relationships in the past because I was a well-intentioned outsider who was pushy. Even if I didn't feel like I was being pushy, I was seen as pushy because I didn't realize that culturally I had asked the wrong questions in the wrong type of way.

On the other hand, I have made a lot of mistakes where people have asked me to do things and I didn't pick up on it because it was so indirect. It went right over my head. There have been times where I have gone to communities and said, "I am here to be helpful, I am here to serve under you. I want to follow your lead." People have in their own way asked me to do things, but I didn't pick up on it because I thought it was just random or an aside moment. I

didn't pick up on the fact that a story was a request for me to engage in a certain way. Then, because I missed a cue people are thinking, "You said we're here to help and then we ask you to help and you don't help."

There was one moment, it was a silly little thing that was my lightbulb moment. A community was having a community feast and they asked me to be a part of that in a number of different ways. So, I was helping plan. The day before one of the grandmothers (an elderly woman from the community) called me. We were just chit chatting and talking and then she said, "I just wanted to let you know that there is a sale on pies at the local grocery store." And I said "oh, thank you for letting me know. I will pick one up for my family." I didn't pick up on the cue. So, the next day I arrived at the feast and she was horrified because I didn't pick up the pies for the feast.

I showed up with no pies which meant that there were no pies at the feast. This was a big deal for her. She was a little frustrated with me because I didn't have the pies and I had agreed to help. I just realized, oh she wasn't just calling me to politely tell me that these pies were on sale. She was indirectly asking me, without putting me in a position of saying yes or no, assuming that I would understand. I botched it, but for whatever reason that was a lightbulb moment for me. I started to understand and ask better questions and get better responses. I have come a long way, but I am still so culturally different that I still make those mistakes. Just not as often as I used. I am sure I am not the only Nonnative who has made such mistakes. So, I encourage other Nonnative professionals who wish to work in this space to embrace their mistakes and learn from them.

I would also advise them to own the history of colonization and not try to worm yourself out of it. Don't think things like, "well that is from a previous generation. I wouldn't have done

that if I were in charge.” Don’t try to deflect blame. Rather, take ownership for it and acknowledge the privilege that you have been afforded from colonization and be open to that. I have seen a lot of workers and even myself want to say, “Hey! I’m not one of the bad guys. I am one of the good guys. Don’t worry, I have indigenous friends. I am pro-indigenous. I’m not one of those ones.” Owning colonization and your part in it while not trying to deflect blame is important if you are going to be taken seriously and really accepted by the community.

My next piece of advice is to try engaging in truth and reconciliation. Talking about it and attending events early on is important. The history of colonization is always the elephant in the room and we are not always aware of it as non-indigenous people because it is not right in front of our face. Well it is, but we don’t see it right in front of our face in the same way that our indigenous friends live the reality of it every day. It can become this awkward thing that is there that hinders relationships from going forward. So, be sure to tackle that early on and not wait too long. It will make for a more toxic and distant relationship if you put it off.

Additionally, come in with a posture of learner. Definitely do not come in as a problem solver or solution bringer. Come in as a question asker and a listener. It is incredibly important. Roles can grow over time, but they certainly do not start with you as the expert. I can say from my personal experience that coming in as a learner and a listener is helping. Give people who feel voiceless a voice. Allow people’s stories to have significance. It definitely helps more than people would think.

The last thing I can think of is coming in with a lot of patience especially with relationships and time. Time is not an enemy. Time is people’s friend. Time is long. Indigenous people play the long game in relationships and in life. They are not looking for the immediacy that most Nonnative people would. Trust that just because things aren’t going quick doesn’t

mean that they aren't okay. Even if it feels like it is taking a long time from our perspective, it isn't taking a long time from the indigenous perspective. Relationships take the time that they take. There is no rush to it.

Fred Jones¹

Occupation: Federal Government Employee

Age: Between 55 and 64

Gender: Male

Ethnicity: White

“It's a perplexing problem which breaks my heart. It's a hard, hard issue. I have a feeling that it has something to do with a radical revisit and revision of reservations and the way they are governed.”

I graduated from Penn State in 1977. I later went to graduate school at the University of Pittsburgh. I graduated there in '83. I worked in business for about 20 some years and at some point I transitioned into the federal government. I worked in a particular federal agency where people change jobs every two to three years. I was in this role for one year. During that year, we reviewed infrastructure projects in different parts of the United States. For the most part where I worked was in the High Plains.

The job itself is the reason I started working with Native American communities. It was not necessarily something I sought out. However, going into the position, I knew there was an aspect of working with Native Americans which was intriguing to me. I have long had an interest in Native American communities, but I grew up in the east and so I did not have a lot of exposure.

I always wanted to know a little bit about what these communities are like. This was the closest I ever got to having some sense of that. The job did not take me to actual reservations, but we met with representatives of different tribes at select locations in the High Plains. That was my encounter. Then, I spoke to various representatives and tribes quite often during that year. I

¹ Fred Jones is an alias name used to protect the identity of this individual.

don't think it's a good idea to disclose the name of the tribes I worked with, but I can say that I spoke to tribal government representatives of numerous tribes. By numerous I would say at least two to three dozen.

My work with tribes was challenging. The first meeting I had with Native Representatives was sort of a warm-up to some of their issues. By the second meeting, I got a deep appreciation for what I interpreted as the bitterness and disenfranchised state of Native Americans in the United States. I found it to be heartbreaking that so many generations later there is still a harsh bitterness and agitation with the United States government. I would not argue their reasons. This frustration with the U.S. goes back more than seven generations. It goes well beyond the 1840s.

Since I was in the federal government, this distrust was very much interwoven in their interactions with us. They saw us as having some level of ability, which we didn't, to go back and redress these various treaties from the 1800s. We don't have the authority to do that, but it was difficult to explain that and work around that at times.

Although I have never been onto the reservation, I have traveled to developing nations outside of the United States. The way reservations were portrayed to me and the way they spoke about what went on in a reservation, I got a real sense that they are similar to developing nations. It's almost as though they are developing worlds within a more developed country. These very poignant and profound differences between the life that I had lived and the lives that many of these people were living really struck me.

Not only are there quality of life issues, but there are big cultural differences as well. I was at one meeting where a gentleman spoke with great reverence. I heard him speak about the cosmos and Native American spirituality. It was really interesting to hear him speak about that

and in such a reverent tone. When you compare that with the way most urbanites live, it's a really different approach to life and things such as infrastructure projects are not necessarily compatible with that spiritual view of the world.

During my work with tribal governments, I started to think to myself, what can be done? I realized that most of these reservations were set up in areas where there's not a lot of resources. If there were, such as there was in the Black Hills, then the federal government found a way to manipulate a treaty so that they could get the mineral rights out of a particular area. The lack of resources makes it extraordinarily difficult for them to conduct themselves to have development and economically viable communities.

They were pleading to me that because of the way the reservation system was set up, they lack any sort of economic power. Within, the past 20 years, they were able to leverage the casino industry, but that is sort of rendered politically insignificant. This creates a situation where we have several million people who are not being represented. Many Native people live in states with small populations. Therefore, they only have a few house representatives in the house and two senators. It struck me as a very difficult situation and one that seems to be forgotten by white America.

Since we have such limited knowledge about Native communities, it is easy to misunderstand the culture and potentially break cultural norms. Luckily, I didn't have to experience that kind of embarrassment. However, someone with whom I worked had done something like that. I was not present for it and it was prior to me joining this project, but heard about it. I don't think I'm the person to describe what happened, but I do know as a result of that incident, it deeply affected people and created some terrible tension on one particular project. We

managed to get through that. Eventually we reached some level of agreement between the tribes, the federal government, and this project that was to be built.

I would describe my time working with tribes as educational rather than rewarding. In retrospect, I'm happy to have a sliver of insight into that part of American Indian life. I would like to go out, but do it as a private citizen, and experience reservation life up-close. I won't say personal because it could never be really personal, but I would like to see what it's truly like. I don't know if that could happen because I think it's rather insular. If I were to go in as a civilian, I'd still be very careful. I would make sure that I don't appear too professional and untrustworthy.

One of the non-profit organizations that I donate to which benefits Native American communities once offered a fundraising opportunity to go see the people and educational facilities that the charity benefitted. You pay upwards near a thousand dollars. They take out to the mid-west where visit three or four reservations for two weeks more or less. I thought this might be one way to potentially visit as a civilian, but I don't have any concrete plans to do that at the moment.

It's not to say that I come away from the experience being really negative about Native Americans, that's not my point. I come away from experience just thinking their situation is far, far different than what I anticipated. And regrettably for them, they're politically and economically in a really marginalized position. Before I started this job, I didn't feel as though their lives would be so desperate and hopeless. Given that they were dealing with the federal government, the way things were described to us could have been inflated, it's hard to say. They're not happy with us, that's for sure.

I wish I would have been more prepared for the level of disdain and bitterness that Native Americans have toward the US government. Frankly, I'm not sure if that would have changed things that much. You adjust to that like you would with any other cultures. At times, I felt that the differences in culture between myself and tribal officials was even greater than the differences in culture I have experienced in other parts of the world. Say, Latin America for example. I have to temper that because usually the people I was working with in Latin America were either business types or government people, so it's not quite comparable. I understand that a local reservation somewhere out in the mid-west is not comparable to a nation state somewhere in Latin America. I recognize that, but the underdevelopment in Indian country, which is within the United States, troubles me as a citizen.

I believe that my work made me more social progressive than what I may have been already. Our former president recognized that this is an element of society which is often overlooked. He didn't always do it, but often when he would go through a litany of different racial groups in the United States during speeches, he would mention Native Americans. I was always happy to hear him say that because I thought it was rare at the national level. There is usually no recognition of what goes on in in Native American communities at that level. It's just a completely forgotten and disenfranchised group of people that have been swept aside into obscure corners of the United States.

So, while it made me a more social progressive, I don't have any grand solutions. It is a big problem and I don't know how to address it particularly in an era where we are right now where more public goods are becoming private goods. Investments in communities are becoming increasingly more private sector oriented. For example, municipal services like trash collection, sewage, and water are slowly becoming more privatized.

I think most private sector investors look at reservations and scratch their heads without really seeing an opportunity. To say this in political terms, if “big government” is the solution, you'd need some kind of massive social, economic program sponsored by the federal government. I'm not really sure that would solve it, or make progress of the issues. The federal government doesn't have that kind of money now. It's a perplexing problem which breaks my heart. It's a hard, hard issue. I have a feeling that it has something to do with a radical revisit and revision of reservations and the way they are governed.

I would advise Nonnative professionals who are entering the field of working with Native Americans to meet with folks that have been in Indian affairs to get a better sense of what the issues are with particular tribes. I don't say that because I think that the BIA is the ultimate primer for understanding the tribe. However, they could probably help you understand some of the issues from a tribal standpoint and point out the difference amongst the various tribes.

I've been talking about Native Americans as a block the whole time during this conversation as if they all think as one, but they don't. Not surprisingly, they disagree among each other. So, even if you did come up with some kind of really inventive plan to try to overhaul reservation life or reinvent relationships with the federal government, you could have some that agree and some that say no. It's not a solid constituency. There are a lot of sub-groups within that who think differently. That's what contributes to the complexity of the problem at least that was my interpretation of what I experienced.

My experience has made me more in tune to the needs of indigenous people. There are indigenous people, of course, everywhere. My experience with indigenous people in the US has made me more sensitive to those issues. I recently in a Central Asian country which has four major ethnic groups. One of the groups, which is not necessarily indigenous, is consistently

being discriminated against. Because of the experience I've had working with tribes, it I felt more sensitive and empathetic to their issues in that situation. It has highlighted the contours of these differences that ethnicity and racial groups have against each other. It made me realize how much energy it takes and how difficult it is to make progress politically and economically.

I've heard people talk about this dilemma of whether to stay on the reservation or leave the reservation. I can see where that has a lot to do with one's identity and opportunity. When I first started to work in this area for that year, I thought to myself, if someone who was able to get through all the social challenges, get an education on a reservation, and then, maybe, maybe, get to college and find work outside of a reservation why wouldn't they? The obvious choice would be to leave the reservation because there's better economic opportunity elsewhere.

I later realized that so much identity is wrapped up into being together as a tribe and attempting to make something out of what little they have. I think an indigenous person is someone who feels it in their soul. By leaving the reservation, you are jeopardizing your sense of identity. So, if you are someone who is from a reservation out in the mid-west like Oklahoma or the Dakotas and you were to go to Chicago and get a job, you could prove yourself there. But a lot of the familial and spiritual aspects of your culture have are now put at arms distance. That probably has a lot to do with how you view yourself and the identity that you have with that tribe.

I think with any group a sense of community is defined by the togetherness of people. The political structure that it takes is another matter. Native people had community before reservations were established. When the United States government created the reservation system over one hundred years ago, they challenged the ability of Native people to define their own communities. The legal actions of the U.S. government set the stage for a conflict between

reservations and individuals. I am not sure that the political structure that the U.S. government has forced Native communities to abide by adequately suits the culture of indigenous communities.

Lastly, I want to mention that even though you may think as a Nonnative person that you think you have an understanding with someone, it doesn't mean necessarily that you have a bond with that person. I had that experience with some people. There was an incident where one of our meetings was protested. One of the individuals who I had spent a lot of time working with over the phone was part of the protest and basically called me out in the demonstration.

The individual knew my situation. They knew that I was at this job for a year, and in spite of that, multiple times, this individual bashed me in public forum. I didn't think that was necessary. I was disappointed by that. That's part of breaching different cultural stuff. I think what that proves is that clearly the loyalty to a particular cause, driven by shared vision of tribes in this particular project, is far stronger and will always be far stronger than building a relationship with a Nonnative person in the government. I didn't feel betrayed, I was just disappointed.

Gwendolen Cates

Occupation: Professional Photographer and Documentary Film Maker

Age: 50-60

Gender: Female

Ethnicity: White

“You must come into a community or a relationship with respect and humility. You have to really take the time to hear what people have to say. You have to take the time it needs to really get to know a community before you launch into your work. Sometimes it is frustrating for people because they are impatient to get started, but it is critical.”

I am a professional photographer and documentary film maker. My connection to working as a documentary filmmaker in Indian Country began when I was a child. My father was a linguist who studied the Navajo language and lived on the Navajo reservation for the two years before I was born. He learned to speak Navajo fluently, so I was introduced to the language before I was even born. When I was a kid, he started bringing me out to the reservation. When I was nine years old, I started taking pictures during these visits. By the time I was a teenager, I was going out to the Navajo Nation by myself to visit our traditional friends.

Although my connection through cameras and Indian Country began early, I originally decided to keep my pictures from Indian Country separate from my professional work. I had issues with exploitation and didn't want to contribute to this existing problem. Even though my relationships with Native communities were such an important part of my personal life they were separate from my professional life until 1999 when I was talked into doing a couple of features for Men's Journal Magazine that had a focus on Native people.

I was the photo editor and the editor in chief. There, I learned the power of positive story telling. For me, positive storytelling is an important component of what I want to do with my work. I want to be a vehicle for people's voices and their perspectives. I realized that I could be

this vehicle for indigenous voices and perspectives. So, I did those features and then went on to publish a coffee table book titled *Indian Country*.

For that book, I travelled all around the United States. Although I would have loved to, I wasn't able to visit every tribe. However, I covered a lot of ground from Alaska to Northern Maine to Florida to Southern California and everywhere in between. I sort of treated it like a road trip. I wanted to capture the serendipity of what it was like to actually travel through Indian Country rather than planning it beforehand. I met all kinds of people. Their stories, in their own words, are included in the book.

Then, I got into documentary filmmaking. The first film I produced was called *Water Flowing Together*. It is about a Navajo ballet dancer who dances with the New York City Ballet. Secondly, I was hired by the Onondaga Nation to film *The Good Mind*. The film is about the tribe's relationship to the Earth, climate change, and the indigenous perspective. Additionally, I have been working on a Standing Rock documentary, *We are Unarmed*, which is not yet published.

With my films, I seek to really tell the stories of grassroots, traditional people. I want to tell the story the way they want the story to be told. I want to tell the true stories of the people who came from an ancient community and managed to retain their cultural traditions and identity. I want to get out in the right way. I am aware that the issues I am raising are controversial. So, I am hyper-conscious of being respectful in the way I frame these issues.

One thing I often struggle with in my work is the intrusive nature of barricade film making. Barricade film footage is the up close and personal footage where you are just in the moment. You are right there with somebody. The camera follows somebody as they go about

whatever they are doing. It can feel like you are kind of on top of someone. It is very intimate and therefore intrusive which is exactly what you don't want to be in Indian Country.

One way that I try to address this problem is by using a small camera. Additionally, I am always hyper-conscious and mindful of those invisible personal boundaries. When do I need to recede and when is it okay to be closer in? There is a bit of a fine line between doing the work you need to do and at the same time being respectful. Being too intrusive can be considered disrespectful. It has been a really interesting learning experience which I balance by being vigilant and always airing on the side of respect.

To further ensure that I am respecting the communities I work with, it important to me that my work is that it is truly collaborative. The concept of being a true ally matters. It means thinking, "what do *you* want? What is the story *you* want to be told?" rather than coming in, looking around, and determining what the story should be.

In more mainstream media, you see the same stories repeated over and over again. To do something that is fresh and authentic requires a level of collaboration that has been missing from most journalism about Native communities. It is not genuine and reciprocal. This is something I want my work to incorporate. I want my work to not only benefit me, but also really contribute something to the community. I want to give back and find a pathway towards better relationships. Reciprocity has been pretty much ignored and it is extremely important.

Some people think of it a negative thing where you give up journalistic and creative control, but that's not the case at all. If you are doing something respectfully and collaboratively, it will only make it a better project. People will see where you are coming from. They will recognize that. They will become more open, trusting, and willing to contribute.

While it is not always easy, working with Native communities is incredibly rewarding. It has certainly enriched my life. There is no question about that. It is such an important part of my life. It has had a huge impact on who I am and how I see the world. Since the time I was a kid, I have learned so much and I continue to learn to this day. The indigenous perspective is very different than the typical American perspective. It is a worldview that one could also call spirituality. It is a more holistic, nature-based view of the world. This worldview has permeated its way through nearly every aspect of my life.

However, I am very uncomfortable with the very new-age spirituality wanna-be perspective by Nonnatives. I think that there has been a lot of cultural appropriation. For example, there has been a rise in Nonnative people who start to go to ceremonies, start identifying with Native people, and believe that they are actually Native. They begin to appropriate sacred ceremonies because they believe that that is somehow part of respecting Native people. In fact, it is the opposite. It is very disrespectful to Native people. I think it is extremely important to respect boundaries and understand that you can learn so much without ever claiming that you have become something that you are not.

Cultural appropriation is one of many reasons why there is distrust between Native and Nonnative communities. Native people have been betrayed continuously ever since Columbus and the first settlers arrived. Since then, relationships between Native and Nonnative people have been a trail of broken treaties and promises. So, very understandably, trust is a challenging barrier to overcome when working with indigenous communities.

Building trust is about building personal relationships and being intentional about collaboration. People want to see consistency. They want to be sure that your goals are for the

betterment of their communities, not your resume. For far too long, Native and Nonnative relationships have been objectified and have taken a colonial approach.

When I was studying anthropology at the University of Chicago, I had a real problem with this. The focus of building relationships was to gain trust in order to take as much information as possible. A lot of this information was personal or sacred ceremonial information. Researchers would exploit this information in pursuit of educational achievement. Reciprocity and collaboration was not the primary goal of the relationships. This was very disturbing to me because the people on the tail end of these one-way relationships were people who I grew up with and knew personally. I could not accept it and ended up leaving academia.

While I think things are starting to change today, dehumanizing stereotypes and false narratives about Native people prevail. This problem has been perpetuated through the romanticizing, villainizing, and sensationalizing of Native people. Romantic stereotypes paint a picture of Native people just sitting around by a river being spiritual all day. Villainizing stereotypes paint a picture of Native people as alcoholics and drug addicts. Sensational stereotypes paints a picture of Native people wearing regalia and dancing in powwows every day. These stereotypes are embedded in our cultural perception. It permeates everything people grow up believing and seeing about the Indians.

If we look at general media portrayals of Native people, there is very little that is actually real. Why is there always powwow footage in trailers and things about Native people? A priority in my work is to be very conscious of this and refrain from doing any of the above- especially romanticizing. I want to keep it real which means that I need to know what is real. The only way to gain that insight and understanding is to listen.

The advice that I would give to other Nonnative professionals who plan to work with Native American communities is to try to let go of preconceived ideas and narratives. I would suggest that you spend as much time as possible listening and learning. This means learning about the community dynamics and figuring out who the appropriate, respected people are within that particular community. These are the people that you should be getting your direction.

The nature of professional work is often deadline driven. However, it takes patience to do the story. It is so incredibly important to do it in the right way. The right way requires taking time to listen and to learn. There hasn't been enough of that.

When work is done in the right way, then it really is a service to the community because you really are then telling *their* story. For so long, Native people have been written about, spoken about, and analyzed. There has just been a very gradual shift to empowering their voices and their perspectives. In order to truly do that, you have to listen and learn.

You must come into a community or a relationship with respect and humility. You have to really take the time to hear what people have to say. You have to take the time it needs to really get to know a community before you launch into your work. Sometimes it is frustrating for people because they are impatient to get started, but it is critical.

Also, keep in mind that a Native community is one in which Native people have defined themselves. That is another interesting point today. The U.S. government decided that it would define Native communities. There are federally recognized tribes, there are tribes that are recognized by the state, and there are some communities that are still seeking proper recognition. The recognition process is an incredibly expensive project. It can cost a million dollars or more to produce the copious documentation required to prove that a tribal community is legitimate in the eyes of the law.

There are communities whose applications have been unsuccessful. Usually, if you look into it, it is because of political reasons. There are fears that if certain tribes gain recognition they will open a casino and the politicians don't want a casino. Or, the tribe would have some claim on land that they don't want to give up. The issue of the U.S. and State governments deciding who is or is not an indigenous community is an ongoing dilemma.

Additionally, I think that most Nonnatives think of Indian people as a kind of homogenous group. They all think the same way. They all practice the same ceremonies. While there are definitely very strong aspects of belief and customs that indigenous communities share, every single nation and band has its own unique character, ceremonies, and songs. However, there are some communities that because of colonialism, to no fault of their own, have lost their songs and their ceremonies. This is tragic. It's complicated. Even within each distinct community you have people who are traditional and people who are not.

The only way to truly understand, and I know I keep reiterating the same point over and over again, but it cannot be overstated, is to listen. Listening is a key component to learning; It is especially important in Indian Country. For example, you never interrupt an elder. Even if they are going on and on and on, you do not interrupt. That is one example of a cultural norm that people outside Indian Country might not be aware of. The times that I have made mistakes and put my foot in my mouth are the times that I am not paying attention. I am not listening. I am moving too fast or I am too absorbed in what I am doing. I didn't take a moment to pause pay attention. That's when I do something stupid. It's usually something small and subtle.

An example that keeps popping into my mind is a situation from Standing Rock in September. We were doing a prayer walk and one of the people who was leading that walk approached me. He asked if I had any water because an elder was very dehydrated. I was feeling

a bit hyper-vigilant. I became very focused on getting this elder some water. I must do this. I have been assigned this task. So, I was going along the walk shouting, “Does anybody have any water? Does anybody have any water?”

It wasn't until after the prayer walk concluded that I realized I was being a little disruptive. I should have backed off a little bit and not have been so hyper vigilant. It wasn't a big deal. I wasn't really reprimanded, but afterwards I felt like, Gwendolen, maybe you should have just let things be. Although I was really concerned about the elder at that time, maybe I didn't need to take that on in such a big way.

Other examples throughout my life are really just boil down to keeping my mouth shut and listening. This is something that we can find a bit more difficult to do as Westerners. Americans have a tendency to jump in and explain something. However, sometimes failing to listen long enough has cause me to subtly and unintentionally break cultural norms. It can be the smallest things. The story about the water bottle was just the tiniest thing, but you can use it as a metaphor for just about everything. People might not say anything, but they notice. They definitely notice.

This is why it is important to keep listening and to keep paying attention. Never assume that you know everything because you don't. You will always have so much more to learn. Using Standing Rock as an example, there were photographers and filmmakers, who would come out for a few weeks and then instantly considered themselves experts on Indian Country. That is not the case. It is something that is truly a lifetime of learning.

Another interesting dilemma I have run into regarding Standing Rock is how I should appropriately raise funds for my documentary. I felt like it is unethical to set up a GoFundMe or other type of crowdfunding efforts although it is the best way to fund this sort of thing. There

were so many crowdfunding campaigns that were created over the span of the protest against the Dakota Access Pipeline that it became problematic for a lot of the indigenous people at Standing Rock. Many local people didn't have access to these funds. There were people at Sacred Stone raising money saying, "Fund me! I'm going to help the Indians!" I didn't feel like it was appropriate. It caused a lot of resentment and rifts between Natives and Nonnatives. There will be millions of dollars that were raised during that time yet a lot of the Native, grassroots, traditional people struggled to find gas money. Nonnatives need to set aside this idea of "I'm going to save the Indians." There is a lot of wisdom in these communities. That is why collaboration and reciprocity is the best approach.

Nick Kowalski²

Occupation: Army Corps of Engineers

Age: 52

Gender: Male

Ethnicity: White

“We deal with broken clay pots and old historic homes, but we have a hard time understanding the significance of something that’s physically not there. I think that’s where the federal government, at least our organization, and the tribes have issues. We haven’t bridged that gap of understanding between what’s significant to them and being able to incorporate it into our regulations.”

I have a bachelor's degree from St. Mary's down in southern Maryland. After leaving there, I took about a year out of school. I was working out in the Chesapeake Bay on a research boat tracking submerged aquatic vegetation populations and sampling water quality. My boss at the time was a professor. He taught employees from the Army Corps of Engineers. He informed me that they had some open positions, so I applied and got the job with the Army Corps of Engineers in the Baltimore District. This was twenty-seven years ago. I worked there for five years and have been in the State College Area ever since.

My role is as a biologist that reviews permits for discharges in waters of the United States including wetlands, structures, and pool waters. Anything from Ma and Pa's driveway crossing to the Atlantic Sunrise Pipeline. I am currently working on that, another pipeline project, and several highway projects. We kind of do a little bit of everything. All in all, we work to ensure that any sort of development complies with federal law. If the project is in compliance, we authorize the federal permits required for the activity.

² Nick Kowalski is an alias name used to protect the identity of this individual.

If there's a federal action, all federal agencies must coordinate with one another, at least in our district now. Normally, the federal agency that funds the project like Federal Highway Administration or licensing pipelines becomes the lead on the project. They typically have a bigger footprint and project area that we do. We are kind of confined to our waterways and the wetland footprint just a little bit outside our waterways. The federal agency that funds the project is the agency that has control. They're the agency that has the responsibility to do the coordination with the other agencies and tribes.

Our work with Native Americans is relatively new. We didn't start consulting with tribes about projects until about four or five years ago. This is primarily because there are no federally recognized tribes in Pennsylvania. However, we noticed that Philadelphia had been consulting tribes for a number of years, and we felt like we were behind. So, we started to think that maybe we should be doing that too even though there's no statute that is forcing us to. We just felt like it is the right thing to do. We felt like Native people should have a say in the decisions we make which also affect their communities. So, we followed Philadelphia's lead and embraced tribal consultation.

We started out with a list of fifteen tribes that we got from the Federal Highway Administration. We sent a letter out to each tribe from our Colonel, the highest-ranking officer in our agency. When we do an initial consultation, it must come from the top. For us, it's the Colonel. Since they're sovereign nations, they deserve to be treated that way. A letter goes out with his signature. Included with the letter is a questionnaire asking if they would want to consult on what we call federal actions which are basically federal permits.

After receiving responses from the questionnaire, we created relationships with the Delaware Tribe, the Delaware Nation, and the Eastern Shawnee. The Eastern Shawnee in

Pennsylvania only wanted to be coordinated with on projects in Lancaster County. The Delaware Nation and Delaware Tribe for our district wished to be consulted on any project where we are the lead federal agency.

Any development project, small or large, that will impact wetland streams ends up in our office. The project immediately goes on a list that is sent to the Delaware Tribe and Delaware Nation. We prefer that they only have 30 days to decide whether or not they want to consult on the project. However, in reality, they can come at any time. That's not set in stone. Normally they don't have a concern, but on some of the larger projects, they'll write back and say yes, we'd like to consult. At that time we send them additional information including a project description, impact maps, and information pertaining to the Natural Historic Preservation Act.

It's been a very interesting experience. I've gotten to travel quite a few places and have met a lot of tribes who are very proud of their history. They are the indigenous people who have been a party of this land for years and years. They are the people who originated here from the get-go. Unfortunately, in this country we've really treated them horribly, and so there's a lot of mistrust.

I went down to the Seminole Nation down in Florida for a week and spent time with them. They're one of the richest nations in the country, and I think in the top five of beef producers in the United States. They own all the Hard Rock Cafes except for maybe one or two. They're doing rather well financially. Within the Seminole Nation, there are different groups focused on different economic sectors. There's one group who are all cattle farmers. They came out with their cowboy hats and boots. Then, there's another group that all work in the casinos. We met all these different groups and some of the sizes of the groups varied greatly. Some were a couple dozen while others were upwards to several hundred or several thousand members.

The situation was quite different with the tribes I visited out west in Colorado. There you see places where there is no money. It's depressing. It's devastating to see how they're living out there. You often wonder why there isn't more sharing of the model that successful groups are using. We asked a question like that to the Seminole Nation. Their response alluded that it is because a lot of the tribes don't seem to get along too well.

However, even with the money coming in, the Seminole tribe is still fighting to hold onto their traditions. One night while we were there, we were welcomed to attend a panel discussion with representation from three generations of tribal members. Included in the panel was a teenager, somebody who is about 30 or 40, and an elderly woman who was around 70. They started talking about their lives and the troubles that they went through. The teenager started talking about how despite being well off, there is still a very high rate of drug and alcohol abuse within the tribe. The three panelists discussed what would help to get them jobs or to get the drugs and alcohol out of the reservation. No community can get it all out, but what's missing to get it off of the reservation?

They also addressed the lack of interest the teenagers have in keeping the traditions that the older generation wants to pass on. The teenagers see other opportunities and things that they would like to do elsewhere. They certainly don't want to spend time doing the weaving and such. So, the tribe is having a hard time of keeping that culture alive. It's kind of disappointing, but that's happening everywhere. I'd say the same thing with my family being of Polish descent. They don't want to make pierogis or other traditional Polish meals anymore because it takes hours and hours when you can just go buy them at the store.

While I was spending time with the Seminoles, I learned a lot about their history that I never knew before. They told us stories about how their tribe ended up down in Florida. They

were pushed into the swamps. Women would have to smother their babies because they didn't want them to make any noise in fear that the white men would hear. Although they were forced into the swamps, they never surrendered. They refused to move west like a lot of other tribes. Because of this, they are one of the only federally recognized tribes left on the East Coast which is helpful for them. As a community they span more than just the reservation boundaries. Their area that they traditionally lived on spreads out much farther. You can't just stick on a reservation and say that's the community for them. Sadly, they didn't have much say in the creation of the reservation system. I find it very rewarding when we hear about their history because so much of it is undocumented.

A lack of written history has actually been a challenge we have faced while working with tribes. It's a big deal because we're relying heavily on what the tribes are telling us. When you have different tribes saying different things, and especially when there isn't a very good working relationship between the two of them, it can become a real issue. We deal with broken clay pots and old historic homes, but we have a hard time understanding the significance of something that's physically not there. I think that's where the federal government, at least our organization, and the tribes have issues. We haven't bridged that gap of understanding between what's significant to them and being able to incorporate it into our regulations.

Trying to learn the significance of various settings complicated our work in Florida. For example, the Seminoles took us to place which was very significant to their tribe. At first glance, it was just a field. Literally, there was nothing there. It was just flat and mowed land. They explained that the area was very significant because this is where their ancestors would meet. Then, they'd go about describing what the area was traditionally used for. While showing us the land they would show us where the chickens once were, where the horses used to sleep, and

where the community would meet. However, when you look at the area, and there is nothing there. What they were trying to get across to us is that archeology is not limited to physical structures.

We experienced this same sort of thing while working with the Narragansett Tribe who are from Rhode Island. They have a property in Wyoming County. Its several thousand acres. They feel that this property is just loaded with Native American artifacts. This place has thousands of stone walls. Some are like serpents and at the end they have a snake head to them.

When we went to assess the property for wetland and waterway impacts, the Narragansetts were not out there with us. The Narragansett are from Rhode Island and the Baltimore district had never worked with them before. They came out of nowhere on this project saying, "look, we have a lot of significant features on this particular property, we want a formal consultation with the Army Corps and with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission." However, the tribes we consult with in our district had no interest whatsoever in this project.

Further complicating the situation, the archeologists assessing the site are not in agreement with one another. We've got a number of archeologists that the Narragansett Tribe deals with who are saying, okay, yes, these are Native American spiritual features. This is where they had meetings in the past and have a lot of cultural and spiritual significance. They explained that white stream rocks were placed in a very specific place on the serpentine features which meant something of significance to the tribe. Then on the other hand, you have archeologists that say, well, no, they're basically post-European structures. They're not Native American. These were what the tribe used post-colonization. They are related to the European settlers coming over, so they site should not be considered Native American.

There is an effort to try to address this issue. A seminar was put together in collaboration with various federal agencies and tribes out in Ohio with just this subject in mind. They are speaking at numerous federal organizations across the country. They're going to do one here in Pennsylvania and hopefully I'll be able to attend. However, not everyone is invited to attend the seminar. The girl who mentioned it to me told me that *maybe* she could get me in on this.

We had a meeting up in Syracuse a couple year back where all of the federally recognized tribes of New York were in attendance. There was one guy who was particularly incredible at telling stories. He would tell these really long stories which did a terrific job of explaining the setting and significance and how it all came together. Unfortunately, we have no way of capturing that in our policies and regulations. So, we've got to try to bridge that. However, I don't know how we're going to do that because the size of the areas that they are talking about are sometimes very large.

These cultural misunderstandings leads us to our biggest challenge here at the district—building relationships and understanding. This is especially hard to do with Native American tribes because they have been screwed over time and time again over the years. Trust takes time to build up and we do have a lot of difficulty with that. When we first started relationships were very contentious. They thought that we would be withholding information from them which created a lot of issues with just about anything.

A couple years back, the tribal officials we were coordinating with were voted out of their tribal government. Then, somebody new came in who we had no relationship with. We felt like we were finally getting to understand what they're looking for, what they wanted, and how they wanted to do things. Then, their government suddenly changes and you are starting over from square one.

Every tribe is different. Up in New York, they went around the table with the various tribes and asked, “What are the kind of things that we can do better to work with you?” One tribe in particular I remember saying, “When we meet with your colonel, we like to be served food. We like it to be a get together.” I never thought about that. Every tribe, just like people, is a little different which can make it a little difficult for somebody who hasn't dealt with them ever that is a Nonnative American to understand. It takes a while. It took me a while to overcome some of the preconceived ideas I had about Native Americans. I wasn't until I finally start working with them and learning that these notions began to change. It also takes a while to understand where each side is coming from and to form an agreement that we're trying to work together.

I think the role of Nonnative professionals who work with Native American communities is to build a bridge between Nonnative professionals and Native professionals. It is important that we're both on the same page or at least understand each other. It is not only for us to understand Native ways, but it is equally as important for Native Americans to understand where we're coming from. When you boil it down, our philosophies aren't so different. We believe there's so much out here that we should be protecting. We want to protect what's already provided for us naturally instead of trying to come up with technical ways of doing things. Native Americans also have a real respect for what's non-constructed.

I wish I would have had the opportunity in school to know that I would have been doing something like this later in life. I would have gotten more involved and tried to become more educated earlier on. It's something that I find really fascinating now and wish I would have taken more interest in while I was younger. But you just never know what you will wind up doing in life. With that being said, I would encourage anyone who is wanting to work with N

Native people in the future to read up on this stuff and take advantage of opportunities for involvement.

Perhaps this way you could gain a better understanding of what is culturally acceptable and what is not. When we went down to that Florida course, we were given packet of what to bring. In the packet, there was a couple of sentences talking about the things you should not do. For example, we were told never look the elders in the eyes. We were told that if you saw a Seminole walking around outside, you were not to come to them first. If they want to talk to you, they can talk to you first. I'm sure they told us the reason why these things were considered disrespectful, but I can't recall why it was an issue. They reiterated these points in a class we attended upon arriving before we met with the tribe. Essentially, we were told that if you are respectful and follow these rules then there should be no problem. I'm sure I broke those rules a couple of times when I was down there. You don't think to not look someone in the eyes when you are talking to them. Luckily, it was never brought up or it was never an issue.

It's tough though. I want people to give me a chance. I wasn't part of what happened years ago. It's like the black and white issue. Give me an opportunity. We're all just people. I hope we can be a little more respectful of one another. So, for the Native American, I hate to say it, but let us in, give us a shot. I know you've been screwed over in the past, but not everybody wants to do that. I certainly don't want that.

I'm trying to do what I can within the law to help them out. I am very careful not to overstep my boundaries or cause any issues or disrespect them. I try to stay back unless they have an issue. Then, they can come to me or any of the different federal agencies. I wish it was more of an informal, friendly relationship where I could just walk up to a tribal member and start

chatting. Maybe over time maybe that will happen, but right now it's a little hesitant. I wish it was just smoother.

It's challenging when some of these areas have just been forgotten. How do you get people to care? Especially in this country right now where it seems like you've got a lot of people out of work. In the rust belt areas, people are just trying to survive themselves. How do you get them to care about these other people who they have no interaction with? Some people look at it and think, "Why do want me to preserve this land just because it's got some features on it or some history to it? We're trying to get jobs out here. We should be able to build roads. We should be able to build buildings, so I can make a living. I'm just trying to get by." How do you begin that conversation?

I bet most of those people that worked coal down there really don't care for coal, but it's a job. That's all they know. You take coal away from them and they're scared because they have no other skills. They're having a hard time with change and that's why I think Trump said, "we'll bring back coal." We should be moving away from that, but these people are scared and they just want something to feed their family, so they'll do it.

I just hope that the new administration is truly for everyone. President Trump has said, I'm going to build bridges, I'm the President for everybody. I hope he is for everybody - Native American, Jewish, Black, all nationalities. We're having a lot of issues with race relations and the disenfranchisement of certain groups. We need to treat people like people.

Sarah Johnson³

Occupation: White Earth Intern

Age: 22

Gender: Female

Ethnicity: White

“My experience and lessons learned are always in the back of my mind. They have changed the way I approach things not even related to Native America.”

I am a senior at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia, majoring in anthropology and minoring in public health. My work with Native communities started around my sophomore and junior years. I didn't intend to get involved with Native communities, but one of my advisors here runs the American Indian Resource Center. She has extensive experience working with indigenous communities all over the country. She brought me on to a lot of different projects that involved Native American communities. I was originally interested in a general sense, but the more tribes I worked with the more my interest grew, and it sort of snowballed from there.

When it came time to prepare for my honors thesis during my junior year, I knew I wanted to do something with Native American communities. I talked with another professor who is familiar with a bunch of Native American social movements and community organizations. She knew about the White Earth Land Recovery Project, and had contacts in the area who she suggested I reach out to.

When I first applied to White Earth, I was expecting a classic kind of job entry experience. You send someone your resume and cover letter and then you get called back for an interview. I had been e-mailing people at White Earth for about two to three weeks, and I hadn't

³ Sarah Johnson is an alias name used to protect the identity of this individual.

heard anything yet. Then, out of the blue I got a call from Mr. Shimick. He was driving to a town located approximately four hours from the reservation to get some apple trees. Our chat was the most rambling, informal conversation I've ever had. Most of the time our conversation wasn't even about the reservation. He was talking about fruit trees and other random stuff. I felt so uncomfortable and didn't know what to do. I was just quietly on the other side of the line like, uh-huh, uh-huh, uh-huh.

Towards the end of the forty minute phone call, he goes, "so you're interested in coming up here, eh?" I simply responded, "Yeah." He goes, "okay, I guess we can make that work. Come on up and we'll see what we can do." It was super informal. The next week I drove up to White Earth. It was unlike anything I had ever done in my life. My parents were actually really concerned because I couldn't answer their questions regarding the internship. I didn't know where I was going to be living while I was up there. I hardly had an idea of what I would be doing. I had no answers. It was a totally different change of pace. I told one of the other ladies about my informal interview. She said, "You know he was testing you, right? He was testing to see if you were comfortable doing things differently." Wow, okay. I passed the test I guess.

So, June and July of 2016 I went up to the White Earth Indian Reservation and worked as a general research intern. I'm currently still doing work for them remotely. My role was mainly doing background research on their basic projects. The two main projects I worked on were a wild foods project and a pesticide project. The wild foods project is in conjunction with the White Earth Tribal and Community College. The goal is to encourage people to eat more traditional wild foods as a health promotion and cultural promotion. I contributed to the project by compiling a list of wild foods. More importantly, I compiled recipes to create a cookbook for these wild foods.

The pesticides project, which is the project I'm also working on remotely for them, entails very foundational work. They don't have much of a budget, so they wanted to work with the Minnesota Department of Health and monitoring to get a project going. The project aims to assess the health impacts of communities living within a certain radius of industrial agricultural farms which predominantly use a wide range of pesticides which adversely affect human health.

For this project, my job was to take well counts to try to get a scope of the problem and identify problem townships. It was very rudimentary work which was labor intensive. Someone had to do it. That information needed to be compiled and put into a form that could be presented to different groups. So, really, we were just getting the ball rolling. Now, I'm working remotely on a related project that specifically looks at data points in Pine Point and surrounding areas on the reservation to determine families at risk by mapping water test results. My education equipped me with the GIS skills necessary to create the map the tribe needed to push their project forward.

The role of the Nonnative professional working with Native communities is largely based on the skills you have to offer. In my case it was GIS and grant writing. However, it could truly be anything. Your job is to help facilitate projects based on the communities needs without being in charge of the project. Using your skills to further Native-run projects and not taking charge of those projects is a good way to be an ally. As you become more trusted by the community, you might be put in charge of heading a project. But you have to work your way to that.

You have to take the time to really get the sense of what's actually happening and where people stand on different issues. There are different expectations regarding professional culture when working with nonprofits like the White Earth Recovery Project. It's totally a different environment than you would find anywhere else. On White Earth, you're rewarded more for

taking that back seat, for showing respect, showing deference to the people who've been there far longer than you have who have experience with the issues that you're trying to work on. Sitting back, listening, and not throwing out all your ideas the first day is rewarded more here.

I think it's different for every community, but the big thing I learned was that in Nonnative culture, you're rewarded for being the go-getter. You're rewarded for showing up, introducing yourself, having a plan, making all the suggestions, and having all the ideas. That's what I had grown up with. So, I thought that was how you impress people professionally.

Watching and learning made my time at White Earth far more successful than it would have been otherwise. I knew things were done differently. I wasn't blind going into that. Repeatedly I'd always remind myself to step back, just listen, and be respectful. I think that really made a difference in how my time at White Earth went down. I saw what it looked like to successfully work with Native communities. It's doing things on their terms, never making the first move, and just kind of stepping back. You don't have to prove yourself to anyone, just learn first. You have to learn first.

It's a process. All communities are different. Native American communities are everywhere. They transcend boundaries and are not restricted to reservation land. Reservations definitely play a huge role, they are not the full determinant of Native American or indigenous identity. In many cases, the reservation serves as the focal point. It acts as a home that urban Indians and others can reference back to.

For example, if you're enrolled on White Earth, then you're enrolled as a member of the White Earth Band of the Chippewa Indians (Chippewa is a colonial name for Ojibwe). Even if you were to move to Minneapolis or anywhere outside of the reservation, you could carry this identity with you. It is complicated though. White Earth Bands never even existed before

colonization. White Earth was never an historic community. The Chippewa who live on White Earth are actually descendants of many different bands of Chippewa that no longer exist because they've been supplanted by this reservation identity. Further complicating the issue is defining what constitutes someone as indigenous. It is really hard especially in a place like White Earth. I think they do it by blood quantum, but I'm not sure. A lot of Native Americans up there have some degree of Nonnative ancestry and a lot of Nonnatives up there claim some degree of Native ancestry. It's mixed and it's confusing a little bit. Whatever people told me they identified as, I accepted it and just rolled with it. I wasn't really trying to determine that for anyone. Indigenous is kind of a term that people choose for themselves.

All Native communities have different ways of addressing these topics. They all have different histories. And they have different ways of interacting with Nonnatives whether they're professionals working with the tribe or not. I've worked with upwards of four different Native communities so far. They're different and that was important for me to understand. I respected that and couldn't assume that I knew how the different tribes operated. For every tribe that I have worked with, I have had to start from scratch and learn a new set of rules.

When you're invited to work with a tribe, you're being given an opportunity. It is important that you treat that opportunity with respect and understand that you don't have all the answers. You will not have all the information to ask the right questions to begin with. So, you just have to come in, listen, and learn. You have to be comfortable taking the backseat and not being the center of attention. I think the most important thing for Nonnative professionals is understanding that you are the outsider. No one is expecting you to come in and save the day. And quite frankly, nobody really wants you to do that. A lot of times when Nonnatives work with

Native communities, there's a sense of "I know better, I can do better, I can help." That's not your role. Your role is to use the skills that you have to further the projects they have initiated.

With that being said, I'm really grateful for the opportunity. Being able to work with a Native organization and with Native communities is not a world that a lot of people have access to. I was talking to someone about my work and she had almost no knowledge about Native American history and culture. I told her I was at the White Earth Indian Reservation and she said, oh, what do they live in? What do they wear? She was asking these very basic questions because she had no idea. I think that made me realize just how privileged I was to have access to these communities. It has enriched my point of view. My experience and lessons learned are always in the back of my mind. They have changed the way I approach things not even related to Native America.

It can also be kind of frustrating. It can be hard to explain to someone why engaging with our Native communities is so important. You can't explain to somebody who has no idea what a Native American reservation is like, what that lifestyle is like, or why treaties matter unless you've had firsthand experience. Even then, it can be challenging. I have found that the only way to successfully explain to Nonnatives why it's important is to humanize the "other" and inform people on what that looks like. My experience is definitely incomplete, I don't know everything. I'm still always learning new things. I take my limited experience and seek to and humanizing Native Americans to people who don't have any interaction with them. I think it's a really, really important role for Nonnatives to play.

After spending time in White Earth this summer, I went to visit a family friend in North Dakota. Since I was in the area, I figured I would go see her. She's been friends with my mom since we were children. She was so excited that she threw a party and had her adult children

there. One of her sons asked me about the work that I'd done at White Earth. I began talking to him about my experience and the conversation turned very negative. First of all, he had a different understanding than I did about Native American communities. He thought that Native Americans got all these benefits from the government which they don't. After trying to explain that, he also wanted to know why we owed them anything to begin with because we "conquered them." That was so frustrating for me to try to explain. The complexity of the American Indian law and the history of how it all that got started is hard for an expert to talk about. I think it's really important to understand the history of our nation and the consequences of that history. It's not only important for Native Americans, but also for ourselves. So, trying to explain this to someone who has no experience and understanding of how his misinformed views have formed his world view was troubling, very troubling.

This frustration led me to be really shy about talking about my experience. However, I realized just how much we have to learn from Native communities and how little people know about that. So, I started to speak up about my experience again. There's such a lack of knowledge, information, and education. I've been given the privilege to experience life on a Native American reservation firsthand. Therefore, I feel that it is my obligation and responsibility to speak up about what I have learned. I consider the conversations I've had like this with my friend and family the most important advocacy work that I've done so far, person-to-person.

My interactions lit the fire for advocacy and understanding. How I approach advocacy and my understanding of what it means to be a good ally have been influenced by the lessons I have learned from the friends I have made. I think that in Native communities, at least at White

Earth, the professional and personal lines are blurred a lot of times. You can't really keep your work and your personal life separate.

When I was living on White Earth, I didn't know anybody out there. I knew that one lady in North Dakota, but that was my closest contact for like a thousand miles. Quietly participating in the daily rhythms of life really changed my outlook on a lot of different issues and how I approach them. I learned how to be okay with the role of the outsider. I'll never fully belong up there and that's fine, that's okay, and becoming okay with that is tremendously important.

If I wanted to, I could have avoided this discomfort. Not everyone on the White Earth Reservation is Native American. It has an interesting mix of about 10,000 people. Approximately half of those are enrolled members of a Native American tribe. So, you know I blended in on the reservation. I was just another white girl. There were plenty of white girls around, so that didn't really impact me.

The discomfort and learning came from when I left my comfort zone and attended community events, ceremonies, and things like that. I stood out like a sore thumb. I felt like there was a lot of concern or skepticism about what I was doing there and what my role was. A lot of people came up to me and asked me what I was doing. Justifying my position on the reservation was a challenge. I could tell that there was this kind of undertone of people thinking, "Why should you be here?" especially because I'm an anthropology major.

There is an interesting relationship between anthropologists and Native Americans. There was an old joke that all Native American families consisted of four people: father, mother, child, and anthropologist. Anthropologists' methods are shifting. It's definitely not the colonial work of the mid-twentieth century anymore, but those kind of frustrations between tribes and anthropologists remain particularly when it comes to cultural sensitivity. Sometimes it was hard

for me because I had two different roles. On one hand, I was watching and observing as an anthropologist. On the other hand, I was working for the community and would be called upon to speak in meetings for complete various tasks.

My age also played an interesting role in my experience. Since I am only 22, I was seen as a child by many of the community members. They kind of took on the teacher role when interacting with me. This was extremely helpful for learning about what is culturally appropriate or not. Most of the stuff I did wrong was kind of small. There was never a time when I touched a sacred ceremonial object or something like that when I wasn't supposed to. Working with my advisor at the research center taught me the basics about the dos and don'ts. It's just kind of these small moments when I was reminded of the fact that I wasn't really a part of that community.

For example, one time we were at the powwow and I was working at the Native Harvest stand which is part of the White Earth Recovery Project. Every powwow they make t-shirts and whatnot. I said to my boss, those are such cool t-shirts and I'd really like a t-shirt. He gave me 20 bucks and said, go buy a t-shirt. I was like, "No, no, no, I couldn't possibly do that I don't want to take your money." He gave me this glare and I thought, oh, God, I did something wrong. So, I took that money and went and bought a t-shirt. I came back and one of the other women there said, oh, geez, you know, it's rude not to take a gift. I messed up. It's just little stuff like that. You make a mistake and you move on.

My experience is definitely incomplete, I don't know everything. I'm still always learning new things. I take my limited experience and seek to humanize Native Americans to people who don't have any interaction with them. I think it's a really, really important role for Nonnatives to play.

Joseph Todd

Occupation: Assistant Professor of Education at Montana State University- Northern

Age: 35

Gender: Male

Ethnicity: White

“There's alternate ways to explore what cultures you self-identify with, where those cultures intersect, and what kind of tensions you might be able to explore and reflect on. This type of exploration helps to diffuse the idea that the Native experience is exclusive. It gives us another bridge to talk about some of those tensions that we might all experience and be able to relate to in some way.”

I originally went to school for bio-chemistry. I wanted to get into some sort of research whether it was cancer research or pharmaceutical research. As a freshman, I had an internship at a pharmaceutical company. It really opened my eyes to what a lot of grunt work is like for scientists. So, I turned my back on that even though I still do love science to this day. I decided I wanted to become a teacher.

I wasn't really navigating my first year in college so well, so I started to bounce around different colleges. It took me five different colleges to get my undergraduate degree. Eventually, I settled on philosophy as my undergraduate degree. Even after so much trouble, I decided to continue my education and get my masters. My masters degree program was called philosophy for children. Its focus was on taking the concepts of philosophy and making them more understandable so that you can talk about them with students.

I finished out that master's degree in about a year. I was really looking to get into the public schools at that point, but I kind of got sucked into a doctoral program in pedagogy and philosophy. In this program I used the lens of philosophy to start looking back on education and in terms of what goes on in the public schools. I also looked at how public education does not provide the best education for minority or impoverished cultures. The program looked at how

poverty affects how you interact with students and their families. It was really helpful for me to then be able to take that knowledge to show future teachers a deeper, more informed cultural lens for approaching education. Long story short, it's been a long road to get to this degree, and I never thought I'd be teaching college at the end of this, but this position kind of turned up out here at Montana State University.

The university I am teaching at is a very small school. I wouldn't call it a liberal arts school. We've got a pretty large technical program here, so it's a little bit different than your average small school. I teach courses in elementary education, introduction to education, and some culture and psychology classes. I also teach some methods courses like the arts methods. Approximately 25% of the students in my classes are Native American. We are very close to two reservations, so we have a fairly large Native population here on campus. There's a grant funded organization on campus called the Little River Institute. The institute does a lot of community outreach and provides support systems for indigenous students. They help with the transition of Native American students into the college environment. Furthermore, the Little River Institute does a lot of Native programming on campus in order to facilitate an appreciation of Native American culture. They put on a small powwow here on campus and oftentimes bring speakers including tribal elders that come on campus to talk at times.

Some students that come into the college environment a little bit more independent because of the type of education they've had on the reservation. They're able to navigate that transition pretty well. Some students that really never had any kind of educational support system, just like Nonnative students weathering the transition poorly, struggle. They struggle to learn how to write papers, organize their time, approach professors after class, and other things like that.

To encourage students to come feel comfortable approaching me as their professor, I usually just converse with them. I leave it open at the end of class and just start talking to students that are interested in talking. Sometimes it's about current events. Other times somebody missed a class the week before and they just want to share with me the reason why. Just by staying there in that space a little longer than the designated class period makes a big difference. I've had students open up to me a lot more than if I just kind of rushed out and back to my office. Even if I were to say "hey, meet me back in my office," and a lot of times students won't necessarily follow you back. After class when everybody is filing out really quickly, you can kind of tell if a student is lingering who has got something to tell you. They might not jump right out of their seat and tell you. They might linger and wait for everybody else to leave class before approaching you.

My first year or two I did not invite Native students as much as I should have. That was part of my learning curve as a faculty with so many Native students. As faculty, you're taught to put your office hours on your door and your syllabus and then students will either contact you to make arrangements outside those hours or come to you. That's not always the case with Native and Nonnative students. You really got to be a little bit more proactive and help them learn that that's what those hours are for. I would say my first year especially, I dropped the ball on that a little bit. I held the students accountable for that higher standard in thinking things like, "you should be coming to my office hours if you're struggling. That's what they're there for." I probably did not handle that as sensitively as I should have the first year.

One thing that I've noticed is that the discussion is sometimes a little more personal. Sometimes there's a little bit of humiliation with some of the questions that they're asking. It's

their first time in college and they're struggling with something. Usually it's not something to be ashamed of. It's something that all students are dealing with or will deal with at some point.

A lot of the students who start to struggle dropout and never come back. Most of them fail to recognize that a lot of students struggle their first year of school. It's not just a matter of, well, you're not going to be good at college. We want our students to give it another chance, come back a little longer. I can relate because my first year didn't go so well. I took some time off too. After two years I came back and I was a different person which made college was a whole lot easier after that process. So, I try to encourage to give it another chance.

I believe that there does have to be, at least on the faculty's part, a little bit more sensitivity to understanding of each individual student's needs. If that is the Native student type, then you've kind of got to be a little bit more inviting to get them to your office. You can't just hold an expectation that they will come to you if they need you. When Native students start to struggle and when things start to get difficult, they start to reach out to their peers and family members. A lot of times they'll let it spiral out of control before realizing, oh, I should come and talk to my faculty and let them know why I haven't been in class for two weeks. Oftentimes it's for family reasons.

In their culture, it's a lot more important to be there with family if they're going through some sort of crisis. Students will just drop everything and go hang out at the hospital for a week or two if their grandmother falls ill. Faculty need to figure out a way to accommodate that from a cultural perspective. The expectations are pretty high and it's nearly impossible to take two weeks off at the college level. Furthermore, I believe that working with communities directly is also important to the success of my Native students. I haven't done as much outreach as I would like to because this is only my third year. However, I am starting to work with the local tribal

college a little bit. I am helping to establish a way for students who go through two years at the Stone Child Tribal College on the Rocky Boy Reservation (it's basically a community college) to be able to transfer to our school and finish out an education degree in our program.

It's a lot of work. I've worked in admissions before. Sometimes that kind of articulation agreement can happen really fast. Your text is laid out there in paperwork and the community college or technical school will just sign on. It's a lot more delicate dealing with the tribal school. They want to make sure that their students are getting into the best program and that the support at the school is going to be there for their students. So, they're not willing to sign these articulation agreements so quickly. It's been nice having to go back and forth. You actually learn who the faculty are over there, so when we do sign this articulation agreement, we all know who each other are. We can call each other on the phone and be prepared to be there for the students who are going through it.

The most rewarding experience is working with students. I have found that if you develop that one-on-one rapport, which I do with a lot of my students, it makes the teaching experience very positive. Many of the Native students that I build relationships with will invite into their home really quickly. At the end of the semester, they might say, "I really enjoyed your class, do you want to come over for dinner sometime?" It's really nice to be invited over, and it's nice to just have that relationship opened up. I've had two students invite me to dinner, and I've gone to both of those dinners. Another student invited me to the powwow on her reservation. I attended it with her and it was really cool. I loved the energy at those things. They are not only showy. They can be really meaningful experiences.

There's a bit of a stark divide between Nonnative and Natives that exists here in the community and out west in general. It's fairly typical that there's still some lingering oppressive

relationships just in the cultural interactions. Montana, however, has tried to do better with that. They have something on the books since the early 80s called the Indian Education for All Program. It's an educational policy that has gained much traction recently due to multi-culturalism, cultural preservation, and critical justice programs. Its focus is about changing the curriculum in the Nonnative classrooms. It aims to get away from the stereotypical pilgrim story and Mayflower story. Furthermore, it seeks to foster a little bit more inter-cultural dialogue

Oftentimes Native American students have a much better and realistic education of what Nonnative and Native relationships were like historically. I get the pilgrim story as a Nonnative student, and it's like, oh, we don't have this cultural history of genocide. Then you learn things about the Sand Creek massacre and the Battle of Little Bighorn from the Native perspective. They've learned that. They've learned that a lot of times in the schools and at home. A lot of my Native students come to the classroom already being much more informed than my Nonnative students.

I had a very kind of narrow upbringing of what Native culture was. I grew up outside of Philadelphia, so I was fairly well versed with race and racism at a young age. A lot of my neighbors were black and we were poor, so we lived in a lot of those communities. I see the same thing here. The difference is that the reservation is a bit more exclusive and secluded than the black neighborhoods I grew up near. If you're Nonnative, you have your community up here. If you're Native you have your community over there on the reservation. It is further complicated because not all of our Native students live on the reservation. Going to my first few reservations and seeing the level of poverty was just stunning to me. I was never taught any of that, it was all just kind of cowboys and Indians in the school.

Growing up in the east, I didn't even know we had reservations nearby because they're much smaller and they just kind of co-exist. Out here, reservations are huge and large communities in and of themselves. Reservations are important Native American communities, but they are not the only determinant. Native Americans living in urban areas have also been able to come together and foster some sort of community experience. They have been able to maintain their culture off the reservation despite being surrounded by 21st century culture. Urban communities of Native American individuals might not even all be from the same reservation, but they are able to come together in solidarity as indigenous people.

Different tribes define what it means to be indigenous differently. Some reservations define that by having a certain percentage of blood, some reservations define that by being able to trace your lineage a little bit closer, other tribes you can be adopted into as a Nonnative. There's not a clear set of rules even within the Native American community on how to define indigenous. I think indigenous here would be anybody who has a certain amount of blood relations to the Native cultures that were here prior to colonization.

Furthermore, Native individuals who leave the reservation oftentimes experience a culture shock from moving off the reservation. Depending on how culturally assimilated they become off the reservation, it is sometime really difficult for them to then go back to the reservation. I think there is, at least in some ways within the culture itself, a view if you leave the reservation, it's going to be tough for you to come back. You have to actively work to preserve your cultural heritage if you leave the reservation so that you don't lose it and become too dominant culture if you ever do want to come back.

For my students, this dilemma is exacerbated by the way the college institution is set up. Native students are expected to conform to a Westernized education system and where

Nonnative students have very little knowledge about Native culture and history. This is why I could say that the biggest challenge for me is figuring out a way to start this dialogue in the classroom with students, both Native and Nonnative, that haven't engaged in this type of conversation before. Often times, I have to lay some ground rules with civility. Sometimes people are challenging a worldview that they've adopted and they've gotten from their parents and their grandparents. For some students it can cause some discomfort. The classroom is a good space to do this because as long as you set those ground rules and you nurture the type of community you want to create upfront, then it's a safe place to share those ideas. But at the same time, you can't just begin day one with those kind of discussions. You've got to work your way into how deep can you explore and how much self-reflection are you willing to do.

There's just so many insensitivities to be aware of. One of the things that I'm really struggling with this semester in the culture class is the way a lot of textbooks frame culture. They frame it by saying "we're going to talk about culture, but it's really important that you don't adopt any kind of stereotypes about these cultures." When we talk about culture, culture is made up of a bunch of individuals that all have similar cultural habits. We immediately start forming those stereotypes. Then the textbooks often go back and say, "but here's some things that is fairly common about Native American culture or African American, etc." The textbooks don't really capture that nuance of the need to move away from this us and them language.

Another challenge is when I find myself falling back into that narrative of us and them. Even just saying things like this is how it is off the reservation and this is how it is on the reservation kind of reinforces that separation. That's something that I try to be mindful of, but it's tough to find another language to talk about it when that's the way the textbooks are written- at least the ones that we're using here at the school.

I hadn't thought about it much before. I've recently been thinking about this through experiential learning. I will be in a conversation and all of a sudden I am saying something and then I realize, oh wow, I just totally used an us versus them metaphor and that's a problem. I'll do this real-time in class and tell everybody, look, this is a problem that we're using the language of the textbook. It's leading into this space and we need to get rid of this us versus them language. I'm looking into other textbooks to hopefully get away from that narrative. Unfortunately, I don't think there's many- at least in terms of college texts.

One thing I have found extremely valuable is the knowledge that my Native students can teach me. For example, on the reservation here, there is a mountain called Bald Eagle. It's one of the sacred mountains on the reservation. You can hike it as a Nonnative during certain times of the year. Most of the people who do that just treat it like a hike - you're walking on the top of a mountain, you see some nice views, and then you walk down. It really is a much more spiritual experience if you let it be. I'm hoping to do that this summer. There are some students that I've approached and they've said they'll take me up there. We're probably going to go up there and camp for a day or two and spend some time on this mountain. They told me that there are some rituals and ceremonies involved to even begin to go up the mountain for that purpose and not for just walking up. It's a learning process to know that it's not just a hike. You just don't go to the top of this mountain, you've got to kind of cleanse yourself beforehand and do some preparation with what your purpose is up there. If I had just hiked the mountain and it was a hike, I would have gone up there, taken some pictures with my iPhone and then come back, but I spent about four hours up there and just watched the clouds and really thought about what was happening up there and it was really cool.

At some point, I would like to experience more of the Native American spiritual ceremonies. They do sweat lodge ceremonies fairly regularly. I have not shared in any of that, but I know it's there. It's just a matter of kind of being patient and waiting to have the right student invite me. The reservation here is really quite small compared to other reservations, so they're very protective of what goes on on the reservation. Even like when sweat lodges do go on oftentimes you hear about it through word of mouth. It doesn't really get publicized. There's no fliers posted about it per say. It's a different way of doing things and communicating. Nonnatives might put something on Facebook and we would invite people that way. Native people share information differently.

Learning these small cultural nuances has contributed to a change in my worldview. It's hard to go on to a reservation and not be changed. It's shocking in some ways to see a completely different way of life. For example, there was a guy I met out here recently who lives pretty deep in the reservation. He went almost a year and a half without electricity in his cabin because he didn't know how to fix it. He didn't want to electrocute himself and he didn't have the money to call in an electrician. So, he set fires outside to keep warm. He lived without power for almost a year until finally a neighbor of his asked, "how come your lights are never on?" Finally he told them, "I don't have electricity." After that conversation it got fixed really quickly. However, the point of the story is that this man had a completely different mentality that I am used to. His mentality was that of I can subsist without electricity just fine, and he did. Nobody even knew it. It's neat to think that at least parts of the reservation are not so dependent on the electricity in this kind of 21st century lifestyle.

My worldview has also been shaped by my education and travel experience. I would say that I have a very multicultural worldview. I'm also married to a Japanese woman, and we have

four children. So, that kind of forces me into the world of bi-cultural communication and what it means to sort of exist on the fringes of two cultures. Having those types of experiences make you more sensitive. You pay attention and become aware of the differences. So, living out here I'm seeing a lot of things from not only a Nonnative perspective, but a non-Montana Native perspective. I have a different worldview than a lot of the locals here.

My wife and I seek to raise our children in a multicultural household. Since our children are fairly young, we're reading a lot of fables and things like that. We've read through some of Aesop's fables, we've read through some of ancient Chinese stories, and we've started to read some of the Native American ones as well. I wanted to get some more stories for my children, so I went to an elementary school here on the reservation. They were teaching a book of traditional Native American stories that have been passed down orally for generations. One of their elders had written down, illustrated, and then published them on the reservation to use as curriculum in the school.

I asked if I could have a copy to read to my children. They told me no. They did not want this information to get into the wrong hands of someone who could co-op their religion to make a buck. I understood where they were coming from, so I didn't press it after they said no, we really can't share this. However, they did invite me to bring my daughters to their library for some of their oral storytelling. Being denied a copy of the stories would likely be offensive to a lot of individuals.

However, I respect that and I understand why they would be unwilling to give me a copy. Native Americans have a history of being taken advantage of. Take for example what's going on with the North Dakota pipeline and violations of treaties. There's a whole cultural history there of being taken advantage of. This is a reason why I would suggest that Nonnative professionals

entering the field should do some reading in social justice theory. I know that's probably a bad thing to say in this political environment right now, but I think that's what gives you the right lens to really think about what it means to have some sort of meaningful intercultural exchange.

In my very specific case here in the education department, I'm able to help Nonnative students become better students. They're able to offer me relationships with their families and getting closer to some of these spiritual experiences. It's a long road, but that's what the theorists says is that it's going to take- relationship building. It's not just about signing a treaty and then moving on. It's about forming a coalition of solidarity with the reservation.

When we can find common ground between the Native and Nonnative experience, it makes creating such solidarity easier. One of the things that I've been working on recently is a project with students to try to find where they experience tension between cultures. A Native student used this term of bi-culturalism to explain how she is very strongly a part of two cultures. She's got the culture on their reservation and then she's got the off-reservation school culture. She is constantly switching between cultural codes depending on where she is. I don't think that experience is exclusive to Native American students. I think a lot of individuals now, especially millennial students, can feel that tension. Sometimes that might be between youth culture and adult culture. Obviously, if it's being a woman in this male dominant society that has it's tensions too. There's alternate ways to explore what cultures you self-identify with, where those cultures intersect, and what kind of tensions you might be able to explore and reflect on. This type of exploration helps to diffuse the idea that the Native experience is exclusive. It gives us another bridge to talk about some of those tensions that we might all experience and be able to relate to in some way.

Chapter 5

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THESE STORIES?

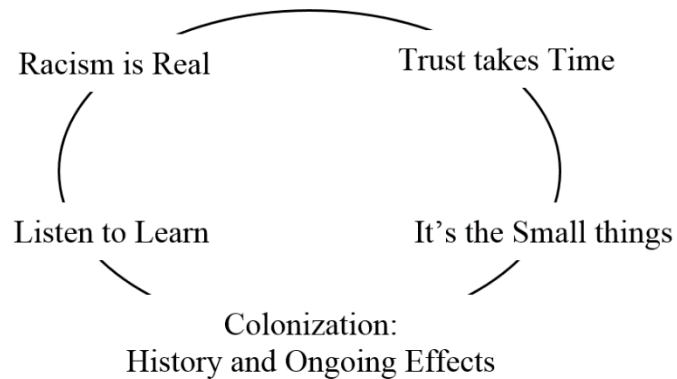
Stories are powerful. They empower people to share their own experiences in their own voice. They highlight diversity and provide an opportunity for subtle nuggets of knowledge which might otherwise get lost in analysis to shine through. They have been an important part of Native American culture for centuries and have been identified as a decolonizing method.

The ten profiles highlight the personal experiences and lessons learned by ten Nonnative professionals who work with Native American communities. Each individual has a unique story and perspective to offer. The profiles give voice to these Nonnative professionals and empowers them to tell their story the way they want it to be told. These individuals vary in age, gender, profession, geographic location, and educational background.

Hopefully, the diverse array of experiences and backgrounds of the individuals profiled provides each reader with a person or multiple people they feel like they can relate to or identify with. The insight provided in these stories is powerful. They are the start to an important and ongoing conversation about the role of Nonnative professionals who work with Native American communities. I invite readers to think critically about the commonalities and differences between the various profiles.

In this discussion section, I offer you my interpretation. I have used the profiles as data for qualitative analysis. I have gone through the profiles and coded for common themes across the ten profiles. Since the nature of the work is qualitative, it will never be completely objective. The themes that I have identified may or may not be the same as the themes you have identified. Our life experiences, education, values, and wisdom vary. Therefore, the way that we see the world, and read these profiles, will also vary.

The top five themes I identified are displayed below. They are displayed in a circular format to represent the interconnectedness of the themes. Furthermore, a circle is not hierarchical and therefore demonstrates that no one theme is more important than the other. In this section I will explain each theme and offer supporting evidence drawn directly from the profiles.



Colonization: History and Ongoing Effects

The history of colonization in the United States is a key contributor of distrust between Native Americans and Nonnatives. Many Nonnatives grow up learning about pilgrims and the Mayflower in the public school system. Many indigenous students grow up learning about how their ancestors survived genocide. The lack of an accurate understanding of the history of how the United States was founded on behalf on Nonnatives causes rifts between Native and Nonnative communities. Dr. Todd States, “oftentimes Native American students have a much better and realistic education of what Nonnative and Native relationships were like historically. I get the pilgrim story as a Nonnative student, and it's like, oh, we don't have this cultural history of genocide.”

The harsh history between the United States government and the tribes is not limited to genocide. It includes the creation of reservations on resource constrained land. It includes stealing children from their homes and forcing them to attend boarding schools aimed to assimilate Native children to western culture. It includes broken treaties between the United States and tribes as sovereign Nations. These are just a few examples. The list goes on. While many Nonnatives have never been taught this chapter of history, Natives have never forgotten it.

Due to a hole in public education, Nonnatives who have not been exposed to this history may fail to understand why Native communities are hesitant to trusting them. Fred Jones, who worked for the United States federal government, states, “I wish I would have been more prepared for the level of distain and bitterness that Native Americans have toward the U.S. government.” This historical distrust poses a challenge for all Nonnatives who work with tribes. Carly, Cinnamon, Derek, and Sarah noted that acknowledging the privilege you have been rewarded as a result of colonization is a key to successful collaboration with Native communities.

Acknowledging this privilege is hard work on behalf of the Nonnative professional. It requires introspective exploration and deeply questioning your worldview and position within society. It is a process. It takes time, commitment, and patience. However, it is gravely important and advised by many of the Nonnative professionals profiled in this thesis.

Derek advises future Nonnative professionals to, “own the history of colonization and not try to worm yourself out of it. Don’t think things like, “well, that is from a previous generation. I wouldn’t have done that if I were in charge.” Don’t try to deflect blame. Rather, take ownership for it and acknowledge the privilege that you have been afforded from colonization and be open to that.”

While most of the professionals profiled agree with Derek's advice, some have yet to acknowledge their position as a colonial force. Nick from the Army Corps of Engineers states, "I want people to give me a chance. I wasn't part of what happened years ago. It's like the black and white issue. Give me an opportunity. We're all just people." Nick's attitude towards Native American resistance to collaboration demonstrates that he is still working on acknowledging his role in colonization.

It is important for Nonnative professionals to recognize that colonization is ongoing. It is happening today. Colonization continues to permeate western society through our formalized institutions. As aforementioned, our public education system often fails to educate the youth about Native American genocide and cultural assimilation. Therefore, the public education system perpetuates a colonizing agenda.

Gwendolen discusses the dehumanizing stereotypes and false narratives about Native people which prevail in mainstream media. Derek discusses the exceptional and elitist attitude that is perpetuated through the church that does not always align with indigenous culture and traditions. Amy speaks about how white folks often overlook the potential harmfulness that leadership and organizational structures pose to Native people. Dr. Todd addresses the problematic nature of us versus them language in higher education. Fred discusses how privatization of public sector goods threatens to leave Native communities behind because private sector investors don't recognize economic opportunity. Sarah explains how anthropological methods are shifting from colonial to more inclusive practices. Carly discusses the importance of indigenous ownership over knowledge and data collected about their communities. Cinnamon discusses the need to decolonize our museums because they have traditionally been an uncomfortable space for Native people.

Although Cinnamon is the only person who explicitly uses the word “decolonize,” eight of the ten profiled individuals allude to the need to decolonize our institutions. Decolonizing institutions is a grand undertaking. It requires being intentional, collaborative, and patient. Decolonization is a relatively new field without a one-size-fits-all approach. However, decolonization will not be successful until Nonnative professionals decolonize their worldview, give value to indigenous perspectives, and are comfortable taking the back seat.

Racism is Real

Racism is a byproduct of colonization and colonizing institutions. Racism, both systematic and blatant poses challenges for Native and Nonnative collaboration. Seven of the profiled individuals flagged racism as a challenge. By acknowledging their privilege, listening, and learning, many of the profiled Nonnative professionals could overcome racial divides and tensions. The main problem they are having, which is more difficult to overcome, is finding a way to talk with other Nonnatives who do not understand the history and make racist and ignorant comments.

Sarah reflects on a time when a conversation about her internship turned ugly. Amidst trying to explain the work she was doing with Native Americans to a family friend, he asked “why we owed them anything to begin with because we “conquered them.” Sarah’s conversation clearly demonstrates how an incomplete understanding of history can fester into a racist mindset. Sarah is not alone in her struggle of dealing with racist remarks fueled by misinformation. Cinnamon states, “We were shocked when we finally realized that we are dealing with racism at the Abbe every day. The racism is found in how people come in and their expectations of Native

people. Every day there is some shocking statement. It will melt your face. You can't believe what was just said."

Racism is a wicked problem and there is no simple solution. However, there are pathways towards greater understanding and collaboration. Cinnamon and the staff at the Abbe Museum address this ongoing problem by engaging their staff members in cultural sensitivity and racial bias trainings. Cinnamon believes these facilitated trainings are effective because they provide the structure and skillset necessary to respond to racist moments. Their goal is take racist moments and turn them into educational moments. This is a powerful approach. It offers a new perspective to those engaging in racist activity without attacking or belittling their experience.

Derek combats racists by finding ways to connect Native and Nonnative communities. Furthermore, he promotes truth and reconciliation. Essentially, truth and reconciliation initiatives acknowledge truthful accounts of the history of colonization and apologizes for them. In Canada, where Derek works, truth and reconciliation is happening at the federal level. However, there are caveats to this approach. It does not require everyone to show up. Derek criticizes the top-down approach because it does not require much action on behalf of "average Canadians." Therefore, Derek makes it his personal mission to educate Nonnative Canadians about the importance of truth and reconciliation.

Furthermore, he seeks to bridge gaps between the two communities and bring them together across commonalities. He does this in the spaces that he has access to including, but not limited to, churches, schoolboards, and hospitals. Dr. Todd and Amy also use the spaces that they belong to foster dialogue and conversations around race. Dr. Todd fosters safe-space for discussing racism and its consequences by setting the stage for conversations that question his student's worldview. Amy uses her platform at Toxic Taters to confront racism by naming it and

admitting that it is there. Toxic Taters takes small yet intentional steps to acknowledge the distinctions that some people often overlook. For example, they are intentional about being explicit that they are an indigenous and nonindigenous collaborative organization.

Again, there is no one right way to address racism. However, Nonnative professionals who work or plan to work with Native American communities must be prepared to address racism daily. They must be prepared to turn racist remarks into opportunities for learning. They must not shy away from their own backgrounds and upbringings. They must be strong enough to acknowledge the flaws in their personal worldviews. They must be willing to listen with open ears and learn with an open mind.

Listen to Learn

Listening is an important skill to have regardless of your occupation or the demographic profile of the community you work in. However, listening is an especially important skill for Nonnative professionals who work with Native American communities. In the dominant Western culture, professionals are rewarded for being assertive, solving problems, and getting the job done. Sarah Johnson iterates this point when she states that “in Nonnative culture, you're rewarded for being the go-getter. You're rewarded for showing up, introducing yourself, having a plan, making all the suggestions, and having all the ideas.”

Sarah notes the difference between this western attitude and her experience on the White Earth reservation. Sarah states, “you're rewarded more for taking that back seat, for showing respect, showing deference to the people who've been there far longer than you have who have

experience with the issues that you're trying to work on. Sitting back, listening, and not throwing out all your ideas the first day is rewarded more here.”

Listening is critical for positive interactions between Native and Nonnative people because it is the only way that Nonnatives can learn about the cultural nuances of each specific community. As mentioned by nine of the profiled individuals, Native American communities are not homogenous. They all have unique customs and traditions. While Nonnatives will never completely understand the complexity of what it means to be Native, they can reach a certain level of understanding and show their respect by listening to members of the tribe. All ten profiled individuals stated the importance of listening in their work with Native people.

The type of listening these profiled individuals are referring to is much more than withholding from interrupting someone. This type of listening requires patience and actively creating an environment conducive to hearing. Derek mentions that, “we as Nonnative people talk about awkward silence. A lot of my indigenous friends talk about awkward talking. There is a real comfort with quiet and creating a space for people to speak into. Part of listening is creating that space and not just listening to people talking.”

Additionally, listening reminds us of how much we have yet to learn. Learning is a lifetime process and there will always be something that we don't know. When we enter a culture that is not our own, there will be many things that we do not know. One of the best and most respectful ways to learn about a culture that is not our own is by listening. Carly puts it this way, “I think there will always be things that we don't know and don't understand. It's not our job to understand everything, but it is our job to listen and observe. That is a practice that is taught in Native American culture again and again. If you don't know something you listen and you observe. Nobody is going to tell you how to do it.”

Trust takes Time

A majority of Nonnative professional featured in this thesis talks about the importance of trust and relationship building. Some have found relationships easy to build while others have found them challenging. Either way, these relationships are a key factor to fostering a valuable experience for both Nonnatives and the Natives whom they work with. Carly, Cory, Sarah, Derek, and Gwendolen mention that building relationships becomes easier as Native people get to know you and your intentions on a personal level.

Getting to know people on a personal level requires time and commitment. Derek addresses how the western worldview about time and the indigenous worldview about time are not always in walk step. He says, “Indigenous people play the long game in relationships and in life. They are not looking for the immediacy that most Nonnative people would. Trust that just because things aren’t going quick doesn’t mean that they aren’t okay. Even if it feels like it is taking a long time from our perspective, it isn’t taking a long time from the indigenous perspective. Relationships take the time that they take. There is no rush to it.”

In a deadline driven society, many Nonnatives seek to get tasks done as quickly and efficiently as possible. However, this approach has failed Native American communities time and time again. Carly shares that, “the mistake is that [Nonnative professionals] go into communities to point and to tell rather than to listen and to learn.” This approach suggests that Nonnatives are superior and have all the answers. This elitist attitude has shaped Native and Nonnative interactions for centuries. It has led to the exploitation of indigenous knowledge and severe distrust of Nonnatives by Native Americans. Gwendolen adds, “You have to really take the time to hear what people have to say. You have to take the time it needs to really get to know

a community before you launch into your work. Sometimes it is frustrating for people because they are impatient to get started, but it is critical.”

Taking the time to get to know the community provides an opportunity for Nonnative professionals to understand some of the underlying power structures and community dynamics. It provides an opportunity to identify the community’s strengths and ongoing initiatives without making assumptions. Nonnatives can then use their skillset to add capacity to the projects that the community is already working on. Sarah shares that, “no one is expecting you to come in a save the day. And quite frankly, nobody really wants you to do that. A lot of times when Nonnatives work with Native communities, there's a sense of “I know better, I can do better, I can help.” That's not your role. Your role is to use the skills that you have to further the projects [Native American communities] have initiated.”

When the community identifies you as someone they trust, you are then considered an ally. Nonnatives often struggle to figure out what their role working within Indian country should be. Many have found comfort in the ally role. Cinnamon recalls a pivotal conversation amidst questioning her position where a friend told her, “Don’t ever underestimate the importance of a white ally.” Since that conversation, Cinnamon feels like there is a role for Nonnative people working in Indian country. Sarah, Derek, and Gwendolen also believe that an ally is a good role for Nonnatives to embrace.

It’s the Small Things

It takes time to understand what is culturally appropriate and what is not. It is highly unlikely that a Nonnative professional will work with Native American communities without

ever breaking a cultural norm. Usually the mistakes Nonnatives make are small and subtle. It typically isn't until after the fact that the professional even realizes that they made a mistake. There is no rulebook which lays out the cultural subtleties. Two primary reasons no such book exists is because (1) every tribe has a distinct culture and (2) indigenous knowledge is traditionally passed down orally.

First, there are over five hundred federally recognized tribes. There are also state recognized tribes and those that lack legal recognition (a colonizing institution). Each of these tribes has a unique culture. What is culturally acceptable in one tribe might be considered disrespectful in another. Carly notes this being a challenge during her time on the Longest Walk 5 because, everything that [she] had learned about Native American culture prior to the walk was specific to Ojibwe culture. There were times when something that [she] learned was okay in Ojibwe culture was not okay in another tribes' cultures. When [she] stepped into someone else's cultural realm, the actions which [she] thought were culturally acceptable ended up upsetting or offending people.”

Second, the oral tradition of passing along indigenous knowledge does not lend itself to a text book laying out the rules of each tribe. Western society operates on formalities, so a lack of written documentation may be uncomfortable for Nonnative professionals. Nick talks about how an unbridged gap of cultural understanding leads to issues between his organization and the tribes they work with. He states, “A lack of written history has actually been a challenge [the Army Corps of Engineers] have faced while working with tribes... we have a hard time understanding the significance of something that's physically not there.”

The only way to truly learn what is appropriate and what is not is through cultural immersion. Many of the profiled individuals will tell you that understanding what is okay

requires some level of reading through the lines. Derek recounts a time when he didn't bring pies to a feast because he didn't realize an elder was asking him to pick them up. Amy talks about the time she was "tested" by her new boss when he told her to meet him for lunch in Toilet. Sarah talks about the time she didn't want to take someone's money and then learned it was considered rude to deny a gift.

Typically, mistakes are small and are not detrimental to relationships and collaboration. Natives know that you are not a part of their community. This is why trust building and relationship building is so important. When Native people trust you and know your intentions, they are more willing to help you understand the culture. They are more willing to share their stories and wisdom. It is up to the Nonnative professional to listen and to learn.

Chapter 6

MOVING FORWARD

I have labelled this final commentary “Moving Forward” because the work does not conclude here. This thesis is a contribution to an ongoing dialogue about the role of Nonnative professionals who work with Native American communities. Due to constraints including time and funding, the indigenous perspective was not explored in this piece. However, indigenous voice is critical for considering pathways towards strengthening Native and Nonnative collaborative work.

I encourage you to think critically about your role in this wicked problem. Understanding your role will require vulnerability and vigilance. It will require that you deeply question your worldview and cultural understandings. In what ways am I colonizing? In what ways am I being colonized? How do I become comfortable with being the other? Am I perpetuating a false narrative? This is hard work. It will likely cause some discomfort. Think of this discomfort as growing pains. The better you understand yourself and your place in society, the better you can understand where your gifts and talents can benefit communities. Be patient with yourself, be respectful of others, and listen.

My hypothesis was that understanding the motivations of Nonnative professionals who have worked or currently work with Native American communities could potentially revamp training and educational programs leading to stronger relationships between Native and Nonnative communities. I now understand that there is not, nor will there ever be, a training program or handbook with all the answers. The answers and pathways forward lie in our individual and collective capacity.

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-

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