How Native American women perceive their unique lived experiences: three women tell their stories

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HOW NATIVE AMERICAN WOMEN PERCEIVE THEIR UNIQUE LIVED EXPERIENCES: THREE WOMEN TELL THEIR STORIES

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Educational Theory, Policy & Practice

by

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I would like to acknowledge my best friend and husband, Joe Kopacsi, for his relentless support and encouragement throughout this endeavor. His inspiration has been the catalyst for my ongoing spirit and my will to continue this arduous process. I would also like to acknowledge our sons, daughters-in-law, and grandchildren. They have sacrificed a great deal of family time supporting my homework. And then there is my major professor, Dr. Earl Cheek, without whom I would have never completed this, often times, daunting task. Last, but not least, I acknowledge my Native American women participants, who ultimately made this dissertation possible. I thank my dear friends Judy Grzych and Susan, David, and Ingrid Jensen for never doubting me and always having encouraging words to build me up.
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ABSTRACT

Qualitative research that explores and further examines the lived experiences of Native American women is an important, yet a frequently neglected, part of the history of the United States (US). This is an important avenue of investigation, as historians have traditionally marginalized many groups within U.S. society, including women and groups that can be viewed as part of the fabric of U.S. culture, yet exist as subcultures. Native Americans (indigenous peoples, ‘Indians’) should share a special place within U.S. society as First Americans; however, qualitative studies of Native American women, offered through a feminist lens as keepers of tradition and culture, are noticeably limited within studies of U.S. history.

Case studies recorded in a narrative form give the researcher the opportunity to research, explore, examine, and engage appropriate participants. This method allows the researcher and the reader a view that may exist, but may be hidden from the mainstream. Storytelling through written narratives may create a story in relation to an individual’s experiences and thoughts. The story may be an oral history if the focus of the research is to obtain an oral account of the individual’s life. The purpose of this case study is to give three Native American women an opportunity to share their unique lived experiences and personal history. The researcher’s goal is to explore, interview, record, transcribe, analyze, and examine their lived experiences, expressed through the stories they tell.
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Background Information

Chief Seattle, as one of the last spokesmen of Paleolithic moral order, wrote a moving letter in response to the U.S. government’s inquiry about buying tribal lands for the arriving people of the US (Campbell, 1988). The Chief’s letter is partially replicated in the following excerpt. Chief Seattle affirms my beliefs in the importance of revisiting the customs and culture of Native Americans (our indigenous peoples) in an effort to transform and reform our respect for the nature of man and his environment. His response also offers readers a glimpse of the mindset of Seattle.

The President in Washington sends word that he wishes to buy our land. But how can you buy and sell the sky…the land? The idea is strange to us. If we do not own the freshness of the air and the sparkle of the water, how can you buy them? Every part of this earth is sacred to my people: every shining pine needle, every sandy shore, every mist in the dark woods, every meadow, and every humming insect. All are holy in the memory and experience of my people. We know the sap which courses through the trees as we know the blood that courses through our veins. We are part of the earth and it is part of us. The perfumed flowers are our sisters. The bear, the deer, the great eagle, these are our brothers. The rocky crests, the juices in the meadow, the body heat of the pony, and man, all belong to the same family. The shining water that moves in the streams and rivers is not just water, but the blood of our ancestors. (Campbell, 1988, p. 34)

He continues quite eloquently and ends the soliloquy by saying to the government officials,

As we are part of the land, you too are part of the land. This earth is precious to us. It is also precious to you. One thing we know: there is only one God. No man, be he Red Man or White Man, can be apart. We are brothers after all.” (Campbell, 1988, p. 35)

This passage presents a premise that being Native American, at least in Chief Seattle’s lifetime, is marked by a deep association with the land. Other prominent historical Native American men have shared a similar perspective. For instance, Ten Bears, the Yamparika chief who had battled Kit Carson at Adobe Walls in 1864, reflected on the battle in an equally eloquent address years later, which began,
My heart is filled with joy when I see you here as the brooks fill with water when the
snows melt in the spring; and I feel glad as the ponies do when the fresh grass starts in
the beginning of the year… my people have never drawn a bow…. (Gwynne, 2011, p. 227)

These selected quotes and passages convey the views of just two prominent historical
Native American men, illustrating their deep concern for and connection to the Earth, and
presenting an identity tied to the Earth and nature. However, do they also convey what it means
in a general sense to be a Native American woman? An abundance of Native American men
have been quoted, their words preserved, and their views recorded for posterity, but what of
Native American women?

Native American women have spoken; and thus, conveyed their views, which in turn,
might also provide a portrait of their experiences. For instance, one of the US’s recognized
Native women, Wilma Mankiller, so appropriately states, “My early childhood in an isolated,
predominately Cherokee community shaped the way I view the world” (2005, p. 46). As it
might be with all of us, our upbringing shapes our worldviews, our perspectives, and ultimately,
our identity. I assume that the experiences of Native American women, intermingled with their
tribal history and culture and their educational and employment/career backgrounds, influence
the way they perceive themselves.

**Purpose of the Study**

Due to an absence of Native American women’s views and a lack of records of their
voices, I intend to seek out three Native women who are willing to personally share their stories.
As a novice researcher, I contend they not only have felt marginalized, but in fact, are still
marginalized, both as Native Americans and as women. Further, I assume that within their
Native cultures, they continue to live as underrepresented citizens. The purpose of this case
study is to give three Native American women an opportunity to share their unique lived experiences expressed through the stories they tell and their personal histories.

This will be an opportunity to follow my passion by continuing to study Native Americans, especially Native women, in the examination of their stories. The voices of the participants will be documented in a succinct and productive manner. My goal is to tell these women’s stories, not at their expense, but rather in their honor. In doing so, I propose to reveal a view of how they perceive themselves and their lived experiences. My own personal history is inherent in the writing of this proposal. Sharing an often-quoted ancient Native American proverb provides me somewhat of a rite of passage while writing about our Native peoples. “Treat the Earth well: it was not given to you by your parents, it was loaned to you by your children. We do not inherit the Earth from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children” (“The United Association of Higaonon,” 2012). In somewhat the same manner, I propose to record stories, not for myself, but to share with a wider audience. This proverb and my application provide a cultural balance and equalizer when comparing my cultural beliefs with those of Native Americans.

Through this case study, reported through narrative, readers will have an opportunity to examine the lived experiences of three Native American women, and while I do not assume the experiences of these women are universal to all Native American women, they might provide a window into the distinct lives of Native women. Native American women, as a subgroup to both the dominant male culture and as members of Native American culture, have traditionally been marginalized within U.S. society, as women and as Native Americans. I contend that all women can be viewed as part of the fabric of U.S. culture, yet they maintain an existence as a subculture.
Researcher’s Story

As a career educator, I have immersed myself in the educational arena as a teacher, coach, and guidance counselor. Toward the end of my 42-year career, the passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (2001) specifically addressed this issue of marginalized groups when requiring U.S. school districts to report as subgroups ten or more students who claimed an ethnicity or race not part of dominant or White culture. In addition, NCLB specified that districts must also identify children by dividing school populations into male and female groups. Thus, I feel such a study is warranted. As First Americans, Native Americans, indigenous peoples or Indians, I believe members of Native American Nations should share a special place within U.S. historical records; however, case studies recorded in narrative form of Native American women, as keepers of tradition and culture, are noticeably absent from studies of our Native American history.

I am particularly interested in this topic because of my background as a female child of the South. I grew up in the 60s and subtly observed many of the atrocities giving rise to the Civil Rights Movement, and I felt troubled that I could not make a difference. Emotionally, I wanted this hate and anger to go away. I decided to try to make a difference by following my mother’s career choice and becoming a teacher.

I will continue to draw from my experiences. At times this proposal may look more like a historical narrative, until I can begin to interview, transcribe, and write narratively about the lived experiences of the Native American women who will participate in this study. I choose to write about Native Americans for many reasons, but the emergence of this desire peaked when I spent a week on a Navajo Reservation with the students and Brothers of the Sacred Heart at St. Michael’s Native American Elementary and High School in St. Michael, New Mexico, in 2004.
I was awed by the beautiful children at the schools, and then taken aback by the abject poverty on the reservation. Most of the hogans and homesites had only local wells, and the families had to walk miles to draw water from the wells. Large families shared very small areas of living space. I was awed by the spirit and nature of all of the Natives, and I decided I would like one day to share parts of their story.

A problem for qualitative narrative researchers, who also choose to position themselves as participant-observers, is that they must be immersed in the research enough to observe, yet not be so intrusive that their participation interferes with capturing in detail the lives of the participants. “Qualitative studies capitalize on ordinary ways of getting acquainted with things” (Stake, 2005, p. 49). Stake believes that “a good interviewer can reconstruct the stories from interviews, but then must give the participants an opportunity to read, respond, and reconstruct” (p. 39). His advocacy for this kind of positioning mirrors my beliefs regarding the participants of this proposed research who are willing to let me into their lives, albeit briefly.

Case studies allow researcher and readers a view that may exist, but may be hidden from the mainstream. The goal of case studies is to develop an understanding of the similarities and differences of participants in a succinct manner.

While the literature representing Native American women, their voices, and thus, their experiences, is limited, a small body of literature does exist. For instance, I found in the reading of Lakota Woman by Mary Crow Dog (1990) words that illuminated this particular woman through the descriptions of her experiences. This excerpt begins to paint a portrait of what life might have been like for a Native American woman in the early 1900s.

When I was a small girl at the St. Francis Boarding School, the Catholic sisters would take a buggy whip to us for what they called “disobedience”. At age ten I could drink and hold a pint of whiskey. At age twelve the nuns beat me for “being too free with my
body”. All I had been doing was holding hands with a boy. At age fifteen I was raped. If you plan to be born, make sure you are born white and male. It is not the big dramatic things so much that get us down, but just being Indian, trying to hang on to our way of life, language, and values while being surrounded by an alien, more powerful culture. It is being iyeska, a half-blood, being looked down upon by whites and full-bloods alike. It is being a backwoods girl living in a city, having to rip off stores in order to survive. Most of all it is being a woman. (p. 4)

This passage illustrates some of the difficulties of being a Native American woman, or as Crow Dog describes herself, an Indian. As a Native American, or a non-White person, and, as a woman, she writes of being marginalized. Her words are stark, even brutal, and create an exposé that is difficult to fathom.

In juxtaposition, Native American writer Dr. Devon Abbott Mihesuah (2005) points out what might be considered a more contemporary and comprehensive Native American view in her book appropriately titled, So You Want to Write about American Indians?: A Guide for Writers, Students, and Scholars. Mihesuah appears to be cautioning individuals like myself about the challenges of non-Natives who want to study Native American culture.

You cannot talk about the political aspects of a tribe without also considering how religion, gender roles, economy, worldview, and Euro-American policies affect tribal policies. Writers disassociated from tribal life do not understand how these issues interrelate, but this methodology makes perfect sense to Natives who are culturally aware. You must learn how the social, political, religious, and economic aspects of American Indian life are interconnected. (p. 7)

Mihesuah cautions me as a researcher that as I conduct a study of Native American women and share their history, I must include the following issues of importance: religion; gender; social, political and economic aspects; Euro-American policies; and worldview. Her recommendations illustrate the complex challenges of this proposed study. Further, Mihesuah (1998) speaks to a common problem when non-Natives are writing about Natives. Her admonishing warns about the importance of language and the significance of labels. She asserts that the language used to describe Native Americans is a sensitive topic in itself. She claims…
You will see throughout the book I use the terms American Indians and Natives interchangeably. I sometimes use the former only because it is recognizable to most Americans, but many Native people find the phrase offensive because it is a label assigned by Euro-Americans, not by the people themselves. I prefer indigenous or native but not with American, because both make a statement: Natives were created on this hemisphere and did not migrate from another continent. Native American refers to anyone born here, including those people with no relation to tribes. (pp. xi-xii)

Mihesuah shares a precept with me that I must weigh and balance as a researcher. Do I use a term that is potentially offensive? Or, do I use one more easily understood? The use of terms, although important, is small compared to bigger issues she raises.

In her book, *Natives and Academics: Researching and Writing about American Indians*, Mihesuah continues to question the motivation of non-Native writers in her words—words I am keenly aware of as I propose this study—“Many think that because they’ve watched *Dances with Wolves*, read *House Made of Dawn*, were a Boy or Girl Scout, and have watched a Powwow that they are knowledgeable about Native histories and cultures” (1998, p. 9). I interpret her chiding and warning as important. Have I romanticized this personal journey of mine? Do I feel sympathy, and does that sympathy cloud my researcher’s lens? The more I read and study, the more aware I am of the careful line I walk as a researcher and scholar.

Why do I choose to use Mihesuah, and other Native women, as resources and inspiration? I wonder, “Am I naïve? Wouldn’t another topic and study be safer, simpler, and easier?” My reasons for embarking on such a study are straightforward. My passion for years has been researching, learning, and writing in support of the theory that Native American women have been marginalized in U.S. history. This exploration will focus on areas of that history, more specifically, what is sometimes termed *herstory*, and how Native American women have been especially marginalized in the area of education by the dominant White culture. I submit the idea that there has been a continuous effort to acculturate their children by the forced removal
and enrollment in the American-sponsored Indian boarding schools, an issue I also find painful and disturbing. This practice in itself is reflective of how I perceive the dominant U.S. culture to view Natives. I reconcile the guilt I feel with the awesome responsibility I have chosen—this study.

For me, Mihesuah is one scholar in this field of inquiry who is an important figure in the writings about Native Americans. She is an associate professor of history at Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, Arizona, and has spent the larger part of her life teaching, researching, and writing about Native American women, herself included. She is a member of the Cherokee tribe and has controversial opinions about the writings of fellow Natives and non-Natives in respect to the Native American communities and their histories. In my exploration and quest for a dissertation topic, she has been an instrumental distant mentor—or mentor on the page—in my approach to my working title: “How Native American Women Perceive Their Unique Lived Experiences: Three Women Tell Their Stories.”

_Natives and Academics: Researching and Writing about American Indians_ (1998) is the first book I read of Mihesuah’s and the one that compelled me to follow her writings. She was also the editor of the book and has included the writings of many other preeminent Native American authors. Mihesuah expresses profound thoughts about Native women.

Knowing of the oppression of Indian women at the hands of non-Indians, but what about inter- and intra-tribal racism and sexism? Tribes have long experienced factionalism, between those who cling to tradition and those who see change as the route to survival, whether it is tribal, familial, or personal survival. Intra-tribal factionalism might also be termed “cultureless”, a form of oppression that dovetails with racism. Indians in tribal power positions, political, economic, or social, often use expressions of cultureless against those who do not subscribe to their views. (1998, p. 39)

This issue of change is fascinating to me. Is it better to assimilate? Or, is it more “Indian” to rebel and retain older ways of knowing. I ponder if my participants will share one or
the other path; and I wonder how they will decide what they will share with me. I also reflect on what is lost when one assimilates.

In Mihesuah’s (2005) poignant book for writers of American Indian history, *So You Want to Write about American Indians: A Guide for Writers, Students, and Scholars*, she is succinct in her opinion that writers should respect the tribe’s research guidelines committee. She guides the reader to appropriate and accurate research sources. She is clear about her purpose for writing. Writing is, “to educate, inspire, and correct misleading stories about Natives. This book is not meant to discourage anyone from writing about Natives but rather to encourage sensitive, truthful, inclusive, and honest writing” (p. x-xi). I feel as if she is guiding me while she warns me; as if she is beckoning me to study, but wants me to “do it right.” At times, I question whether I found this topic, or if this topic found me.

Another book by Mihesuah that has influenced my thinking is *Cultivating the Rosebuds: The Education of Women at the Cherokee Female Seminary, 1851-1909*. She examines this seminary as one of the most important schools in the history of American Indian education by looking at the curriculum, faculty, administration, and educational philosophy. This book allowed me a glimpse into the historical issues that might have created her identity. She has also written *American Indians: Stereotypes and Realities*. This text also greatly informed my thinking.

In the end, I conclude that Mihesuah is an inspiration to me, and I will follow with her direct and succinct suggestions in my ongoing effort to give voice to Native American women. I will continue to be cautious and remind myself often that I must take precious care of the integrity and culture of those I interview; I will be aware of my innate bias, whether positive or
negative, real or perceived. As a woman, I owe it to my informants to be as representative as possible, but to remain humble and a learner as well.

Often I see inspirational posters in schools with messages like, “Every journey begins with a step.” This is my step as a researcher. It is important to record the voices and stories of these women, and it feels like a privilege to me.

**Researcher’s Premise for Study**

A synopsis of a legendary Native American myth explains why the snake has no legs. The legend speaks volumes and illustrates through metaphor the historical treatment of the Native American Nations by the U.S. government. According to the myth, a snake was walking along the Painted Desert. An eagle flew over the snake, and as the snake ran under a rock, the eagle then swooped down and ate the snake’s legs. Did the US (the eagle) actually take the land (legs) out from under the Native Americans (snake), thereby marginalizing them? Is the U.S. government in a continued, protracted power struggle with their aborigines? I use this as a metaphor for my own journey.

Power is the ability to influence what people say and do. When and where determines who controls or manages. Power is a ubiquitous force that makes some people obedient to others. Individuals who do not possess a strong identity are easily dominated by individuals with a strong identity, whether the identity is fabricated or actual. Power reflects back to the powerful; their own values, beliefs, behaviors and interests set them apart from the powerless.

In this study, I will examine the historical significance contributing to the marginalization, and thus the marginal or under-educating, of the Native American peoples of the US (i.e., the powerless) by their particular governments (i.e., the powerful), with a special denial of equality for women. This issue of marginalization has created significant impact on the
lives of many individuals of Native American descent (i.e., the powerful vs. the powerless). It is my assumption that this powerless-powerful status will contribute to how Native women currently perceive themselves.

As a non-Native woman researcher, I hope to relate a nonbiased view—a seemingly impossible task according to Mihesuah and other Native writers. My assumption is I will use my own lens of experience and my own cultural identity as a filter, while attempting to be objective. Through a case study recorded in narrative form, I hope to reflect the stories of Native American women who have never found a voice. Their roles in their Native lives and the history of their ancestral mothers and grandmothers may find a voice. I believe these are stories waiting to be told.

One of the challenges of case study is transcribing the interviews accurately and sensitively, and for me, that will extend to overcoming the history of negative literature about Natives. Another problem is that some individuals view qualitative research as nonessential, and have described it as inferior work. However, feminist scholars, such as DuPlessis (1985, p. 3), have found narrative analysis useful in cross-cultural research and in uncovering perspectives that have traditionally been marginalized. My personal understanding of marginalization compels me to explore and to further research the history of the marginalization of Native Americans. The historical relationships of disenfranchisement, treaties and land ownership, education, and poverty are complex and intertwined, deserving more contemporary evaluation and research. “Although the freedom of their ancient way of life has been lost, the religion, culture, legends, and spirit of the American Indian will always endure” (Louisiana Office of Indian Affairs, 2007).

Non-Natives’ ignorance of the cultural beliefs of Native American women devalues the voices of the women and continues to force them into a role of underrepresented citizens in this
country. My challenge as a non-Native is to be true to the words of these women, and to be especially cautious in researching the facts as they are presented by many authors.

The following essential research questions will guide the direction of the study:

1. How have your lived experiences impacted your perception of how you are situated in the Native American community?

2. How have your lived experiences impacted the Native American community at large?

3. Describe how Native American women perceive their unique lived experiences as Natives and their shared experiences and personal histories as Native Americans.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review will be presented in three sections. First, I will provide an overview from selected historical perspectives of the lives of the Native Americans as told or retold through the eyes of Native men and from U.S. governmental perspectives. Next, Native American women and the sharing of their stories will be presented, followed by a review of Native American educational histories. The literature review might provide answers to many of my questions about the written and unwritten word in Native American culture. To focus only on the comparisons of Native American historical perspectives and educational histories would create a disconnection between their histories and their educational historical backgrounds. Rather, I will create a spectrum of views.

Historical Perspectives of the Lives of Native Americans

The U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) was established by President James Madison in 1824, as part of the Department of War. In 1832, Congress authorized the president to appoint a Commissioner of Indian Affairs, and in 1834, enacted a bill to organize a Department of Indian Affairs. In 1849, the BIA was transferred to the newly created Interior Department. By the 1850s, overseeing Indian reservations had become its principal arena of activity. According to Cheyfitz (2001),

In this context, the term colonialism has a precise meaning: the control by the federal government over what the federal law terms Indian country, which, in broadest terms, includes all federal reservation land; all Indian allotments; and all dependent Indian communities, whether they are residing within a reservation or not. In Indian country, reservation land is land used by federally recognized tribes, but titled to the federal government, which thus has legal ownership of it, keeping the lands in trust for the tribes, of which there are 300 today in the lower 48 states. (p. 98)

The definition of reservation leads one to question the original intent of the U.S. government in establishing reservations. As the US expanded and more and more settlers
migrated westward, forcible removal became a solution to what many historically referred to as
the Indian problem. In order for the US to grow as a nation, something had to occur that would
open up lands for settlement.

In the United States, an Indian reservation is land managed by a Native American tribe
under the United States Department of the Interior’s BIA. Reservations were established
when Americans began to forcibly take land from the Indians who lived there for
thousands of years. The land is federal territory and Native Americans have limited
National sovereignty meaning limited independence and self-government. (Wikipedia,
2007, see Indian Reservation)

The question I ask is why is it “use” and not “ownership”? The word “reservation”
means an opportunity to occupy a venue temporarily and not to own it. Furthermore, why are
there not reservations for each of the country’s 550-plus recognized nations, rather than only 300
reservations (Cheyfitz, 2001)? Some nations have more than one reservation while others have
none. Each piece of tribal trust and privately held land is a separate enclave. This distortion of
contiguous lands creates a great deal of ambiguity and fragmentation. “By the late 1800’s most
aborigines had joined white rural and urban communities. Aboriginal people became
economically marginalized and were exposed to new diseases. The consequence was massive
depopulation and extinction of some Aboriginal tribes” (Siasoco, 2007, p. 19).

While Native Americans faced a history of forced assimilation, their problems differed
from other groups because they were not owners of land and resources. “A central focus of their
activism was on gaining enforcement of treaty rights, not civil rights” (Winfrey, 1986, p. 20).
Ulysses S. Grant, 18th President and Civil War commander, suggested a peace policy as a
possible solution to conflicts between western settlers and Native Americans. The policy
included a reorganization of the Indian Service, with the goal of relocating various tribes from
their ancestral homes to parcels of lands established specifically for their inhabitation. In the
early nineteenth century, the U.S. government shifted its policy from assimilation of Native
American Indians to relocation (Perdue & Green, 2008, p. 90). Many forced removals dot U.S. history beginning in 1813 and ending more or less in 1855 (Jahoda, 1995, p. 54). Among the most well-known are the Trail of Tears in 1838-39 (Ehle, 1997; Johanda, 1995; Perdue & Green, 2008; Smith, 2011, p. 33) and the Oklahoma Land Grab.

**Example of historical perspective of the lives of Native Americans.** Andrew Jackson’s removal policy in 1834 resulted in the death of 4,000 of the 16,000 Cherokees who had been forced to migrate from North Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, and Alabama to what was then called the Oklahoma Territory (Smith, 2011, p. 33). A true number of casualties—and one would have to settle on a definition of casualty—remains elusive. This journey of exile became known as the Trail of Tears (Perdue & Green, 2008, p. 90).

Ironically, due to U.S. government policy in the early 1800s, Native American Nations continued to be removed or relocated to the Western US, even though some had successfully adjusted and assimilated to European values (Ehle, 1997). As White settlers trespassed on Cherokee land, many Native leaders responded by educating their children, learning English, and developing plantations as obvious forms of assimilation. One such a leader was Major Ridge, a Cherokee leader. In fact, Ridge had fought alongside Andrew Jackson, opposing the British. Despite his allegiance and embracing European ways, land-hungry Georgia legislators, with the blessing and aid of Andrew Jackson, ousted the Cherokee from their land, forcing them to make the grueling and taxing journey west on the infamous Trail of Tears.

But the Trail of Tears is not a simple story of brutal, forced relocation as recounted in many U.S. history texts. The inner story reveals the Cherokee Nation torn by views of opposition versus assimilation and includes the assassination of three Cherokee leaders, Elias Boudinot, Major Ridge, and his son, John Ridge, by Cherokee political rivals (Smith, 2011, p.
According to Jahoda (1995), the removal of the “five civilized tribes” as well as a number of Midwestern peoples was pointless (p. 91). In particular, removing the eastern tribes was not about clearing hostile Native Americans in the guise of assisting helpless White settlers. Based on Jahoda’s extensive research, many eastern Native American Nations had already blended into and had been assimilated into the way of life of the American settlers. For instance, some Cherokee had become major plantation owners, complete with slaves; many more had been converted and were devout Christians. Jahoda exposes the pattern of disguising racism as an issue of dealing with “savages” (1995).

The story of the Cherokee is important on many levels. Their story chronicles similar experiences by many Native groups. Perdue & Green (2008, p. 57) elucidate the Cherokee experience, starting with their initial contact with Europeans, estimated around 1540, when the De Soto expedition visited their southern Appalachian territory. The Cherokee Nation was annihilated by successive outbreaks of epidemics beginning in 1697. Then the Cherokee ceded approximately half their tribal lands to the British in the mid-18th century. The U.S. government first attempted to “civilize” the Cherokees, illustrating the then policy of assimilation. However, after the War of 1812, the policy of removal took precedence over assimilation. As a result, the Cherokee Nation and their allies lost the battle, what Perdue & Green and many historians have come to view as tribal nationalism versus states’ rights. After 1836, the Trail of Tears began in earnest, and the Cherokee Nation ended up in Oklahoma, removed from their ancestral homeland (Perdue & Green, 2008).

In approximately half a century, American policy shifted from civilizing or assimilation of Native Americans to removal. The Indian Removal Act (1830) made legal a brutal political program of social engineering that resulted in inconceivable suffering, deaths in the thousands
(perhaps hundreds of thousands, depending on how far back one might travel in U.S. history), and resultant emotional pain that remains. The legal intricacies of the 18th-century ‘right of conquest doctrine’ gave way to the 19th-century emerging doctrine of state rights. Treaties were ignored and landmark cases *Cherokee v. Georgia* and *Worcester v. Georgia* (one effectively denying Cherokee self-government, one ineffectively affirming Cherokee sovereignty) illustrate how the first citizens of the US were viewed through their actual treatment.

The fate of the Cherokee Nation magnifies the history of interaction between Euro-Americans and Native Americans, and in many instances, parallels what happened to other Nations. The story of the Cherokee National removal embodies a larger history that everyone in the US should know, and that no one in the US should forget.

After the 15th Amendment gave all citizens the right to vote, it took 54 years for Native Americans, the First Americans, to gain citizenship and the right to vote. President Lyndon B. Johnson signed into law the Voting Rights Act of 1965. In the past, Native American voting blocs have determined the results of some national elections. The threat of this bloc has prompted continued attempts to disenfranchise Native Americans. For example,

The *Arizona Apartheid Act* in the early 1980’s was an attempt to create an all-Indian county and it was implied that this was an attempt to discriminate against the rights of the Native American population to elect representatives of their choice to their county and school board offices. (Jackson, 2004, p. 22)

**Spiritualism as historical perspective.** An important aspect of the Native American cultures, and therefore their history, is their spiritual beliefs. The following illustrates the importance of spiritual beliefs among Native Americans in the Southwest.

The native people of the Southwest and Southeast had full-time religious leaders with shrines or temple buildings. Most Native Americans believe that in the universe there exists an Almighty, a spiritual force that is a source of all life. Is this description unlike all cultural beliefs of a higher power? The Almighty belief is not pictured as a man in the sky, but is believed to be formless and exist in the universe. The sun is viewed as the
power of the Almighty. Without the sun, where are we? They are not worshipping the sun, but praying to the Almighty, and the sun is a sign and symbol for that. They assume the souls of the dead go to another part of the universe where they have a new existence carrying on everyday activities like they were still alive. They are just in a different world. (Eck, 1998, p. 55)

Similar in terms of how spiritual beliefs are central to being Native American, yet also distinct from Native Americans in the Southwest, are the spiritual beliefs of many plains nations. The Dakota and Lakota peoples, both Sioux, share a belief in certain spirits. Perhaps recognizing the core of spirituality shared by many Native nations, “The dream catcher is a result of this belief system as is the ancestral spirits including the Rainbow Serpent and others” (Klar, 1993, p. 10). These beliefs are often seen as non-Christian, but are often integrated into the spiritual beliefs of other religions.

President Ulysses S. Grant’s plan provided and called for the replacement of government officials by religious men, nominated by churches to oversee the Native American agencies on reservations in order to teach Christianity to the Native nations. The civilization policy was aimed at eventually preparing the tribes for citizenship. In many cases, the lands were not ideal for agricultural cultivation or for any other productive purpose. When the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 terminated the policy, the American Indians continued to live under the policy.

Today many Native Americans who live on reservations have a quality of life that is among the poorest to be found in the United States. The life on reservations is sometimes so poor that it is easily comparable to the quality of life in the developing countries. (Langston, 2007, p. 99)

This phenomenon compares to antebellum views wherein enslaved Africans were considered childlike, needed to be taken care of, and were unable (or lacked the intelligence) to make decisions for themselves. Does the government keep Native Americans in poverty, I wonder? Is this continuous treatment of Native Americans by intent or happenstance. Of all the
Native Americans who live on reservations are the most impoverished.

“The Indian land that is privately owned and not controlled by the BIA is far more productive than the land allotted to individual Indians but held in trust by the BIA (individual trust land) or the land belonging to some tribes (tribal trust land) but, also, is held in trust by the BIA.” (Anderson, 1995, p. 38)

Native Americans remain at the bottom in almost every measurable economic category. They earn only a little more than half as much money as the average citizens of their countries. “Indians are four times more likely to succumb to alcoholism, three times as likely to die of tuberculosis, and nearly twice as likely to die of diabetes” (Carlson, 1997, p. 10). Consider for instance, the Lakota, an indigenous people of the Great Plains. They are part of a confederation of seven related Sioux tribes, and speak Lakota, one of the three major dialects of the Sioux language. The Lakota are the western-most of the three Sioux-language groups, occupying lands in both North and South Dakota. Notable persons include Sitting Bull from the Hunkpapa band of Lakota; Crazy Horse from the Oglala band of Lakota, as well as Red Cloud, Black Elk, and Spotted Tail, also Oglala Lakota. Large numbers of Lakota live in Rapid City, South Dakota, and other towns in the Black Hills, and in metro Denver, Colorado (Pritzker, 2000). In terms of numbers, and to gain perspective, approximately 55,000 Lakota were registered on reservations in the mid-1990s, while 103,255 Sioux self-identified in the 1990 census (census.gov, 2011). As a Native American Nation, their numbers are significant. Despite this, poverty among the Lakota remains a legacy from the 1800s.

Natives of America where a steady flow of supplicants coming into the tribal offices at Pine Ridge, which is in Shannon County, South Dakota, the poorest county in America, a place where unemployment hovers around 80 percent, where the per capita income is $3,417 a year, the lowest in the nation, where two out of three live below the federal poverty level. One example of the level of living conditions is eleven people living in a house without electricity on a reservation with a population of about 23,000, where there are 1,200 families on the 10-year-long waiting list for subsidized federal housing. Half a
millennium after Columbus misnamed them; American Indians are the poorest people in the United States. This is a ‘National Disgrace’. (Carlson, 1997)

**History into the present.** In August 2005, the U.S. Senate Democrats conferred with more than 150 tribal leaders for nearly six months working on recommendations on Native American country issues. A recommendation was made to amend the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) to address problems unique to Native Americans. Amendments were recommended to take into consideration the cultural factors affecting the lack of success of NCLB on the reservations. Senator John McCain, as the chair of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, stated, “Our treatment of Native Americans is a national disgrace” (Carlson, 1997).

**Native American Women: Sharing of Their Stories**

While Native American men dominate in the history of many Native Nations, and thus, the history is presented and preserved, Native American women’s stories have been preserved in a sense, and shared with a wider audience. Early accounts that focused on Native American women were frequently written by men, anthropologists, ethnologists, and historians. An example of this might be Radin’s (1921) classic, *Autobiography of a Winnebago Indian*. Although this work is considered a classic, it is a second-hand account of the life of a Native woman’s life who lived from 1884 to 1960, written through the eyes of Paul Radin, an ethnologist. Radin admits, “One of the drawbacks in the study of primitive peoples, is the difficulty, one might say the impossibility, of obtaining and inside view of their culture from their own lips and by their own initiative” (1921, p. 383). Indeed, Radin’s perspective that the woman he interviewed was “primitive” makes me wonder how his lens of interpretation filtered what he was told, what he heard, and thus, what he chose to include. Issues of gender, culture, ethnicity, and actual interpretation are all present in such accounts; and although they do have
value in a general sense in describing what life may be have been like for such a woman at that point in history, these accounts are not written by the very women being described. In this instance, a man interpreted a woman’s existence and thus, her identity.

There are, however, also texts written by women that recount other women’s words, such as Lurie’s (1961) autobiography of a Winnebago woman. This is the story of a woman told in her own words to Lurie, her adopted kinswoman. But, again, as with Radin’s work, Lurie is telling another woman’s story; the object of the study does not speak for herself.

In recent decades, Native women have begun to share their own stories in earnest; the stories they share are as varied as the authors. Some, such as Mihesuah (2003), as detailed in chapter one, do explore the ever-evolving identity of Native American women today. Mihesuah also explores Native women’s ongoing struggles against a centuries-old legacy of colonial disempowerment, as well as how Native American women are seen and portrayed by themselves and others. Another Native writer, Andrea Smith, analyzes sexual violence and both explores and provides a scholarly examination of the link between colonial genocide and sexual violence (2005). Though Native American women writers have emerged, my interest in this study is to explore how three contemporary Native women have constructed their identity, as told through their stories.

Here I present a list of writers that I have culled from the field: Paula Gunn Allen, Louise Erdrich, Joy Harjo, Diane Glancy, Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, Allison Hedge Coke, LeAnne Howe, Roberta Hill, Kim Blaeser, Theda Perdue, Linda LeGarde Grover, and Winona LaDuke. What ties these writers together are the stories they tell (write about) from across the US. Further, many of these Native American women share stories that not only record and explore the role of
Native American women but also celebrate the roles of Native American women in community. I expect to continue including the words of some of these women in the final narrative.

**Native American Educational Histories**

No serious study of Native Americans can be undertaken without references to the historical, ethnological, anthropological, and artistic work of Charles Bird King, George Catlin, and Karl Bodner (Moore, 2008). These three men were working independently and under differing circumstances, yet they collectively had a unique vision. They were dedicated to preserving the various cultures of Native American people through their artwork and writings.

In the past, educators believed that the job of schools was to help individuals assimilate into the predominate culture. This can also be referred to as cultural genocide, because the culture might be lost as assimilation occurs. For some, assimilation equates to survival. As I have read and prepared this analysis, I have questioned the cost of survival. Does survival have to mean a loss of identity and cultural mores?

Historically, education was used as a method of indoctrinating Native American children and undermining their own language, religion, and culture; thus, silencing the Native American culture. In the typical educational institution, Native American students become invisible because of the lingering assimilationist attitudes. The pressure to pull away from their culture has driven Native American students away from education and who they are. They were all forced to disassociate from traditional communities if they chose higher education. (Eshelman, 1997)

This is an enormous price to pay. The assimilation versus indoctrination versus survival mentality is pervasive among the histories of many Native American Nations. And although this might be perceived as a historical practice, it has a current implementation that actually began in 1952, just 60 years ago (Baylor, 1994; Olson, 1984; Winfrey, Winton, 1999; 1986; Ziegelman, 1985). As I write this, I realize this practice occurred during my lifetime, not in some distant century.
“The Relocation Program begun in 1952 was one part of the U.S. Termination policy. This program offered one-way bus fare and the promise of assistance in finding jobs and housing in urban areas for reservation Indians, usually younger tribal members with more employable skills” (Baylor, 1994; Ziegelman, 1985). “In 1940, 13 percent of Native Americans lived in urban areas, but by 1980 more than half were urban” (Olson, 1984, p. 20). According to the BIA, an estimated 200,000 Native Americans were relocated under this program, while in juxtaposition, the Indian Removal Act of 1830 had forced less than half this number, 89,000, to relocate (Winton, 1999). “The high point of the termination policy occurred during the period from 1952 to 1962” (Winfrey, 1986). With the election of President John F. Kennedy, the policy went into remission and was formally overturned in 1972.

Whether the term or practice is called relocation or assimilation, the impact is similar. Pervasively, it appears U.S. government policies convey a sense of protectionism over Native Americans. The “trust” relationship between the tribes and the federal government is at best a double-edged sword. Ostensibly guaranteeing federal protection of Native American assets, U.S. government policy also casts Native Americans in the role of perpetual minors, a barely veiled version of the classic European stereotype of the childlike “savage.” Native Americans, by definition, are legally incompetent to manage their own resources, and consequently find these resources placed in the hands of a federal bureaucracy, overseen by Congress, which has historically grossly mismanaged them. In many ways, again, I find this similar to antebellum views wherein enslaved Africans were considered childlike, needed to be taken care of, and were thought to be unable (or lacked the intelligence) to make decisions for themselves.

The BIA currently finds itself embroiled in an almost five-year-old class action lawsuit filed by the Native American Rights Fund against the Bureau and the Department of Interior for
the mismanagement of an estimated ten billion dollars in Native American trust funds since the end of the 19th century. In February 1999, as reported in the *Washington Post* of August 17, 2000, Govern (a Comanche tribal member and outgoing head of the BIA) himself was held in contempt of court for not turning over records in this case—records he claimed “no longer exist” (Cheyfitz, 2001).

As I write this review, I question if the U.S. government has a *special* relationship with their Native American peoples? This special relationship has seldom worked out well for the Native Americans. The list of negatives far outweighs what anyone might consider a positive. And, I am left with the sense that Native Americans would be in a much better place if left to protect themselves, versus relying on their government for “protection.” Consider the following:

Over the last 150 years, the government has tried a series of conflicting ways of dealing with the natives of this nation—making war on them, making treaties with them, breaking treaties with them, sending them to Oklahoma (The Trail of Tears), forcing them onto reservations, forcing them off reservations, permitting them to own land collectively, forcing them to divide the land into individual plots, dispatching their children to boarding schools hundreds miles from home, closing the schools and sending the children home, outlawing practice of their religions, legalizing practice of those religions, discriminating against them in employment at the BIA, discriminating in favor of them in employment with the BIA, permitting them to run gambling operations under certain circumstances, increasing funding for the BIA and in fiscal 1996, cutting funding for BIA by $160 million, or 9 percent. (Carlson, 1997, p. 33)

Vine Deloria wrote a short essay in 1978 and presented it at a White House pre-Conference on Indian Library and Information Services On or Near Reservations, held in Denver, Colorado. It was filed under “Doctrines of Discovery.” The essay focused on education, the field that initially launched Deloria’s career in indigenous activism. In the first part, he traced the early history of intercultural relations between Native Nations and colonial Americans and described the contrasting cultural paradigms of the two peoples. It seems then,
that education of Native Americans follows the same path of the histories of so many Native American Nations.

The English settlers conceived education to be that of memorizing established truths which had passed down from generation to generation by their forebears, while Native peoples sought the maturity of the human personality rather than the transmission of a body of factual knowledge and doctrinal beliefs and [Indian education’s] pragmatic approach encouraged individual development and an attitude of intelligent subsistence in the world. (Wilkins, 2009, p. 22)

As an example, I present the case of a renowned Native American physician, Susan LaFlesche. She was educated in Native American schools. That does not sound like too terrible a fate. Well, “imagine that is what happened to eight-four Sioux boys and girls in 1879, when they were forced to leave their tribe behind and become students at the Carlisle Indian School” (Collins, 1999, book cover). This was the idea of a man who was an Indian fighter turned educator. He, however, never finished high school. He just decided that this school was the best way to avoid killing Indians or confining them to reservations. He wanted to remove them from their savage environment. The American government instituted The Boarding School Experience for the Indians (Klar, 2009).

Summary

Education is a large factor in the search for equality. Education is basically a process that entails strategies and materials meant to influence our thinking and behaviors. This education can be unpredictable and individualized and most often, experiential. It has been concluded by some educators that there are three types of education: formal (schooling), non-formal (training and capacity building), and informal (lived and daily experiences). Education can also be a product or a consequence of the process. The Native American is truly a student of all three types of education, but suffers most often from the consequences of their educational history.

To conclude, the history of Native Americans is wrought with injustices, brutality, greed,
and mistreatment. Amid this backdrop, I contemplate what it might be like for a Native American woman.
CHAPTER 3: METHODS AND RESEARCH PRACTICES

Design and Methodology

John Creswell (2007), professor of educational psychology at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, describes qualitative research metaphorically as “an intricate fabric composed of minute threads, many colors, different textures, and various blends of materials” (p. 37). Further, he asserts in his book *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, “Qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 37).

According to Creswell, the researcher acts as the “key instrument” (2007, p. 38) in exploring the process and the emergence of themes within that process. Regardless of the specific protocol followed in collecting the data, the researcher must analyze the data, make inferences from the data, generalize themes, and make connections.

“Case study” is simply interviews, descriptions, and interpretations; it is a qualitative research strategy “in which the researcher explores in depth a program, event, activity, or process of one or more individuals” (Creswell, 2009, p. 13). The cases are usually bounded by time and activity. Each case is unique; therefore, the questions will change. The case study form of research explores individual stories to describe the lives of people. The theoretical framework may be a qualitative storytelling structure, which is a flexible approach to writing a qualitative report. The meaning of the study unfolds through descriptions, the author’s reflection on the meaning of the data, a larger understanding of the phenomenon, and a return to the author’s stance on the topic. Spradley says, “People everywhere order their lives in terms of what things mean. All of us make use of meanings most of the time without thinking about it (p. 95).
I propose to explore and further examine the lived experiences of Native American women through their words, voices, and views. Educational researchers should study the struggles of all groups in the US in an effort to offer a comprehensive view of U.S. history. The purpose of any case study is to give the researcher the opportunity to research, explore, examine, and engage appropriate participants. And further, according to Bransford, Brown, & Cockling (2000) and Spindler (1982), the real purpose of conducting research is to make it possible to impact situations positively. These studies and examinations should be occurring, not at the expense of Native Americans, but in their honor.

In selecting participants for this study, I was influenced by my experience with two women I met through the Louisiana Indian Heritage Association (LIHA), a nonprofit state-chartered organization whose goal is to educate the public in the true traditions and culture of the American Indian. (LIHA has been one of the most important resources in educating myself about Native American culture.) The two women have a lengthy history with the LIHA and are member affiliates of the Sac/Fox tribe. I expanded my idea for interview participants when I met a member affiliate of the Cherokee tribe at a Louisiana State University (LSU) event. All three women are registered members of their respective tribes and are recognized members of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. I interviewed all three women.

**Historical Relationship**

The historical relationships of disenfranchisement, treaties and land ownership, education and poverty are complex, intertwined areas deserving more contemporary evaluation and research. “Although the freedom of their ancient way of life has been lost, the religion, culture, legends, and spirit of the American Indian will always endure (Louisiana Office of Indian Affairs, 2007).”
There are many researchers who explore the areas that support the proposition that Native Americans have been marginalized and, thereby, underrepresented. In the end, each and every one is underrepresented in one situation or the other. This concept compels me to explore and to further research the information supporting or dispelling the precepts related to the history in many areas of concern for Native Americans. When addressing the concept of bias, Gayatri Spivak warns the researcher to be aware of the temptation to “assume the role of the subaltern which identifies and describes the man, woman, and the social group who is socially, politically, and geographically outside the hegemonic power structure of the colony and of the Colonial Mother Country. Subaltern is not just a classy word for oppressed, for the other, it is for somebody who’s not getting a piece of the pie” (Wikipedia, 2013).

My focus for many years has been researching, learning, and writing about the history of Native Americans, especially in the areas of the history of Natives being marginalized by the “White man” and the continuous effort to acculturate Native American children by the forced removal and enrollment in the American-sponsored Indian boarding schools. In particular, I am fascinated by the role of women in these events and situations. How did they endure? How did they overcome such devastating obstacles? And how did they maintain cultural ways of being and seeing? After reading Carolyn Johnston’s (2011) article in Indian Country about the Cherokee Women’s Power and their history, I have a new understanding of Mihesuah and her seemingly defensive attitude about Native and non-Native writers. Johnston’s insight is well-documented in her book, Cherokee Women in Crisis; Trail of Tears, Civil War, and Allotment, 1838-1907. Johnston (2011) wrote, “Europeans were astonished that Cherokee women were men’s equals politically, economically, and theologically. Women had autonomy and sexual freedom, could obtain a divorce, and rarely experienced rape or domestic violence” (p. 40). In
my exploration and quest for a dissertation topic, these women scholars have been instrumental in my approach to finding a working title for my dissertation, and I remain compelled to follow this line of interest and research.

As a seminal text, *Native and Academics: Researching and Writing about American Indians*, is a book that is edited by Mihesuah. The title caught my eye, as there were many other Native American writers’ works within the book. Other writers cited in this book and preeminent Native writers are: Angela Cavender Wilson, Paula Gunn Allen, Vine Deloria Jr., Donald L. Fixico, Susan A. Miller, Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, Laurie Anne Whitt, Theodore S. Jojola, Duane Champagne and Karen Gayton Swisher. Each offers profound perspectives on this body of knowledge with Mihesuah writings in her introduction of the book about *Commonalty of Difference: American Indian Women and History*. In Mihesuah’s (1998) work she expresses her thoughts about understanding Native American women as….

Knowing of the oppression of Indian women at the hands of non-Indians, but what about inter- and intra-tribal racism and sexism? Tribes have long experienced factionalism, between those who cling to tradition and there are those who see change as the route to survival, whether it is tribal, familial, or personal survival. Intra-tribal factionalism might also be termed “cultureless”, a form of oppression that dovetails with racism. Indians in tribal power positions, political, economic, or social, often use expressions of cultureless against those who do not subscribe to their views. (p. 39)

**Framework**

The purpose of this case study is to examine how three Native American women share their stories. I intentionally select qualitative case study methodology because it provides a forum to situate data in a historical context. Case studies recorded in a narrative form provide an opportunity to place a particular event in context and to be able to categorize the events by similar themes. This qualitative case study, “How Native American Women Perceive Their Unique Lived Experiences: Three Women Tell Their Stories,” was based on research sources
and ongoing conversations and interviews with three women of Native American descent, whether similar or dissimilar.

Interactions, observations, and experiences with Native American individuals at Powwows have provided some pilot information relating to potential participants who are willing to be interviewed. The design of my case study was to conduct interviews, analyze the interviews, review documents and archived records, directly observe participants and their artifacts while finding the themes common to each interview, and develop a summary with recommendations and implications for future study. According to Merriam (2002), an interpretive qualitative study is one where “the researcher is interested in understanding the meaning a phenomenon has for those involved” (p. 37). Crotty (1998) describes meaning in this way… “Meaning, however, is not discovered, but constructed. Meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting” (pp. 42-43).

James Spradley believes researchers should be searching for meaning that participants make of their lives. He reflects that these meanings are expressed through “symbols, which can be words, but also be nonverbal cues” (p. 78). In reading his book *The Ethnographic Interview*, I was given a framework for analyzing the interviews of my participants. Spradley participated as a consultant to an ethnographic research project on Navajo schools, which he shared was an experience that greatly enriched his understanding of ethnography. He emphasizes that “ethnographic interviewing involves two distinct but complementary processes: developing rapport and eliciting information” (p. 78).

Spradley’s framework divides the rapport process into apprehension, explanation, cooperation, and participation (p. 79). He warns researchers that questions and answers come from two different cultural meanings systems; one must be aware that this cultural difference
frequently leads to distortion. Spradley suggests there are different strategies to formulate questions when studying another culture. Strategies he often uses are recording the questions people ask in the course of everyday life, and inquiring directly about questions used by participants in a cultural scene.

My first choice, and the protocol I feel most comfortable with, is asking informants to talk about particular cultural scenes. My experiences at Native American Powwows in the last few years have been enlightening, but certainly no more than a limited beginning to my learning. But through my interactions with Native Americans I have become aware of the importance of using culturally appropriate language.

**Researcher’s Bias, Entrée, and Assumptions**

There are issues that present themselves in a study of this dimension. Otherness is the quality or condition of being or seeing others as different, strange, or even exotic. I am not quite sure if that is a problem for me as non-Native, or possibly, a situation that will arise with the participants of various cultural backgrounds. It seems to me that the answer will depend on their situatedness or situational context or place, rather than by application of moral absolutes. Positioning is a point of view or attitude on certain questions, and Mihesuah is clear on her disagreements with Native and non-Native authors in regard to many of the questions that arise out of the issues or questions of the validity in the study of the marginalization of Native Americans.

Case study requires that researchers position themselves when engaging their subjects by owning up to any power positions such as race, educational background, and economic status. Possible problems with this dissertation may be in the area of entrée, the occurrence of being allowed and invited to study, with participants as partners. The power and or permission or
liberty to enter and gain acceptance as a non-Native is an area that I have been cautioned about as a researcher. As an issue of trust, there is the likelihood and the reality of cultural biases emerging from both sides, which can create a lack of validity and reliability from the participants and researcher, and may actually compromise gaining access in the first place. How will I locate Native American women and ask to interview and observe them? And, I will need to additionally explain the type of participant that I will be throughout the study. For example, will I be a moderate to active participant, not a full participant (Spradley, 1980)? Would it even be possible to act as a full participant, given my otherness as a non-Native woman? As a moderate to active participant, not a full participant, Spradley (1980) strikes a balance between being an insider and an outsider, between participator and observer.

For the purposes of this study, the indigenous peoples of the US will be referred to as Native Americans. This issue of marginalization has created significant impact on the lives of all individuals of Native American heritage. As a non-Native woman researcher, I anticipate I will offer a biased view. As a White woman, I assume my own lens of experience will inform what I see, hear, and observe and I will be mindful of what has been challenged by Mihesuah and other Native writers, as an impossible task to accomplish. My assumption is that I will use my own feminist lens of experience and my own cultural identity as a filter, thus while attempting to be objective, I cannot help but be subjective. Through this case study, Native American women who may have never found a voice for their crucial role in their Native lives and their history of the ancestral mother’s and grandmother’s role can possibly find voice in the cultural development of their Native American Nations. These are stories waiting to be told.

Mihesuah is an inspiration to me, and I embrace her direct and succinct suggestions in my ongoing effort to give voice to Native American women. I will continue to caution myself about
taking care of Native American women’s integrity and culture and the awareness of my innate bias, whether positive or negative, real or perceived.

The struggles and tensions with this kind of research are to be able to explore and succinctly transcribe the interviews of Native American women. I hope to obtain a clearer definition of their situation from the interviewees in their explanations of their history in their Nations. Observations and review of artifacts will add depth to interview data. I realize the exploration and the search for data about the Native American world is certainly informed by the likenesses and the differences of the individuals living in that world. For me, such an exploration is a never-ending educational adventure.

What may be deduced from the analysis and interviews, although individuals have varying views and beliefs about religions, culturally they may be aligned in their views of the importance of education, religion, family values, culture, and ethnicity. Their religious leaders may be depicted in many different ways. Does that help define them and their religions? Do they all honor a “Supreme Being” and does that help them relate to other human beings and their leaders?

Dr. Lori Arviso Alvord, with the assistance of Elizabeth Cohen Van Pelt, wrote an amazing book about Dr. Alvord becoming the first Navajo woman surgeon. She combines western medicine and traditional healing in her writing of *The Scalpel and the Silver Bear*. She states, “I would like to thank my creator for giving me life and for showing me that love is the strongest medicine of all”. McCullough, Worthington, Maxey and Rachel (1997), suggested that several forms of religious involvement (including intrinsic religious motivation, attendance at religious worship, receiving coping support from one’s religious faith or religious congregation, and positive religious attributions for life events) are positively associated with a variety of measures of mental health. (p. 80)
This being true, the researcher truly believes that the survival and positive attitudes along with the indomitable determination and spirit of the Native Americans can be attributed to their spiritual beliefs and their attention to those beliefs throughout their lives. Their spirituality is closely aligned with their family values, their educational drive, and their commitment to their culture and ethnicity. I believe it is impossible to delineate emerging themes and know where one starts and the other theme ends. Native American women are probably a compilation of their religion, culture, ethnicity, family values, and education. However, this is yet to be determined. How will I be cognizant of these issues and yet not portray my participants as superbeings? How will I best tease out and report themes that emerge from data analysis?

An area of particular concern for researchers is etic data. Etic data is the information representing the researcher’s interpretation of the participant’s perspective. “Etic” typically refers to second-order concepts, such as the language used by the researcher to refer to the same phenomena mentioned by the participants. After gaining entry or establishing trust from my participants, I would need to be especially careful and aware of the anomalies of the Native American culture and extending most cautiously into the female world.

I return to this issue of power as I consider the aspects of this inquiry on how Native American women perceive their lived experiences. Such a study will attempt to examine areas of historical significance contributing to the marginalization of Native American women and subsequent issues surrounding their lives. Sheila Keegan (2009) writes, “Although we may refer to the outcomes of qualitative research as data, they are not data in the sense of facts or statistics. The data refer to behavior, thoughts, opinions, meaning and the like” (p. 13). Keegan reinforces my beliefs that this case study methodology “requires a high level of interpretation and synthesis of data by the researcher throughout the process, both in the interaction with the research
participants and in the analysis and presentation of the research outcomes. As such, qualitative researchers need to be highly skilled and competent in all stages of the research process” (p. 13).

Interpretation is filtered through a researcher’s own lens or frame of reference. “What we see also depends on how we look—how we open ourselves up to the acts of seeing” (Chiseri-Strater & Sunstein, 1997, p. 97). I will collect what I observe, and what I am allowed to collect through interviews, conversations, and observations, and possibly, through access to artifacts not commonly available. Decisions I make about what to observe and consequently record will be influenced by what I already know and believe. Using the lens of my own theory allows me to use myself as a tool to filter data, to become part of the data.

Qualitative case study methodology involves in-depth interpretation and analysis. The analysis of the data generated through such a study will be conducted according to established protocols. As a first-time researcher, the task seems enormous, but I look forward to the challenge of sifting through data, coding it, interpreting it, arranging it, and summarizing.

The Appropriateness of a Case Study with a Feminist Lens

A feminist lens allows me to expand the focus and purpose of a narrative into a study of women and the cultural practices that serve to disempower and oppress them. Like Mihesuah, Gesa E. Kirsch discusses the ethical dilemmas faced in feminist research, particularly issues of interpretation.

Several feminist researchers have been inspirational. In particular, the seminal work of bell hooks (1981), whose first major work, Ain’t I a woman: Black women and feminism, defined central feminist themes of culture, gender, race, and class that have continually categorized her work. A prolific writer, hooks has continued to impact feminist thought by examining the juncture of the unique dynamics of race, gender, culture, and economic status as they pertain to
women. Although hooks is Black, her work and views apply to a study of Native American women.

Writing in the feminist lens, Elizabeth A. St. Pierre (2000) studies and writes about older southern women living in the southern Piedmont region of the US. St. Pierre, as she has grown older, has become increasingly interested in how women construct their stories. This is an excellent example of a feminist writing about non-Native American women. Again, her findings can apply to Native American women.

Like St. Pierre, feminist researcher Sharlene Hesse-Biber (2007) claims that it is imperative for feminist researchers to look at the experiences of women of various ethnic, racial, and cultural backgrounds who have been neglected by mainstream research. Hesse-Biber states those who examine the lives of women must begin with women’s lived experiences (2007) and should include the interconnections of research epistemology and methods in relation to those being studied. Her work speaks to my intention in this proposed study, to examine the lived experiences of Native American women amid cultural, gender, and economic backdrops. Hesse-Biber researches and writes with co-author Deborah Piatelli (2007); they explore the intersection of theory and method and how one informs the other.

Another feminist whose work has influenced me is Elizabeth Ellsworth. Although she is known for her work with online learning environments, new communication media, and museum exhibits, she has written extensively as a feminist since writing her dissertation in 1984. Her dissertation, “The Power of Interpretive Communities: Feminist Appropriations of Person Best,” was a research study on the relationship between audience interpretive strategies and social change written through a feminist perspective. Ellsworth has influenced me to think about research as responsibility. Ellsworth has taught me that we must question why we do research.
and for whose purpose. Each day, according to Ellsworth, I should rethink what I do and why. From her I have learned to question my motives, question my purposes, and question myself—openly and continually (1988, 1994).

Like St. Pierre and Ellsworth, Mary Crow Dog also provides a feminist narrative, allowing the voices of women to tell their own stories. Mary Crow Dog shares a Cheyenne Proverb: “A nation is not conquered until the hearts of its women are on the ground. Then it is done, no matter how brave its warriors nor how strong their weapons” (Anonymous, 2007). She tells us about the Lakota Women adopting a feminist perspective by quoting many of them. She begins by opening the first chapter with Mary Brave Bird and her story.

After I had my baby during the siege of Wounded Knee they gave me a special name-Ohitika Win, Brave Women, and fastened an eagle plume in my hair, singing brave heart songs for me. I am a woman of the Red Nation, A Sioux woman. That is not easy. If you plan to be born, make sure you are white and male. It is not the big, dramatic things so much that get us down, but just being Indian, trying to hang on to our way of life, language, and values while surrounded by an alien, more powerful culture. It is being a half-blood, being looked down upon by whites and full-bloods alike. After my sister was born the doctors performed a hysterectomy on my mother without her permission, which was common at the time. Often I wanted to purge out my white blood. The fight for the land is the core of our existence, as it has been for the two hundred years. Once the land is gone, then we are gone, too. (pp. 3-17)

Rather than summarize or convey a story in her words, Crow Dog allows the woman’s own voice to speak to readers. This is the hallmark of feminist writing, which employs a narrative form, weaving the words, and thus voices of their participants to actually convey an experience versus a researcher trying to capture the essence of a story through summarization.

Two additional feminist researchers inform this work. Carol Gilligan (1993 & 2003) recommends data interpretation methods that are advocated by feminist researchers. She views using a feminist lens as a way to bring women’s voices and ways of perceiving into the world’s view (Gilligan, 1993). Corrine Glesne (2006) discusses interviewer attributes. Glesne suggests
that women researchers who study women engage in and acquire the interviewer trait of silence when interviewing, thus allowing for true listening.

The aforementioned feminist researchers have influenced my thinking, yet they are not single minded in their approach to research, their interest, or their findings. According to John Creswell, “Feminist perspectives are a view as problematic as women’s diverse situations and the institutions that frame those situations” (2007, p. 62).

Research on Native American women’s lives should support the premise that the voices of Native Americans, especially Native American women, has been challenged by the attempt of non-Natives to marginalize and dismiss their personal value and their contributions to the history of the US and their tribal/Native groups collectively. They have suffered and continue to suffer from marginalization. I pose the question because of my experiences as a White, non-Native woman. The non-Native’s ignorance of the cultural beliefs of the Native woman continues to force these women into a role as underrepresented citizens in this country and to devalue their voice. My challenge as a non-Native is to be true to their personal history and to be especially careful in researching the facts as they are presented by many authors. Mihesuah (2005) points out that,

You cannot talk about the political aspects of a tribe without also considering how religion, gender roles, economy, worldview, and Euro-American policies affect tribal policies. Writers disassociated from tribal life do not understand how these issues interrelate, but this methodology makes perfect sense to Natives who are culturally aware. You must learn how the social, political, religious, and economic aspects of American Indian life are interconnected. (p. 7)

Others also express this sentiment. “In the history and current affairs genre, the reissue of a 2004 volume by Wilma Mankiller, requires mentioning”. In this issue of Indian Country, Every Day is a Good Day: Reflections by Contemporary Indigenous Women (Anniversary Edition) contains the reminiscences of 19 Native women who share with her their stories about
social, political, religious, and economic aspects of Native American life. Their responses are compelling and noteworthy.

Native American culture is not a homogeneous culture; rather, each nation has its own set of beliefs, ways of speaking, traditions, and gender roles. However, because of historical happenings such as the initial founding of the US and implications for Native peoples, land grabs, the westward settlement, relocation policies, including forced removal of the children, as well as the establishment of reservations, some issues cut across tribal boundaries and have impacted all Native American Nations. The following scholars address some of the eminent issues surrounding the study of Native American women.

In her book *Natives and Academics: Researching and Writing about American Indians*, Mihesuah (1998) continues to question the motivation of non-Native writers in her words, “Many think that because they’re watched *Dances with Wolves*, read *House Made of Dawn*, were a Boy or Girl Scout and have watched a powwow that are knowledgeable about Native histories and cultures” (p. 9). Mihesuah (1998) speaks to the common problem with the language used to describe Native Americans in her book.

You will see throughout the book I use the terms American Indians and Natives interchangeably. I sometimes use the former only because it is recognizable to most Americans, but many Native people find the phrase offensive because it is a label assigned by Euro-Americans, not by the people themselves. I prefer indigenous or native but not with American, because both make a statement: Natives were created on this hemisphere and did not migrate from another continent. Native American refers to anyone born here, including those people with no relation to tribes (pp. xi-xii).

Because the history of Native peoples truly is a part of U.S. history, it is essential to view the historical issues, events, and acts or laws that have impacted Native peoples. While artifacts remain—some in the hands of descendants, others in museums—what has been lost through
assimilation are aspects of culture, such as language. With each generation, links to the past fade or are forgotten. In the case of women, those bodies of knowledge are even more tenuous.

Another Native American historian, who often uses Deloria as a reference and includes his own personal experiences, is Dean Chavers (2009). He opens his book *Racism in Indian Country* using a feminist lens with a poignant dedicational note to his wife:

To my beautiful wife Antonia Navarro Chavers, She has suffered the sting of discrimination as I have. She remembers vividly growing up in South Texas. She remembers how her brothers and sisters would have to eat their ice cream on the sidewalk. The restaurant would sell them ice cream out the side door, but they could not go inside to eat it. She still remembers vividly the landlady who tried to evict her from her first apartment when she finished nursing school. Thank goodness for her roommate Diane who threatened the landlady with a lawsuit. The landlady backed down. She remembers as recently as 1985 how she was discriminated against in Tulsa. She would select her purchases at the store. But when she would go to pay for them, the clerks would always wait on the white ladies first. If she did nothing she was wrong. If she protested she was wrong and uppity. We soon left Oklahoma. Thank you, Toni, for hanging in there.

According to Brent Davis (2009),

Identity is a matter that merits discussion. Western mysticisms and religions alike tend to regard personal identity as pregiven, unchanging and eternal. There are many variations on this theme. For example, the human soul is sometimes seen as an entity that cycle through physical forms on the route to perfection. In other traditions, the soul is seen as breath of life, direct from the Almighty and fated either to external bliss or eternal damnation depending on such factors as birthright, lifestyle, and opting into or out of a particular set of doctrines.

N. Bruce Duthu (2008) relates to his personal identification as a member of the Louisiana Houma tribe in his book *American Indians and the Law*. However, the book was unsettling to me, as I perused it and read about issue after issue identifying the marginalization of our indigenous peoples. He shares about his growing up as a member of the largest tribe in the state of Louisiana, yet he says, “Absent a history of treaty-making with the United States and distrustful of our oral history, the federal government elects not to recognize our people as a
tribal political body with powers of self-governance” (p. 218). And today, this is still a fact. He goes on to speak about their three separate school systems: white, black and Indian. They were punished for speaking their native language and in their church they sat in the Indian section.

New Mexico’s previous Governor Bill Richardson writes

Duthu’s (2008) intellectual honesty and compassionate message give a strong voice to our sovereign neighbors who are all too often forgotten or ignored in today’s political arena. This book triggers a sense of moral justice and the need for a new beginning where Indian nations have a seat at the table of democracy. (book cover)

**Data Sources**

The women participants need to self-identify as Native American (Collins, Onwuegbuzie, & Jiao, 2007). Possible data sources include: interviews, both formal and informal, field notes from observations, and artifacts. Chiseri-Strater and Sunstein (1997) suggest that “you need your informants' actual words to support your findings” (p. 203). Pseudonyms may be used to protect the identity of my informants and to maintain their anonymity.

**Data Analysis**

I digitally recorded all formal interviews and take detailed notes when observing. Artifacts will be described, and if allowed, photographed. To guard against potential bias or possible incorrect inferences, I asked my participants to review and edit interview transcripts.

Once data has been generated and collected, it has to be analyzed. Data analysis is the process of systematically searching and arranging interview transcripts, field notes, and other accumulated materials to increase your own understanding of them and to enable you to present what you have discovered to others. (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 157). I used the complete interviews as transcribed to glean pertinent information for assimilation into the dissertation. Each participant was interviewed for approximately two hours each. The need for further
exploration was determined after the interviews were transcribed, analyzed, and reviewed by the participants and me.

The most important element of the interview process is the rapport with the participants and the researcher’s ability to generate a conversation that is sensitive to cultural biases and based on a rapport developed with the participant. Spradley relates that the most effective technique for the study of cultural belief systems is for the individual ethnographer to immerse himself in the culture as deeply as possible and, by some series of private, unstated, and sometimes unconscious operations, to integrate large amounts of information into an organized and coherent set of propositions. (p. 190)

My 6-year study of Native Americans includes time spent on the Navajo reservation reading Native historical information; attending Powwows; identifying and speaking with Native Americans (other than my three participants); visiting Native American museums in Washington, D.C.; Marksville, Louisiana; and Narragansett, New Jersey.

I reviewed the transcribed interview data to find individual similarities and differences between the participants. The analysis of concepts and categories led to final themes.

Trustworthiness

In a poignant book for writers of American Indian history by Mihesuah (2005), *So You Want to Write about American Indians: A Guide for Writers, Students, and Scholars*, her writing targets and succinctly gives her view about writers checking with the tribe’s research guideline committee. She gives information about places to look for information to help avoid inappropriate or inaccurate research sources and is very clear about her purpose for writing. Writing is “to educate, inspire, and correct misleading stories about Natives. This book is not meant to discourage anyone from writing about Natives, but rather to encourage sensitive, truthful, inclusive, and honest writing” (p. x-xi). She has also written *American Indians:*
Stereotypes and Realities, where she continues to contribute to the historical archives regarding her Native Cherokee culture.

**Timeline**

Securing participants occurred during early fall, 2012. Once participants agreed to the study, interviews were scheduled in October 2012, in a mutually agreed upon, neutral location. I asked if I could visit any cultural events such as fall Powwows. I inquired if I could view any personal artifacts such as photographs. All data was collected by March 2013. Analysis began as soon as all data was transcribed, and each participant was allowed to review their transcript.

**Summary**

I have come full circle as to why I chose to study how Native American women perceive their unique lived experiences. My journey began when I entered teaching as a way to make a difference—a way to give back—and one of the few avenues available to me as a female growing up in the Deep South in the 1960s. Now, in 2012, after 42 years as an educator, I have the freedom and privilege to pursue an intensely personal and interesting course of study.

S. Keegan (2009) speaks about qualitative research by explaining that “interpretivist participants are encouraged to interact with one another in a fluid, improvisation manner that involves emotions and bodily gestures. All contributions are subjective.” She recommends home-based interviewing, which is interviewing the research participants in their own environments (p. 41).

“Qualitative research explores questions such as why and how rather than how many or how much when trying to understand why individuals think and behave as they do” (Keegan, 2009, p. 11). Such a study of Native American women was ambitious and intimidating; however, I felt such a study was warranted and interesting. And, I was excited about the
challenge. I have given myself voice, and I hope to do the same for Native American women who have been similarly challenged. “How Native American Women Perceive Their Unique Lived Experiences: Three Women Tell Their Stories” is an effort to give three Native American women the opportunity to tell their stories about their Native American history.

In closing, and to share my desire to follow in the footsteps of Native American women feminists, I leave you with the words of Ella Cara Deloria, spoken to John D. Rockefeller Jr. in 1934…

To me it seems like a religious duty to get everything as right as I possibly can, for future scholars. Perhaps this sounds silly; but I have an idea that this is my work, which none other can do. You see, I represent a middle era, in the development of my tribe. I lived the early years of my life in the heart of Sitting Bull country, spoke the language and heard many myths as a child. I am related, according to the social kinship system of my tribe, with everyone in it. Then I was sent to school. I went on and on, and by one lucky break after another, I was a college graduate, in due time. With my college training, coupled with my Indian background lived in the days when it was really Indian background, I stand on middle ground, and know both sides. I do not say I am the best educated Indian that ever will be; that is not so; but no matter how far a younger student should go, he could not know both sides, because that other, the Indian side, is gone. That is why I feel as though I have a mission. (Cotera, 2008, p. 41)
CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to give three Native American women the opportunity to share their unique lived experiences expressed through the stories they tell and their personal histories. Through this case study, reported through narrative, readers will have an opportunity to examine the lived experiences of three Native American women, and although the unique experiences of these women are not universal to all Native American women, they can provide a window into the distinct lives of Native women.

Review of Design and Methodology

As noted previously, John Creswell (2007) asserts, “Qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldview, and the possible use of a theoretical lens and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 37). Furthermore, according to Creswell, the researcher is the “key instrument” (2007, p. 38) in exploring and discovering themes within that process. The researcher analyzes and makes inferences from the data, generalizes themes, and makes connections. Through the case study form of research, individual stories may be explored to describe the lives of people; the researcher may engage, explore, and examine participants. Qualitative case study provides the researcher an opportunity to tell stories of the lived experiences of the participants. The stories unfold as the author reflects on the data and understands the significance of the participant’s words.

To gain comprehensive knowledge of U.S. history, educational researchers must study all groups in the US. To that end, I have explored and further examined the lived experiences of Native American women through their words, voices, and views. According to Bransford,
Brown, & Cockling (2000) and Spindler (1982), the real purpose of conducting research is to make it possible to impact situations positively. I believe I have done exactly that.

**Data Analysis of Interviews**

My goal was to tell each participant’s story, not at her expense, but rather in her honor. In doing so, I proposed, as originally stated in Chapter 1, to reveal a view of how she perceives herself and her lived experiences. This case study revealed unique stories—even more unique than my previous research had disclosed—and confirms that, while the experiences of the participants are not universal to all Native American women, they might provide a window into the distinct lives of Native women.

**Developing Themes from Interviews I and II**

One of my initial concepts was that Native American women, as a subgroup to both the dominant male culture and as members of Native American culture, have traditionally been marginalized within U.S. society, as women and as Native Americans. I have contended that all women can be viewed as part of the fabric of U.S. culture, yet they maintain an existence as a subculture. Through my discussions with Lela Bess, I found that the Cherokee culture has a matrilineal (women are the power) line of dominance. Lela Bess’s grandmothers welcomed non-Native men into their lives, thereby facilitating the men’s livelihoods on the Cherokee Territory as viable ranchers, bankers, and businessmen. Through Interview II with Teri Bates Richard, I learned that the Sac and Fox culture has a matrilineal line of dominance as well. Themes from all three interviews are presented later in this chapter, preceding the third interview.

**Interview I. Lela Bess**

**Subject and setting for Interview I.** This opportunity to follow my passion by continuing to study Native Americans, especially Native women, in the examination of their
stories, came to fruition when I became acquainted with the great, great, great, great, great, great, great, great granddaughter of Annie Beehunter. Lela Bess is a 77-year-old member of the Cherokee Wolf Clan, which is comprised of descendants of her ninth-generation grandmother Annie Beehunter (1692-1793), from the tribe of Native Americans living in upper Georgia in the Cherokee territory. Lela Bess and I met, quite accidentally, at a Louisiana State University (LSU) fundraiser. She had come to Baton Rouge to continue her support of the Baton Rouge Women’s Club Book Drive.

On a Friday morning in February 2012, I went to the book drive to explore the shelves dedicated to Native American books. I approached a petite, stately woman behind a table of books and asked for assistance. I was surprised when she quickly directed me to the books I needed, amongst thousands of available books for sale. As I thanked her and started to walk away, she stopped me and asked why I was interested in that topic, so I gladly proceeded to tell her my story about being an LSU (Louisiana State University) Ph.D. student and the title and topic of my dissertation. She then informed me she was a ninth-generation Cherokee and had been researching and writing about her matrilineal heritage for countless years; I was immediately intrigued. After a short conversation she gave me her name, address, and phone number. Within a month of our meeting, I visited her one weekend at her home in Fairhope, Alabama, to share Native information and talk about the sharing of her stories. We enjoyed our time together and the sharing of our experiences about Louisiana, my research, and her stories about Native Americans, especially her nine generations of Cherokee grandmothers. I was hopeful that she was as committed to this exploration as I was.

After the weekend, Lela Bess and I continued to interact through e-mails. We decided to continue the relationship, and I was excited about engaging her as one of my dissertation
participants. She and her husband, who is originally from New Orleans, had lived in Baton Rouge for many years, and they still travel often between Alabama and Louisiana. Case study is a research method that demands the participants and researchers get to know and trust one another; I felt our weekend together was our first step. Subsequently, Lela Bess decided to engage in the recording of her family history, and to tell her stories for my dissertation.

**Interview format and collection procedures for Interview I.** Lela Bess and I continued e-mailing and discussing her renewed and ongoing interest in her family history. We set up dates for future meetings and interviews, pending clearance by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). We discussed the necessary consent form that would allow me to record our conversation(s) and transcribe them for inclusion in this study, which she subsequently signed. These preliminary steps required ongoing explanations, confirmations, and assurances about my motives and her commitment to the process. I continuously assured her she would be given access to all of my work, especially the opportunity to review the recordings and remove any words or information that may be questionable for the public domain.

Lela Bess provided the following list of her matrilineal ancestors (beginning with herself). The locations listed in the third column represent birthplaces.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lela Bess Kite Patterson</td>
<td>1935 -</td>
<td>Dallas, Texas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bessie Clem Oliver Kite</td>
<td>1912 -</td>
<td>Chouteau, Oklahoma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lela Clem Hayden Oliver</td>
<td>1888 - 1965</td>
<td>Chouteau, Indian Territory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca Caroline Bryan</td>
<td>1850 - 1917</td>
<td>Hayden Chouteau, Oklahoma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Husband on Dawes Rolls)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca Wright Bryan</td>
<td>1814 - 1882</td>
<td>Indian Territory East, Georgia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Husband was Principal Chief of Cherokee Nation)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Transcription of Interview I with Lela Bess. Following are transcribed audio recordings from the interview with Lela Bess, which lasted 1 hour and 20 minutes. The transcription provided support for my interpretations of my findings, which deviated, somewhat, from my original beliefs and perceptions. Lela Bess is the participant and I am the interviewer.

Interviewer: Okay this is recording.

Lela Bess: I was eligible for UDC [United Daughter of the Confederacy] because my Cherokee grandfather was in charge of the Cherokee mounted cavalry in Oklahoma.

Interviewer: Keep that by you because I want to talk about both of those.

Lela Bess: I used to make my students, when they were going to write a term paper, to state their objective in 10 words or less. Can you do that?

Interviewer: Yes.

Lela Bess: For me?

Interviewer: Mhm.

Lela Bess: Then I’ll know where we’re going, beginning with the preposition “To”: “My purpose is to –” or “My paper is –” or “My study is –”
Interviewer: Okay, so --

Lela Bess: I don’t know if this from you or somebody else -- oh this is an article I wrote in to this magazine and they printed it.

Interviewer: And all of those things, if I can I will be very careful with. I’ll make copies of it if you want me to make copies of it. And I will put it in a folder and bring it back to you in unless you need some of it now.

So those are considered artifacts. And if there’s anything that you don’t want me to use just tell me and I’ll make sure that I don’t. At this point in time do you have things that you know you don’t want me to share with anybody?

Lela Bess: No. I just will not give you copies of anything I do not want you to use.

Interviewer: Okay. I will now tell you what my goal is. That it’s important to me to establish an importance of my research by being able to succinctly organize, record, and transcribe and reflect your story. This is the statement of my problem: to describe your life and your ancestors’ lives and experiences so that readers can enter into a world they may never have had or heard about or seen.

Lela Bess: That’s pretty obscure.

Interviewer: Mhm. Mhm.

Lela Bess: Can enter into a world?
Interviewer: Your world.

Lela Bess: But mine is so normal.

Interviewer: And that may be exactly what we establish… is that your view of your world may be what you think is normal, but it may reflect experiences that no person has ever had.

Lela Bess: I’m thinking nobody ever calls me normal.

Interviewer: No, I certainly would not, having spoken with you and how this all began I would not say -- but I don’t think that there’s any such thing as a normal person anyway, you know because we all have different reflections on our lives that tell different stories.

Lela Bess: In different times they mean something different.

Interviewer: Exactly.

Lela Bess: Okay well let’s see what we can do.

Interviewer: Make sense to you? So we are doing it --

Lela Bess: So you’re just going to question me?

Interviewer: I’m -- hopefully what I’m going to do is give you questions that will probe somewhat and have you -- these are some questions that I have that I’m going to keep in front of me.

Lela Bess: Okay.
Interviewer: And somehow I don’t think that it’s going to be too much of a lull in the conversation.

Lela Bess: We don’t seem to have that problem.

Interviewer: No. My new title is—this is the title of the dissertation at this point in time. This is the title that I used with the abstract that I reported: *How Native American Women Perceive Their Unique Lived Experiences: Two Women Tell Their Stories*. And it may end up being three women. This is not the end of all, because my dissertation title may change somewhat after this is approved and after I finish, because there are three of you. But I have a feeling it’s going to end up being just you and one other woman from Baton Rouge that’s part of the Powwow organization, so we’ll see. The other woman -- I have a feeling that the other woman is -- her life has not been good, her husband just lost both of his legs. They are both 100% Native Americans and he had diabetes and he lost both legs.


Interviewer: But it’s -- as we know it’s rampant on the reservation. So that being said tell me -- okay, you are full Cherokee or half Cherokee?

Lela Bess: Like 1/32\(^n\)th, something like that. I have it on my card that I carry in my purse.

Interviewer: But they registered you as a tribal member?
Lela Bess: No, 1/32<sup>nd</sup>, I mean it’s nothing.

Interviewer: One thirty-second Cherokee.

Lela Bess: I may have to go down nine generations: the first one would be 50% then 25, you know.

Interviewer: And I did that for myself on that schematic that you saw that had the arrows down, I went down nine generations.

Lela Bess: You may have it more exact than I do.

Interviewer: No I don’t; I didn’t figure it. But, so 1/32<sup>nd</sup> Cherokee. You are a member of the tribe?

Lela Bess: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay.

Lela Bess: A voting member.

Interviewer: Voting member of the Cherokee tribe? Okay. And these are things that’ll be on both of those recorders, but I want to have this as a schematic to draw back on. Pat is not at all Native American, so your children will be one divided by what, four?

Lela Bess: You want me to get my card, get it exact?

Interviewer: No, let’s do that next time [at our planned second interview].

Lela Bess: It’s in my purse.
Interviewer: So then tell me your mother and your father and tell me their ethnicity.

Lela Bess: Daddy was -- he was Scottish and Irish.

Interviewer: And his name?

Lela Bess: Arthur Madison Kite. M-A-D-I-S-O-N. They were naming after presidents back in that time. His daddy was George Washington Kite.

Interviewer: Wow. Arthur Madison Kite; do you know what year he was born?

Lela Bess: Well he said he lived longer than anybody in his family. He died the year we moved to Baton Rouge which was 1990 and he was 85 years old; is that 1908, somewhere in there?

Interviewer: Yeah, 1905, if he was 88, 1908.

Lela Bess: No, he was 85.

Interviewer: So 1905. Where was he born?

Lela Bess: In Colorado, Gray Creek, Colorado. Then his family traveled on covered wagons and went back to the East through the years. They stopped in Arkansas a while, then they went to West Virginia -- he loved the mountains. And his daddy was a carpenter and a printer; he always had a print shop wherever he went and he could print the papers and whatever needed printing in those days. And they ended up back in Pine Bluff when Daddy was in high school and that’s where he met my mother, at Little Rock High School, and they got married during the Depression.
They moved to Dallas, Texas, at that time because his brother-in-law had a business there in the meat-packing business. And then I was born. When I was 18 months old they moved to Monroe, Louisiana, because Uncle Will had his packing plant there and Daddy was a wholesale meat shopper. He worked for himself the rest of his life.

Interviewer: What was his educational background?

Lela Bess: High school, Mama too.

Interviewer: Both of them finished high school?

Lela Bess: Yeah. She had -- I think I told you -- that scholarship to go from the high school and she said, “Oh no, we’ve got money. Give that to somebody who needs it,” and then the Depression hit and they had nothing. So she went to secretarial school like Metropolitan Life and had a little job with them for a while.

Interviewer: Wow.

Lela Bess: And Daddy was doing -- what kind of radio is that? [trying to recall]

Interviewer: Oh CBs [Citizen’s Band]?

Lela Bess: No. He did CBs but before that you had -- how you’d send Western Union.

Interviewer: Oh, okay, not ticker tape -- yes. Tell me your mom’s name.

Lela Bess: Bessie.
Interviewer: B-E-S-S-I-E-?

Lela Bess: Clem, C-L-E-M -- C, is that a C?

Interviewer: No it’s not.

Lela Bess: Oliver.

Interviewer: O-L-I-V-E-R?

Lela Bess: Kite.

Interviewer: Now your mom was not the Native American?

Lela Bess: Yes, she is. [She speaks as if her mother is still alive.]

Interviewer: Your mom’s the Native American, your father Scotch Irish?

Lela Bess: Mhm.

Interviewer: Okay.

Lela Bess: It’s S-C-O-T-S, Scots Irish. People say that wrong all the time.

Interviewer: Really? I have written that all my life wrong because I’m Scotch Irish, as well, but we’ve always called it Scotch Irish because I belong to the McLain clan.

Lela Bess: Well people do, but I think it’s really S-C-O-T-S.

Interviewer: I know you’re a fanatic about that stuff. But you teach me stuff. That’s good.
Lela Bess: She grew up in Choteau in Oklahoma. She’s the Cherokee.

Interviewer: S-H-O-T-O?


Interviewer: Oh okay, Choteau, Oklahoma.

Lela Bess: Oklahoma.

Interviewer: You may be related to our best friends. My best friend that lived down the street from us in New Jersey is Cherokee.

Lela Bess: Mhm.

Interviewer: And they come from Oklahoma and his brother still lives in Choteau.

Lela Bess: My Cherokee ancestors moved there before the Trail of Tears. There were some of the plantation owners in Georgia who saw the handwriting on the wall and took their plantations and their slaves and their families and they were called the “Old Settlers.”

Interviewer: Wow.

Lela Bess: They went before the Trail of Tears.

Interviewer: So they were called the Old Settlers.

Lela Bess: Mhm.

Interviewer: And your mom was born in Choteau, Alabama?
Lela Bess: No, Oklahoma.

Interviewer: I mean Oklahoma -- sorry, I meant to say Oklahoma. What year was she born?

Lela Bess: She’s a few years younger than Daddy.

Interviewer: So in 1903, something like that?

Lela Bess: I should look those up for you.

Interviewer: Yeah if you can. And it’s just a frame of reference.

Lela Bess: She was 90 when she died.

Interviewer: Okay and where did she die?


Interviewer: And your daddy was in Monroe, as well? Okay. So they had quite a different frame of reference.

Lela Bess: So if you really look into my personal history, it takes place in Monroe, Louisiana, because we moved there when I was 18 months and left there when I went to LSU. And never went back, I mean to live.

Interviewer: Wow. So Monroe… and you were in Monroe ’til you finished LSU [Louisiana State University]? And LSU --

Lela Bess: No, I was in Monroe until I went to LSU as a freshman ’cause I graduated from Louisiana Tech.
Interviewer: What year was that, do you remember?

Lela Bess: Let’s see, graduated high school in ’53, college in ’56.

Interviewer: You did it in three years?

Lela Bess: Oh, yeah.

Interviewer: That’s right you’ve said that… that you wanted to -- because you met Pat [husband] when?

Lela Bess: In ’56.

Interviewer: Okay, you wanted to finish school --

Lela Bess: And I had to stay at Tech two more years ’til he finished.

Interviewer: I remember that. So… Pat finished Tech in ’58, cool.

Lela Bess: No, what did I just say?

Interviewer: You finished LSU in ’56 and Pat finished two years later in ’58.

Lela Bess: Yeah.

Interviewer: And that’s just -- if we’re off on dates -- I may not even use dates; I’m trying to establish a thought and a picture for myself. So Mom --

Lela Bess: And her mom ’cause this is a matrilineal Cherokee picture. It’s all the moms, even though some of the men had Cherokee blood it’s not counted when you add up -- that’s why the numbers change so drastically. There’s
now one more female born into this family: my sister’s daughter had a little girl. So she would be -- since Angela [Lela Bess’s daughter] couldn’t have any more children she didn’t have a daughter so that ended my line. This would have to go through KK [Lela Bess’s sister] to her daughter to her granddaughter.

Interviewer: Okay matrilineal, so you’re the carrier of the line.

Lela Bess: Angela would be the last of this particular line.

Interviewer: Okay and is there a name for her line that -- your line, is there an actual name for your line?

Lela Bess: Well you go by the ancestor, Annie Beehunter.

Interviewer: Okay.

Lela Bess: That is the original -- the first squaw that married the foreigner. And then her descendant was only 50%. It goes down 25 --

Interviewer: Okay we’re going to take her down to the bottom.

Lela Bess: Okay.

Interviewer: But that is the line is from Annie Beehunter.

Lela Bess: I did know it: Annie, Nanie, Jennie, Rebecca, Rebecca Caroline, Lela, Lela Clem, Bessie Clem, and Lela Bess [These are the first names of Lela Bess’s maternal ancestors, ending with herself].
Interviewer: Okay do that again.

Lela Bess: I don’t know if I can: Annie --

Interviewer: Annie or Anna?

Lela Bess: I-E, A-N-N-I--E. And her daughter was named Nanie, N-A.

Interviewer: I-E? Just one N?

Lela Bess: I have last names for these people too: Annie, Nanie, Jennie J-E-N-N-I-E, Rebecca, Rebecca Caroline, Lela Clem -- I’m not putting surnames on these.

Interviewer: No. We’ll go back after you -- so not to get confused.

Lela Bess: Bessie Clem, Lela Bess, and Angela Carol.

Interviewer: So no daughter stops the line. But your sister has a daughter that continued the line, so --

Lela Bess: Well yeah. It’s just that she never indulged in any of this knowledge.

Interviewer: Okay but it’s still your -- what’s your sister’s name?

Lela Bess: KK.

Interviewer: K or C?


Interviewer: And her daughter?

Interviewer: B-R-Y-A-N.

Lela Bess: And her little girl’s name -- wait, the new baby is named Kathryn, like her grandmother, Jolie J-O-L-I-E.

Interviewer: Yeah. So this is your sister, Lela’s sister, okay, so the line -- this same line from Annie B this continued through Kathryn until there’s no woman born.

Lela Bess: Mhm.

Interviewer: This is so amazing because I don’t know this. You know, I need to read nothing about -- everything about just Cherokees, yes.

Lela Bess: Lineages.

Interviewer: Because different tribes and different nations have different rules, don’t they?

Lela Bess: Well Cherokee’s strictly matrilineal, period. And it was really confusing because the traders and everybody who came over had to marry the Cherokees to get into the tribe in order to do trade with them and to get furs and guns and all this stuff going. And so that’s where you get the cross -- you got the Scots came in, the British came in, all the Europeans that came in would have to go get some kind of allegiance, usually to the chief of the tribe, usually his daughter or they couldn’t do business in the
Cherokee Nation. So that’s where you get all the infiltration. And let’s face it: they all probably had more than one wife. In fact I know Annie Beehunter, the guy she married -- and he’s the one that later on the Cherokee’s depeditated [severed feet], burned at the stake -- they really took good care of him, let me tell you. I don’t know what he did wrong.

Interviewer: Really?

Lela Bess: And we’ve been to the place where that happened.

Interviewer: Her second husband or first husband?

Lela Bess: Her first husband.

Interviewer: But that’s your --

Lela Bess: Yep, grandfather.

Interviewer: Wow.

Lela Bess: In fact at first I thought it was just depeditated but later reports that I read they just mutilated him totally. And that’s what they did to the traitors who maybe betrayed them in some way: cut off your feet, you can’t go anywhere, you know, and burned him at the stake. And this was in Georgia. It was a place called “99” or Fort 99.

Interviewer: So you don’t know which town it was in, outside Georgia?

Lela Bess: I have that somewhere.
Interviewer: So Annie Beehunter.

Lela Bess: But their child is the one that -- Jennie was -- Annie, Nanie, Jennie -- Nanie was the next one. I think she was C.

Interviewer: C --

Lela Bess: R-I-T-T-E-N-D-E-N.

Interviewer: And Jennie?

Lela Bess: We really ought to go get the papers and get this right.

Interviewer: Well like I said, this is not -- this doesn’t necessarily mean that this is going to be part of the whole paper; this is picking your brain and hoping that it evokes questions or stories that you remember different people telling you about different people, and what it looked like. It’s formulating a picture for me to find -- what’ll probably happen is I’ll look for themes of the different nations and how they compare or how they relate or how they’re different. A case study is not necessarily a compare and contrast; it’s more telling the stories of the different tribes and then there are Sac Fox’s, so they may have an entirely different story.

And Jennie’s last name -- do you remember? So Nanie C.? And then Jennie?

Lela Bess: Rebecca Caroline was her mama, they called her Carrie.
Interviewer: This is your mom, this is you and this is your daughter. Okay so this was your grandmother.

Lela Bess: And her last name was Oliver after she married, her married name.

Interviewer: And they called her Carrie, probably after Carrie Nation.

Lela Bess: She was way before that, I think.

Interviewer: Well it was your great-grandmother.

Lela Bess: She’s the one whose Bible I have in there that the house burned down. And Nina [Lela Bess’s nickname for her grandmother] had four or five sisters, and one cousin that was adopted. So she had all these girls to take care of, and I don’t think any boys.

Interviewer: My grandmother did the same thing, and one of her cousins died on the plantation in New Roads and my grandmother was the one that taught those kids, because there was no place to go to school, the nieces and the nephews and then her siblings, who all became teachers, and all the black kids on the plantation were taught to read by my grandmother – and that was against the Jim Crow laws.

Lela Bess: Oh yeah, definitely.

Interviewer: So Rebecca was your great-great-grandmother -- you remember her last name?

Lela Bess: This is Rebecca Caroline Bryan.
Interviewer: BRYAN?

Lela Bess: B-R-Y-A-N.

Interviewer: Okay. Were any of these folks married to Native American men?

Lela Bess: Yeah, but that doesn’t count when you’re doing genealogy.

Interviewer: Okay but those are stories that we can tell too.

Lela Bess: And there are other stories: one of these is married to the first in the state white man who built a house in the state of Oklahoma. But he was part Cherokee, and they’re the ones who came from Georgia. And that must have been the Bryans. But I could be wrong -- wait, Rebecca and Rebecca Caroline, I’m going to get them mixed up.

Interviewer: I’m impressed.

Lela Bess: Well the house is still standing. I sent money one time just to help with the upkeep of it. The last I heard of it the house is still standing and he’s the one that fought in the Confederate -- the last battle of the Confederate War. He was head of the cavalry.

Interviewer: Wow.

Lela Bess: His name is Joel Mayes Bryan.

Interviewer: And he was?

Interviewer: And he was half Cherokee?

Lela Bess: Mhm. But even so they called him a white man. And he’s the one who moved over with his plantation and his people. And the Yankees stole half of his “n” [she was not aware of her use of the actual term] while he was out fighting the war.

Interviewer: But if you look at it according to the demographics and the denying of the BIA, the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Lela Bess: Oh, they’re a joke.

Interviewer: Do they have different -- who’s this [showing Pictures]?

Lela Bess: My parents [picture].

Interviewer: They were beautiful.

Lela Bess: She’s the Indian. You don’t notice it.

Interviewer: Gosh, I want to look at that again. So if you do it according to the BIA then from then -- you would actually -- how are their rules about eligibility for affiliation? If he was half Cherokee, she was full Cherokee.

Lela Bess: They don’t -- okay I don’t know about the BIA.

Interviewer: They [the Cherokee’s] don’t count that for eligibility to the tribe?

Lela Bess: I don’t know. They do include that, but to really the Cherokee Nation does not recognize it.
Interviewer: Okay, so even if the Nation doesn’t sanction your affiliation to belong to the BIA, which you do, right? You belong to the Bureau of Indian Affairs?

Lela Bess: Mm-mm.

Interviewer: Your Nation belongs to the Bureau of Indian Affairs; your Nation is on the list.

Lela Bess: But they’re not thought of very well in Oklahoma. “Too little, too late”.

Lela Bess: This is all in Oklahoma and you’ll want to look at this later [showing pictures].

Interviewer: Yes, definitely.

Lela Bess: See there’s Rebecca [showing pictures].

Interviewer: Oh my.

Lela Bess: [With Pictures] And when we went there [the cemetery] somebody had put a little Confederate flag on -- there’s Joel Bryan, there’s Rebecca. These are all my people. There’s the Haydens.

Interviewer: They’re not still here so we can talk to them. Do you want to talk to them?

Interviewer: So who is Clement Bryan? Is that one of their children [pictures]?

Lela Bess: No these are some of -- her sisters. [Pictures] Oh, here’s my aunt that I visited in Oklahoma. She and Mama were the same age.

Interviewer: Okay and that’s your mother’s sister?

Lela Bess: No -- wait a minute, she’s a cousin of Caroline -- she’s Mama’s cousin.

Interviewer: Okay.

Lela Bess: And she had a picture in her home of her mother who would be my great aunt. And she’s just a beautiful woman. She had just died. And this is a vase by Osteen -- I would love to have that vase. But she’s gone now.

And that’s my granddaddy’s bank, in Choteau or Pryor [picture] -- I don’t know which little town.

Interviewer: Okay that was your granddaddy? Okay.

Lela Bess: That’s Pat [husband] helping me go find graves [pictures].

Interviewer: Tell me, your granddaddy was a banker?

Lela Bess: There’s the Blessed Virgin Mary statue in the bathtub in the front yard [picture]. They do that all over Louisiana; I didn’t expect to see it in Oklahoma.

Interviewer: Your granddaddy was a banker?
Lela Bess: Yeah but that’s Joel Oliver’s, that’s not the Indian side, that’s the white side.

Interviewer: Okay but all of these women were actually married to aristocrats, is that true?

Lela Bess: Aristocrats?

Interviewer: Mhm. Men economically that were well-to-do… that could provide for the family.

Lela Bess: Well, I guess so, come to think of it. That is my granddaddy -- my Lela’s husband [picture].

Interviewer: Lela Clem?

Lela Bess: Mhm, he was an engineer; he built roads across Arkansas and when he died, to go to the cemetery they had to ride out on a road that he had actually built, he and his brothers, the Oliver plow people had come to Arkansas before the Depression and they were engineers and they built roads. And when the Depression hit everything went crazy. They said that little brother made out the least. So I don’t think he had any higher education.

Interviewer: How old is she [pictures of Lela Bess’s granddaughter]?

Lela Bess: Eighteen.

Interviewer: Now, is she the one that’s at LSU?
Lela Bess: Mm-mm, she’s at Tennessee -- Capers, the one from Texas, is at LSU, Angela’s child. She just has one child.

Interviewer: Okay. Where does he live at LSU, live in the dorm?

Lela Bess: No he lives south of the campus.

Interviewer: Really?

Lela Bess: He was living in those fine apartments that they built and then he moved to River Bend, I think.

Interviewer: We live in the South Gate Apartments so we see a lot of students. Capers?

Lela Bess: Capers Patterson Wilson.

Interviewer: Okay.

Lela Bess: Oh here’s Lela Hayden, went to Key Keith College [pictures].

Interviewer: Your mama -- what was your relationship with your mom?

Lela Bess: Normal.

Interviewer: What is normal?

Lela Bess: Gee, I don’t know, just like everybody else’s mom. She was bossy.

Interviewer: Was she?

Lela Bess: And Daddy was kind and sweet -- isn’t that kind of typical?

Interviewer: Yeah. How does that happen?
Lela Bess: I don’t know, but I’m sure my children will say the same about us: “She was bossy, Daddy was kind and sweet.”

Interviewer: Yeah, because we have to be, because somebody has to be.

Lela Bess: I never thought of that.

Interviewer: Yeah, somebody has to tell them what to do; you can’t both be the boss.

Lela Bess: And not to do this or that.

Interviewer: Yeah, exactly. So how many siblings do you have?

Lela Bess: Just KK [my sister]. Daddy used to refer to Mother as “Hell on wheels.” In fact after she died -- and I was there at the house -- no, after Daddy died somebody came to see Mama. The preacher came. I opened the back door -- I didn’t really know him and I said, “Well she’s not here right now” and he said something, I said, “Well Daddy always called her ‘Hell on Wheels’ -- I said that to the preacher? I’m really bad about mouthing off.

Interviewer: So am I.

Lela Bess: I really am. After we’d been at the coast for a few Sundays and the preacher wrote us a little note or e-mail or something, wondering where we were and he missed us. It was right at Halloween and after church he wears this robe and he says, “Welcome, stranger.” And I said, “Maybe stranger than you think.” Right there in the church; I said that.
Interviewer: I love it.

Lela Bess: I’m bad.

Interviewer: I am too.

Lela Bess: I have to quit that.

Interviewer: No! Why would you quit now?

Lela Bess: You’re right. I mean he asked for that.

Interviewer: Tell me your favorite story that your mother or your grandmother would tell you. You didn’t know your great-grandmother, did you? No, so it was your mother and your grandmother. And how long did your mother live during your lifetime?

Lela Bess: Well, Artie [her first born child] had been born because she came and spent some time with us after her husband died. After Granddaddy died she came to Monroe and stayed with Mama a little, then she came to Tahlequah [Oklahoma] and stayed with us a little. But she was pretty reticent, I think. She wasn’t -- okay Daddy’s people were always laughing and giggling and full of fun and they had cousins that I played with and they were fat and jolly. I’ve got pictures you wouldn’t believe of Daddy’s family standing with Mama’s family; they were little skinny people. And Granddaddy was kind of fun, but I don’t think I ever had any relationship with them. They lived in Little Rock, Arkansas, and we went up every year for Christmas, sometimes on the train, sometimes we drove.
Interviewer: This is your grandmother at Little Rock, right?

Lela Bess: Mhm.

Interviewer: And you rode the train? How’d you like riding the train?

Lela Bess: Oh that was fun.

Interviewer: That’s what we’re going to do next week. We’re doing that all the way to New Jersey next week.

Lela Bess: Oh yeah, we loved that and I loved to have -- I call them train sandwiches, the ham sandwich on toast; I thought that was just so cool. And one time going up -- did I tell you this? I kept coughing, and Mama had KK [sister] -- a little baby and I’m sitting there just coughing. “Be quiet, Lela Bess, don’t do that.” Turned out when we got to Little Rock I had whooping cough. And she kept fussing at me the whole way.

Interviewer: And KK is your sister?

Lela Bess: Yeah.

Interviewer: You called her KK and tell me her real name?

Lela Bess: Mary Kathryn.

Interviewer: We wrote that down, didn’t we?

Lela Bess: Mhm. She’s KK because when she was little she said everything twice. Instead of Kay she was KK. Mama was “Mama No” because all Mama
ever said to her was no. Daddy was “Daddy Doe” and I was “Bubba Doe.”

Interviewer: And how old were you all before she stopped doing that? And it’s just the two of you?

Lela Bess: I was 10 years older, so we didn’t really grow up together.

Interviewer: And I have a sister that I’m 12 years older, but she was my baby. I took care of her.

Lela Bess: KK said I scared her to death. I read her all kind of scary stories and stuff. I probably did. I remember what I used to show her though was the Compton’s Encyclopedia because they had -- they showed you your insides. And there was some kind of -- must have a children’s version, it showed little men going down in your body, taking your food down. She said I just showed her all kind of scary things.

Interviewer: Really? So you’ve always been an educator.

Lela Bess: Oh, maybe so.

Interviewer: You were born an educator. That’s pretty cool. When was the first time that you realized you were Native American?

Lela Bess: I don’t think it would have been like a first time; it’s something that you always know. I mean Nina had Cherokee books in her house; I just -- as long as I can remember I knew I was Cherokee. So I guess my mother
must have just sung and liked some little songs that you sing. “Bye, Bye Baby Bunting,” but that may be -- everybody sings that one.

Interviewer: Yeah, that I remember too. But do you remember it?

Lela Bess: It wouldn’t have been in Cherokee, but I remember after Nina died -- she had a Cherokee dictionary and I think a Cherokee bible and they were gone. Mama had two brothers in Little Rock and they had taken a lot of things. And I got some books but I wished that those had still been there. But Nina never cut her hair. It was long, long, and she brushed it and brushed it and wound it up on top, things like that.

Interviewer: Yeah, my grandmother did the same thing.

Lela Bess: My granddaughter wrote this paper [hands written paper to interviewer]. She’s 18. Cassidy Brooke -- she named her after her soap opera friend.

Interviewer: Fabulous: “Winning the Race to Equality.” Oh, and I love how she spells her name: Cassidy. How old is she? So she’s in 10th grade--

Interviewer: And this is English composition, so she is --

Lela Bess: She’s in Tennessee.

Interviewer: University of Tennessee, in Birmingham?

Lela Bess: No, she’s not there yet; she’s at ETSU [a private school] and she will graduate high school at Christmas, but she won’t walk until spring. So
she’s taking courses at ETSU and will enter UT [University of Tennessee] as a sophomore in the fall.

Interviewer: Okay. My son Joseph started the University of Texas as a second semester sophomore.

Lela Bess: I mean she’s got names, teams -- this is – [she gives the interviewer a paper written by her granddaughter].

Interviewer: It’s fabulous. I can’t wait to read it.

Lela Bess: She read Gone with the Wind... I think when she was in fourth or fifth grade. She’s been an avid reader her whole life.

Interviewer: Tell me the story of the stories your mom was telling you. So did you talk about -- with your mom and your aunt and your grandmother and everybody about being Native American and what you thought was important about being a Native American?

Lela Bess: No. Something that you are… you don’t question. I mean my Uncle Will used to come in and say, “I’ll give you the high sign.” And this is just stuff that was woven into my upbringing. You didn’t think about it.

Interviewer: But how did your father understand that matrilineal lineage?

Lela Bess: We didn’t live up there [on the Cherokee Territory]; we lived in Louisiana.

Interviewer: So he didn’t have to -- but there was still the matrilineal power?
Lela Bess: Uncle Buddy lived with us a while --

Interviewer: Whose brother?

Lela Bess: Mama’s little brother.

Interviewer: Really?

Lela Bess: He was only 18 months younger than she was. He lived with us after he had been in the service, the Army, the Marines and I don’t know what all. I loved my Uncle Buddy; he was just so bad. He’d say, “I’m going to race the Indianapolis 500 next weekend, but don’t tell Mama, don’t tell Grandma.”

Interviewer: Oh no.

Lela Bess: He’d tell me all this stuff; he was always really good to me, because I was just this little bitty nothing baby. He played with the little Cherokee growing up.

Interviewer: So he was three-quarters Native?

Lela Bess: Yeah… But they grew up in Little Rock. I mean Mama --- I don’t know what grade they moved to Little Rock. She used to go to Kansas to visit my grandfather who was not Native American. His sister, Aunt Bee -- and that was Mama’s dearest relative, Aunt Bee. And she’d rub lemon juice all over, say, “I don’t want you getting brown out there like the little Indians.”
Interviewer: Your mama said that or your aunt?

Lela Bess: My aunt said it to Mama so she would rub me down with lemon juice before she’d let me go out and play. Mama used to tell me that and laugh.

Interviewer: So she had no resentment that basically she was getting you to deny that you were Native American, or was it just that you didn’t get too brown?

Lela Bess: Who the aunt? I guess she didn’t want me to look too brown. I don’t know.

Interviewer: Because you guys were all fair-skinned anyway, right? Was there any family that was dark enough for anybody to even know that you were Native American?

Lela Bess: No, we’re all dark.

Interviewer: Were you dark?

Lela Bess: Yeah, I mean I’m darker than normal.

Interviewer: Well I’m -- yeah, I’m darker than normal, too, but I think that’s the French ancestry on my mother’s side of the family. My mother could go out and not sit in the sun and she could get a tan. My grandmother would go outside and you could always tell when she’s been working out in the yard.

Lela Bess: Where were the Oliver plow people from? Is that Illinois, Ohio, where was the Oliver plow?
Interviewer: I don’t know where, probably somewhere in the Midwest.

Lela Bess: No, Pat [Lela Bess’s husband], where were Oliver plow people from?

Male Speaker: [Husband from other room] I think it was Ohio. Oliver Tractor Company.

Lela Bess: Mama always talked about going up there and seeing the fine houses all the Olivers lived in. So I don’t really know how he got to Oklahoma.

And Mama used to talk about going to town in Choteau and she said, “We’d always see the Chief when we went to town; I thought she meant the fire chief. She meant the Chief of the Cherokee.

Interviewer: Really?

Lela Bess: Yeah.

Interviewer: You don’t remember his name?

Lela Bess: No. Nina, my grandmother, and Joe were married by Red Bird Six Killer -- Chief Red Bird Six Killer. So he must have been the Chief in Choteau at the time.

Interviewer: Why did none of you actually have Native American names, or did you?

Lela Bess: Lela is a Cherokee name.

Interviewer: Is it a Cherokee -- and what does it mean? You don’t know?

Lela Bess: Mm-mm. Names don’t necessarily have to mean anything.
Interviewer: Well most of them do, yeah. Most of them are when you were born or where you were born. So if I used an anonymous name for you what would you want that name to be if I used it in my paper?

Lela Bess: Well look at this: I don’t think we’re going to do this but -- oh this isn’t it. I usually call myself Lulu Beesting. I don’t know where that is.

Interviewer: Are you allergic to bees?

Lela Bess: No.

Interviewer: Can I use that?

Lela Bess: Well that’s Annie Beehunter. Annie and Sally and I don’t know if that’s mother and daughter or sisters. They were bee hunters in the Cherokee Nation -- beekeeping and I’ve got a picture of Sally with the hives that I’ve lost since I moved to this house with the beehives that they kept because that was their sugar. And it was a big thing that they had for their cooking -- one of the few seasonings they had. So that’s how I came across that, just being silly.

Interviewer: No, but I like that. Where did she grow up -- what kind of house did she grow up in? Did they live Cherokee?

Lela Bess: My mother?

Interviewer: No, Annie Beehunter.

Lela Bess: That would have been a wooden longhouse.

Lela Bess: Up in North Georgia or Tennessee, up in the Cherokee Territory, the old Cherokee Nation.

Interviewer: And how do you feel about what happened to the Native Americans in this country and how they were removed and sent on the Trail of Tears and how did that have an effect on you at all?

Lela Bess: Not really because it was so long ago. You know, and I’m not and I never was really into history, period. I didn’t like that subject in school and the wars and the explorers never interested me particularly until I really got into this country. It’s been interesting to read back. I don’t know. It’s just something that happened. And evidently since it did happen, God meant it to happen.

Interviewer: When it’s introduced, Christopher Columbus or anything to do with Native Americans when you were in school, did you self-identify as a Native American?

Lela Bess: I don’t remember that.

Interviewer: You don’t remember ever identifying yourself as Native American at that time? Because Monroe, Louisiana, didn’t have a lot of Native Americans in your school did you… that you knew of?

Lela Bess: I don’t know of any. We have minorities but that wasn’t one of them. It was the Italians.
Interviewer: Well that was Louisiana -- a lot of Italians. Baton Rouge was the same way when my mother was growing up.

Lela Bess: Oh! Our maid came in one day, our black maid: “Ms. Kite? Mr. Tiscali done married a white woman.” Oh gosh.

Interviewer: I love it.

Lela Bess: We need to turn all those off for a while [speaking about the recorders].

Interviewer: No, and that’s why I say, I will send this off and it will be transcribed and then I’ll send it to you and then if you want anything taken out of it you just circle it and I’ll take it out. No, but those are such cool things. I look back on my childhood, and like you used the “N” word a little while ago, you didn’t even realize you used it.

Lela Bess: No that was --

Interviewer: It was appropriate.

Lela Bess: We didn’t have black people. Then we lived in Mississippi for a long time, in Vicksburg. Pat had the plantation north of there and that’s all the people he worked with.

Interviewer: Really?

Lela Bess: [Whispering]. And that’s not so long ago.

Interviewer: No, it’s not.
Lela Bess: That was in Issaquena County [highest population of slaves in the U.S. 92.5% before the Civil War].

Interviewer: Now if you sat on your grandmother’s lap would she tell stories from the past?

Lela Bess: Which I never remember doing, but she was a little bony skinny thing.

Interviewer: Oh really? Did she tell you any stories about her childhood?

Lela Bess: I think I had a better rapport with Granddaddy. He told me about the five little blackbirds sitting on a limb and he had little games and stuff like that, my Granddaddy did. And I don’t remember Nina much; she was mostly in there shelling beans and frying chicken.

Interviewer: Okay, the women were all in the kitchen?

Lela Bess: It used to impress me because after she’d wash the dishes and I always dried them. She would have a teapot boiling on the stove and she would pour that over to just sterilize the dishes after she washed them. And I thought that might have been something from the old times.

Interviewer: Oh, because that’s brilliant. I’d never heard that before.

Lela Bess: Oh yeah, she kept that teapot boiling. Well that’s her kitchen; that was one of her kitchens [pointing to a picture on the wall]. And see that little cabinet on the left? Well that’s where she kept the Fiesta Ware, and I think I have some in there. That thing’s full; I’ve even got some real jelly
in there. But she had that dishpan. The stove would have been to the right, and she washed there and she put the dishes in the sink in a drainer then she’d pour that boiling water.

Interviewer: Amazing. Did you eat any traditional Native foods when you were growing up?

Lela Bess: I wouldn’t have known that.

Interviewer: You just thought it was -- like fry bread?

Lela Bess: No. That’s a Southwest thing.

Interviewer: Succotash?

Lela Bess: Mama used to eat cornmeal mush, I think, when she was little, but we never had that.

Interviewer: Your mom did? If you could ask your Grandma Nina [Lela Bess’s nickname for her grandmother] any questions, what would they be?

Lela Bess: Oh. What was the highest grade she achieved? What schools did she go to in Choteau? What was her personality? What were her children like Bessie Clem, Buddy and Jack? What were her parents like? What Cherokee stories did they carry forward? Tell me about the Gypsies in Little Rock. What games did you and Carlotta [her cousin] play?

Interviewer: I thought that gumbo was typical for the whole world too. Or jambalaya or crawfish pie, filet gumbo. I thought everybody knew about that stuff.
Lela Bess: There is something in the spring they call eggs and onions -- they have a festival in the early spring when the onions come up and they have a big fry. But that really wasn’t part of my upbringing. That was because Mama grew up in Little Rock, Arkansas, basically.

Interviewer: Do you ever remember anybody recognizing you as a Native American and saying anything to you growing up in the South?

Lela Bess: No.

Interviewer: Because there are so many stories I’ve read about Native women having to go to the back door in public places. But you were more a member of the elitist society? Yeah.

Lela Bess: Well let’s put it this way: I didn’t go to the parish school. I went to the city school. And that would be public schools.

Interviewer: Yeah, so you went to public schools all your life?

Lela Bess: Mhm.

Interviewer: Yeah. And then you went to LSU [Louisiana State University]. If you could write a book about your experiences what kind of title would you give it? What would you like to focus on? Because you obviously are so embedded in this that you’ve got a story to tell.

Lela Bess: I don’t think I would ever write a book about myself.
Interviewer: But it really wouldn’t be about you; it’d really be about your family and putting all of this together succinctly would be so interesting. You want it to be Bee or Beesting? See how you did it S-T-I-N-G, one word?

Lela Bess: That’s because I’m writing it.

Interviewer: But do you want it to actually be so that it looks like you are talking about a beesting, instead of two words?

Lela Bess: No, it’s one word.

Interviewer: All one word? Okay.

Lela Bess: That’s just something silly I wrote one time.

Interviewer: “Call me Lulu Beesting. I’m a Deep South Cherokee. How you-all are? Wado for the warmth of your fire –”

Lela Bess: Thank you – “wado” means thank you.

Interviewer: Oh, in Native?

Lela Bess: That’s just a common Cherokee word.

Interviewer: Okay. “Yankees forced my people off the banks of the Tuskegee, burned all our seeloo –”

Lela Bess: Corn.

Interviewer: Corn? What do the Native drums mean to you?
Lela Bess: The drums are my soul! You can keep this poem, but don’t write on it [referencing her copy of the poem she was sharing].

Interviewer: “Yankees forced my people off the banks of the Tuskegee.” Explain that to me. “Scalped my whole clan family and drank up all my firewater and rode out on my pony.” Now did you just make that up or that’s true?

Lela Bess: Yeah -- well it’s based in truth, but that’s just how I feel about it. Now you’ve asked me how I felt about that -- well there it is.

Interviewer: [Reading her poem] “I’ve been cold, hungry and alone on the trail. I’m a Cherokee. I don’t cry out.”

Lela Bess: That’s another thing: I don’t cry. Never cry.

Interviewer: Can you remember who told you that you should never cry?

Lela Bess: No, that’s something I grew up knowing. I taught my grandkids that.

Interviewer: So if you’re a Native Cherokee woman you don’t cry?


Interviewer: Does Pat cry [Lela Bess’s husband]?

Lela Bess: No.

Interviewer: But he’s not Native.

Lela Bess: No.
Interviewer: But he’s a man and he’s not supposed to cry.

Lela Bess: Yeah. Right.

Interviewer: You didn’t cry, even when your mother died or your father died, especially when your father died. How did you handle that?

Lela Bess: I guess we’re just a little stoic.

Interviewer: Wow, because I wouldn’t find you that way.

Lela Bess: Wait, go ahead and finish that [the poem].

Interviewer: Okay. Don’t let me forget. Reading her poem… “Now I rest with you and thank Great Mother for all the blessings and wish for a new star, a new path of dreams.” Great Mother is your God?

Lela Bess: Mhm.

Interviewer: Okay ’cause it can’t be a man in a matrilineal society. God has to be a woman, which I agree with 100%.

Lela Bess: Diana is one of my goddesses, I guess you’d say.

Interviewer: Diana is one of your goddesses?

Lela Bess: Mhm. Oh that next one’s pretty good too.

Interviewer: [reading her poem] “I was Cherokee when Cherokee wasn’t cool.”

Lela Bess: Which isn’t true?
Interviewer: Well it is true; you just didn’t know it. [Reading her poem] “Now everyone wants to be in the Cherokee gene pool. We can’t go back where we’ve all been, so why do they want to be our kin? Beloved woman, blessed be, one with woods and Brother Bear. One with corn and deer and bee, grandmother to mother to daughter are we. Matrilineal tsalagi.”

Lela Bess: Tsalagi.

Interviewer: T-S-A-L-A-G-I. And that means --?

Lela Bess: That’s Cherokee.

Interviewer: -- the end?

Lela Bess: That’s Cherokee.

Interviewer: To the end? What does it actually mean in English, do you know?

Lela Bess: Tsalagi? That is Cherokee.

Interviewer: Oh, matrilineal Cherokee. Oh. See that’s something I did not know. It’s like the Navajo or Dine -- I did not know that. So you’re stoic, so that’s why I have to ask the right questions to get the answer from you.

Lela Bess: Uh-huh.

Interviewer: And you’re cautious by nature. You’re going to have to translate this for me. Read it to me please.
Lela Bess: “Annie Beehunter Wadalisi was born into her Cherokee Wolf Clan family in the early 1700s in Upper Georgia. She was there when the King’s men first landed on Virginia shores to infiltrate the Indian Territory as traders and army men, and to intermarry for land and position in this New World – “new” to them; old to those who had been here since archaic times. Major John Downing III, from a titled British family came to America and he married Annie. I’m the seventh daughter, seven being the mystic number of the Cherokee, and I belong to the Seventh Clan. “My mother and I are both blue-eyed Cherokee,” which in tradition means witch. But that’s not on this paper.

Interviewer: Okay I need you to rewrite that and give me a copy of that, please.

Lela Bess: I think that is a copy. Pardon the back.

Interviewer: That’s good. I think I can read it. Now do me a favor: read that to me, because your emotion is important and your intonation is important.

Lela Bess: “Oh, call me Lulu Beesting. I am Deep South Cherokee. How you-all are? Wado for the warmth of your fire. Yankees forced my people off the banks of the Tuckaseeggee, burned all our seeloo, scalped my Wolf Clan family and drank up all my firewater and rode out on my pony. I have been cold, hungry and alone on the trail. But I am Cherokee -- I do not cry out. Now I’ll rest with you and thank Great Mother for all blessings and wish for a new star and a new path of dreams.”
Interviewer: And never put foot on Yankee land.

Lela Bess: Soil – “never put foot on Yankee soil.” I love to say that.

Interviewer: So when you went to -- tell me about going to Canada to see Niagara Falls and your husband wanted to walk across.

Lela Bess: And I didn’t? Oh, that’s probably because I was scared of the water. But I wouldn’t have done that.

Interviewer: Because?

Lela Bess: Never put my foot on a Yankee soil. So that’s what I think about Yankees: I don’t want to put my foot where they’ve been. And that may be part of the reason we’re not so happy in Fair Hope [Alabama…new Victorian home just like her grandmother’s]: there’s so many Yankees here.

Interviewer: When do you remember having that first thought, that Yankees were no good?

Lela Bess: Well we grew up near Vicksburg, Mississippi. I can remember I made a sundress. One time Mama had gone home to see Nina and left me in Monroe. And I used her sewing machine and I made myself a sundress -- remember the little spaghetti strap dresses?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Lela Bess: And it had a star and bar across on the top of it.
Interviewer: Whoa.

Lela Bess: And I used to wear that when we would go to Vicksburg Military Park. That was a fun thing to do. We just always grew up hating Yankees.

Interviewer: I remember my brother in church saying to my mother: “Mom, why did you marry a Yankee?” My dad’s from Michigan. And Joe’s from New Jersey. [Joe is interviewer’s husband.] But I remember that that was -- in our generation that was carried over.

Lela Bess: When we moved to Vicksburg there was still living Confederate veterans living in Vicksburg. And I used to take the kids out for fun to play in the military park, you know, the pretty gorgeous park? And they would hide behind the monuments and shoot at the Yankee license plates -- tshoo-tshoo-tshoo!

Interviewer: Oh yeah.

Lela Bess: And you just grew up with that.

Interviewer: You did. But it hasn’t escaped you. And some of your great-grandfathers’ and grandfathers’ were Yankees.

Lela Bess: Right. But again, the men don’t count.

Interviewer: Say that again: “Men don’t count.”

Lela Bess: “The men don’t count.”

Interviewer: [Laughs]. That’s what you have to call your book.
Lela Bess: That would never sell. Oh, I don’t know. It’s like the Venus and Mars thing, you know? It might sell; you never know.

Interviewer: If one of your Grandmother’s wanted a divorce, how would she go about getting one?

Lela Bess: Oh, that was easy. She would put his clothes in a basket on the front porch and that would tell him not to come back.

Interviewer: Wow! If you had an opportunity sit down with Annie what would you ask her?

Lela Bess: Oh wow, what a thought.

Interviewer: What would you say to her? What would you ask her? And tell me some of the answers that you may know that she might say back to you and/or give you as answers.

Lela Bess: Oh that’s really hard. I would want to know how her family life was back then. And I think -- oh God, who’s the beloved woman of the Cherokees? She’s got to be a cousin and I’ve always pulled her name out.

Lela Bess: Nancy --

Interviewer: Beehunter?

Lela Bess: No.

Lela Bess: Everybody’s related somehow. So where did she actually live? I think it was in Upper Georgia on the Tuckaseegee River.
Interviewer: Okay. So none of these women ever lived on a reservation or they did?

Lela Bess: No. No. They did not live on a reservation?

Interviewer: No.

Lela Bess: Even as a young child she was not born on a reservation?

Interviewer: No, they didn’t have reservations.

Lela Bess: Okay, when we talk about reservations I’m talking about national grounds or areas that they actually lived.

Interviewer: This was Cherokee country.

Interviewer: So they lived in longhouses but not what you call -- how many of them lived in a longhouse when they got married?

Lela Bess: Her family.

Interviewer: Everybody lived in a longhouse?

Lela Bess: Yeah.

Interviewer: All the way -- but you never lived in a longhouse.

Lela Bess: No. I could show you a picture of Mama’s house and great-great grandmother’s house. I’ve got it in the other room.

Interviewer: Yeah, they’re not longhouses, though?
Lela Bess: No, these are the people that moved from Georgia and they got fine houses, big two-story Victoria or Tudor houses.

Interviewer: Yeah and I think we’ve seen those but we can certainly look at those again.

Lela Bess: And if you look at those in Georgia --

Interviewer: They were beautiful.

Lela Bess: Oh yeah.

Interviewer: So actually traditionally when did your family break away from the longhouse? Did they have their husbands, all of these [women]?

Lela Bess: I would imagine that when they lived in Georgia, right before the Gold Rush -- I think they left before that.

Interviewer: But -- for the Gold Rush?

Lela Bess: But they had plantation homes.

Interviewer: Okay. How did they manage those big houses?

Lela Bess: And I’ve tried to do the same.

Interviewer: And they had slaves.

Lela Bess: Connect this family with the Moravians that came in to teach as teachers on the Territory where preachers came into the area and started schools and churches. And I’ve tried to see if any of the family went there, but I
haven’t found that out and I’d like to know that, like you say, if I could go
back and ask. And that would tell you more about the education of the
family.

Interviewer: Yeah, because everybody was educated.

Lela Bess: Well I don’t know that, but I mean as far back as I know they were.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Lela Bess: I mean the Cherokee had their own writing by then. So Granddaddy was a
Rancher; he had I don’t know how many heads of cattle. Mama’s talked
about all the cattle they had, of course they had so much land. The
Cherokee had lots of land. Nina finally got payment for some land, but by
that time she had five or six sisters, I mean the money had divided so
many ways and so many times it did not amount to much.

Interviewer: Now we’re talking about Lela Clem?

Lela Bess: Lela, yeah.

Interviewer: Lela Clem’s husband, who was an Architect and a Rancher?

Lela Bess: No, no, no, her husband was the Oliver plow people and the road-building
people. We’re back to Rebecca.

Interviewer: Okay, back to Rebecca Caroline; her dad was a rancher.
Lela Bess: And that’s in Choteau and his home was in a place called Choteau Hills; it’s still there. And the graveyard that I’ll show you sometime is in Choteau Hills.

Interviewer: So why did they leave Oklahoma?

Lela Bess: Who left Oklahoma? Oh Nina and Granddaddy?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Lela Bess: I don’t think I know that.

Interviewer: Because they did not participate in the Trail of Tears... did they?

Lela Bess: No.

Interviewer: Or did they?

Lela Bess: No, no.

Interviewer: None of your family ever participated in the Trail of Tears?

Lela Bess: No.

Interviewer: That was your family -- the Cherokee then as far as you know only the Cherokee?

Lela Bess: What I said, they came before the Trail of Tears because they could see the handwriting on the wall.

Interviewer: Okay so they left early and became the Old Settlers.
Lela Bess: They were not in the Trail of Tears.

Interviewer: Okay.

Lela Bess: And it’s interesting when you go to the Cherokee Territory in Tennessee and, however, that is God is on my mind? I forgot what I was going to say.

Interviewer: Yeah, you’re tired. We’re good.

Lela Bess: When you go up there they consider the Eastern Band of Cherokees that were the traders, they are the Old Settlers…the first Cherokee to arrive.

Interviewer: And you were the Eastern Band?

Lela Bess: Mhm.

Interviewer: Okay.

Lela Bess: They said, “We’re the real ones because we stayed and we hid and we saved our land, what little bit they’re on. But they consider themselves the real Cherokee. But this trip, I thought, “I’m going to get a little information on this.” Christie [Lela Bess’s daughter-in-law] said that her daddy’s mother was a full-blood Cherokee. Nobody in those generations could have been. But anyway I asked her, I said to her if she went to school there in Johnson City, and when I go there I see Native Americans walking around, they have beautiful hair, and they are pretty people.

Lela Bess: Well anyway, I asked Christie, who grew up going to the schools there in Johnson City, if she had some Native American friends in her group.
“No,” she claims not to know any of them. But she said, “But my grandmother” and she gave me a really funny name, she said, “And she looked like Cochise; I’ve seen her picture,” her granddaddy’s mother -- supposedly -- was Cherokee.

Interviewer: So this is the woman that works in the library here that you’re talking about? No.

Lela Bess: I’m talking about little Pat’s [Lela Bess’s youngest son] wife.

Interviewer: Oh okay.

Lela Bess: I just wanted to get a take on some Cherokees up in the area.

Interviewer: Okay, she’s Christie? And they live?

Lela Bess: In -- well yeah, Johnson City [Tennessee]. This is Christie’s mother, [Lela Bess’s son’s wife]. I’m just doing a little local research, and I did research in that library up there. I got some good stuff there. But anyway, she claims not.

Interviewer: It’s interesting, people are still shy about saying they are Native. I’ll run into people that I can see that they are Native. You [to Lela Bess]… I don’t see it for you.

Lela Bess: We went into a Wal-Mart here I think, when we first moved here and I saw this guy, I knew he was Native American. I had a feeling he was from Florida, but I didn’t ask; I just stood there and looked.
Interviewer: Yeah. Ask.

Lela Bess: But you can see --

Interviewer: Because once you ask -- and I do, I ask. And once you do, and then once you tell them that I’ve been researching Native Americans for the last six years and that my dissertation is about Native American women then they’ll start opening up to me, knowing that it’s something -- my interest, obviously. It’s always been my passion.

Lela Bess: You must have loved living in the Southwest.

Interviewer: Oh yes. Oh yeah because all my students are from South America and Mexico and you can see it in almost all my students.

Lela Bess: Aborigines?

Interviewer: Well just because I feel like there’s more of a story to tell, you know? It’s very interesting. So I’m going to turn off the tapes.


Interviewer: I want to look at that. Let me put my glasses on and turn off my recorders.

Lela Bess: Oh, you need a whole other session to look at this.

Interviewer: Oh, yes, definitely. And we have to talk about that next date, too.

Because I want -- and I want you to, if you will, take notes during the day when you think of questions or things to tell me.
Lela Bess: I haven’t looked at these in a long time. [Looking at pictures] Look at what tricycles looked like. That’s Mama and that’s Carlotta [her sister] – that’s her best friend and cousin, and that’s going to be up in Indian Territory.

Interviewer: Oh cool. I need you to make some copies. Do you have a printer that you can make copies?

Lela Bess: It’s a shame; I don’t know who this is [picture].

Interviewer: You don’t know who this is?

Lela Bess: That’s just -- I must have tried to figure it out for a while. That’s yours truly [pictures].

Interviewer: Oh look how precious you are!

Lela Bess: This is Mama and her daddy [pictures].

Interviewer: Oh my goodness! Where did the shortness come from in the family? How did you end up being so short?

Lela Bess: Well I don’t think the Oliver’s were very tall.

Interviewer: But you don’t have Oliver blood anyway, do you?

Lela Bess: Yeah, that's my granddaddy.

Interviewer: Great-granddaddy, that’s right. I keep forgetting that.

Lela Bess: Because Uncle Buddy wasn’t very tall. They were just normal height.
Interviewer: And you need to tell me the rest of Uncle Buddy’s story.

Lela Bess: That’d take not a book, but an encyclopedia.

Interviewer: Okay, you need to tell me more about him next time.

Lela Bess: He was a smart, smart fellow but he was bad. I thought he was great.

Interviewer: Tell me about Uncle Buddy just real quick, since you mentioned him.

Lela Bess: Well, he could like read a page and recite it back to you. He had a photographic memory. Mama was a year behind, 18 months behind Mama, but he just went through school like I mean it was nothing. He was so smart. But then he -- I don't know what all he did bad, but I know he ended up joining the Navy when he was about 17 because the judge told him take your papers, either this one you go to jail; this one you go to the Army, which was going on a lot back in those days. Just send them off. He went through the Navy, the Merchant Marines and the Sea Bees. He had a beautiful wife that lived two doors from my grandmother in Little Rock, and then he had a little girl and she must have been 6 years younger—I was in his wedding—6 years younger than me. And you know I have looked for her for years and years and years, short of hiring a detective. Doris…she divorced him while he was overseas.

Interviewer: Wow.

Lela Bess: The only way a non-Native man could work or do business on the Cherokee Territory is to marry a Cherokee woman. When Native women
wanted a divorce all they had to do was put their husband’s clothes in a basket on the porch and they knew they were divorced. The women owned everything else. And then she remarried [Natives do not marry into their own Clan] and she took Nancy, her little girl and was gone. The children and the house belonged to the women.

Interviewer: So his last name was Weber?

Lela Bess: Hmm?

Interviewer: Kite? Weber? Which one, Uncle Buddy?

Lela Bess: No, you're in the Oliver’s, Buddy Oliver.

Interviewer: Oh, he was an Oliver? And what was her name?

Lela Bess: Who?

Interviewer: His daughter, Nancy?


Lela Bess: And she was—Nancy Hayden Oliver was her name, Nancy Hayden Oliver. Anyway, it was just a shame to lose that cousin, my only girl cousin. But you wanted to know about Buddy.

Interviewer: Yeah, tell me about Buddy.
Lela Bess: Well he was in all the services, but he lived with us for a little while in Dallas because he came home with—what was everybody getting from bad fruit, no fruit?

Interviewer: Oh, rickets.

Interviewer: It was …without eating fruit. Where the legs were curved?

Lela Bess: I’m thinking of all the worst things. Anyway, he came home with that and went into the hospital in Dallas when my folks were living there. And, because Doris divorced him while he was overseas and he didn’t have any place to go. So he came to us and stayed with us and he even went to Monroe with us when we moved there. I remember Daddy saying he rode all the way from Dallas to Monroe in the back of my truck with his head on the toolbox. He was probably drunker’n a skunk. But anyway, that was Buddy. So he was out of the service and—I don’t know, he just did all kind of bad things. Later on he kind of—he met a nurse back in Little Rock and she kind of straightened him out. She was really good for him. And then they had two sons.

Interviewer: So have you seen them or hear from them or know where they are?

Lela Bess: One of them has died now, one of them went to New Orleans early on and nobody ever heard from him again.

Interviewer: And what was his name?
Lela Bess: Oh, is it my first cousins? I think it’s time to stop; I can’t even think. They were the Hayden’s and Bryans’ because they were after Grandma’s family, the Hayden’s and Bryans’. So he named his two boys Hayden and Bryan Oliver?

Interviewer: Wow, that’s interesting.

Lela Bess: One of them had a gun shop for years in Little Rock. But he died. I used to call back after he had died and just listen to his answer just to hear his voice. His answer phone was still on.

Interviewer: I have a friend that her husband had a message on his phone and this is now 15 years ago and it’s still on the phone.

Lela Bess: Oh, my goodness.

Interviewer: Yeah, that’s troublesome. Okay Lulu, thanks. Awesome. An hour and 20 minutes, that’s not bad.

Lela Bess: Sure it wasn’t six?

Interviewer: I think we’re good.

Lela Bess: That’s your copy.

Interviewer: Yes. I think we’re good. I asked you previously to think about and write questions you wish that you could ask your grandmother. Can you read those to me?
Lela Bess: OK. I would ask my [ninth-generation] grandmother, Annie Beehunter:

1. Was Sallie Beehunter your mother or your sister? 2. Why did you marry Major Downing? 3. Was that Wm. Bartram that visited in lower Georgia? 4. Tell me about being Wolf Clan. 5. Did you go down to the “Little People”? 6. How are you related to Nancy Ward? 7. Since there are no curse words in the Cherokee language, how do you express anger?

**Interview II. Teri Bates Richard**

**Subject and setting for Interview II.** In 2011, I attended a Powwow in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, in my ongoing efforts to study Native Americans, especially Native women and the examination of their stories. The Louisiana Indian Heritage Association (LIHA) is a nonprofit state-chartered organization with the goal of educating the public in the true traditions and culture of the American Indian. LIHA hosts the Baton Rouge/Gonzales Powwow, which provides for the preservation and presentation of high quality Native American dancing, singing, arts and crafts. I had contacted one of the names affiliated with the organization that sponsored the Powwow; Teri Bates Richard was this individual. We met at the Powwow, and she shared with me that her husband had just died. She graciously sat with me and shared information about what was happening. At the time I had not understood why an individual so imbedded in her culture had short hair and was not involved with the organization and the daily events and the cultural immersion of the Powwow. I now know, after our recent interview, that when we first met she was honoring the culture of Native mourning, which is to refrain from celebrating or participating in any Native activities for one year.

In 2013, Teri and I met again in her home in New Orleans for two hours. (We had been meeting and e-mailing and keeping in touch with one another for two years.) Most of our
interactions had consisted of crossing paths at Powwows in Marksville, Louisiana, and Baton Rouge. Now at her home, I was amazed and intrigued by the Native artifacts in her home. As previously stated, case study is a research method that demands the participants and researchers get to know and trust one another. I felt that this meeting was the follow up on our first steps in getting to know and trust one another. Subsequently, Teri decided to engage in the recording of her family history and to tell her stories for my dissertation.

Compared to the first interviewee (Lela Bess Beehunter), Teri offers a very different perspective on the Native American woman and her participation culturally. At 62 years old, Teri offers a view of the Native culture that is more embedded in her Sac and Fox culture, but without the legacy of her parents and grandparents (ancestors) that was offered by Lela Bess. The Sac and Fox Nation is the largest of the three federally recognized tribes of Sac (Thakiwaki, people coming forth from the water) and Meskwaki (Fox) Native Americans. Most members of the tribe are located in Oklahoma, Iowa, Missouri, Kansas, and Nebraska.

Teri has little family history, as her parents passed away early in her life. Her father died when she was 7 years old, and her mother died when she was 12. The Tribal Council voted to send her to a boarding school; the faculty of the school became her family. She has no living relatives that she is aware of.

**Interview format and collection procedures for Interview II.** As with the first interview, ongoing explanations, confirmations, and assurances about my motives were required; her commitment to the process was discussed. I continuously assured her that she would be given access to all of my work, especially the opportunity to review the recordings and remove any words or information that may be questionable for the public domain.
Transcription of Interview II with Teri Bates Richard. Following are transcribed audio recordings from the two-hour interview with Teri Bates Richard. These recordings provided support for my interpretations of my findings and documentation in which my study implementations that deviated, somewhat, from my original beliefs and perceptions. Teri is the participant, and I am the interviewer.

Interviewer: Teri, we need to talk about confidentiality. If after reading this interview, of which I will send you a copy for review…if you want anything to be eliminated, I certainly will.

Teri: That sounds fair.

Interviewer: I am going to share some information about me, subject to me, and getting to know you throughout this interview.

Teri: Can you give me questions? I think it will be easier for me to respond rather than just telling my story.

Interviewer: I am going to ask you to sign a consent form that is required by LSU, because I am interviewing you and you are a human participant.

Teri: Give me prompts.

Interviewer: My goal is to gather info about your life…being Native American…how that changed your life…your tribe and your affiliation…questions that will help us to bond and to make you more comfortable sharing your life with me. Tell me about your life.
Teri: Tell me about your life. That is pretty vague. Well. Both of my parents died when I was a child. My dad was a non-Native and he died when I was 7 years old. My mom was a Native and she died when I was 12 years old. I was then an orphan with no relatives, so the Tribal Council made a tribal decision to send me to a Catholic boarding school.

Interviewer: That is so sad!

Teri: I eloped with an Irish Catholic priest/seminarian when I was 16. He was 21. Ten years later we came south and he went to Loyola Law School. The nuns use to call Yabba the Rabbit. I got a nursing degree first. I was married to him for 7 years.

Interviewer: What did you do while he was in law school?

Teri: He was actually pre-law before he went to Loyola. I was working for NOLA. I had the nursing degree and while I was working at NOLA I decided to go to school at night to get a degree in special education/teaching and then had my master’s and then got my +30 hours. And then I was diagnosed with cancer.

Interviewer: Oh my goodness!

Teri: I was finishing at Tulane when I was diagnosed. It was very serious and the prognosis was not good. Luckily, I was cured. But it was tough.

Interviewer: Wow. I cannot believe that.
Teri: John was such a nice man…but he was a serious addict. We went through a really tough time. He was a non-Native, but was heavily involved with Natives. He would get them out of jail. He had a symbiotic relationship with the addicts. The West Bank of New Orleans had a lot of Natives living there, in Avondale.

Interviewer: Oh, at the Shipyard?

Teri: Yes. John was a Benedictine priest. He went to Saint Bede’s Seminary. He was Irish Catholic…so was his family, very Irish Catholic. He was from Lake Forest, Illinois.

Interviewer: His family was very wealthy?

Teri: His family was very nice to me. They seemed to be great about the marriage. I was a Native girl emancipated at 16 years old. When we divorced I stayed here [in New Orleans]. My second husband was non-Native [not Native, either]. But, he was entrenched in the Native culture.

Interviewer: Fabulous, and your daddy and his father?

Teri: No.

Interviewer: So your daughter is half Native.

Teri: No, she is adopted from two full-blooded Natives. My husband, her daddy, was very influential in the Native culture here in New Orleans. He
was their architect. He died of a pulmonary embolism and we lost him within minutes. He was so healthy…a runner.

Interviewer: This is amazing.

Teri: In May, I married his best friend…dear friend of Gene’s. Larry and he would drum together.

Interviewer: Cool, yeah…sharing your culture is so important. Yours has been a cultural exchange.

Teri: Yes, now Larry and I have four Native children. His two daughters are married to a Rumanian and a Mexican. The daughters are Choctaw.

Interviewer: Talking about sharing cultures…my grandson, when he was in kindergarten, planned a visit for me to the Austin Powwow.

Teri: Larry’s Daughter is in charge of the Austin Powwow. Sarah. His three daughters went to LSU and then to University of Texas for their Master’s. Annie…one of the daughters…is a Professor of Indian Studies in California.

Interviewer: If we decide to turn this into a book, she can be a resource for us. [I shared my story of the visit to the Navajo [Dine] Reservation.] My interest from childhood has been in Native Americans. I often wonder if I have Native blood?
Teri: I think it is heart, not necessarily culture. I think back to Gene, who was not Native, and he was “redder” than a lot of Natives.

Interviewer: Going to Powwow’s has been a great experience for me. There was a Black couple…Native who took us under their wing in the Marksville, Louisiana Powwow and shares with us the symbolism of all of the dances and dancers.

Teri: Did they identify as Native and Black?

Interviewer: Well, we saw that they were Black, but they were sitting in the circle so we knew they were Native.

Teri: Is it Shirley and her husband and daughter?

Interviewer: Yes, they shared information with us all day.

Teri: They are called Red Bone Cherokee. The racial mix is referred to as Tri-racial and may be any combination of the following: Native American, European Caucasian, and Asian, and any various African sub-groups.

Interviewer: Wow.

Teri: She has become Clannish. We need to share that information about the dances in Baton Rouge. We somehow got away from doing that. As one of the members of LIHA [Louisiana Indian Heritage Association], I need to start that practice again.
Interviewer: That would be very helpful for individuals that are non-Native or new to the celebrations of the Powwow. Tell me your married names.

Teri: My first marriage I prefer not to share last name. Gene Bates was my second husband and Larry Richard is my new husband. Natives call me Teri Bates Richard; even though Gene was not Native, they do not want me to drop the Bates because they all want him in their memory. Natives are really tied to your name and family history. Southerners are all about where you went to school and your education. Natives are about who you are and who your parents were. Gene was a true musician…it was all about getting together and playing.

Interviewer: My son just played at Tipitina’s here in New Orleans.

Teri: Gene played there all the time. [She called it Tipi’s] Gene Bates was heavily involved in the Native Drumming. And, now, my husband has been recommended by me and the Tribal Leaders to have him to be the drummer. Gene used to come home from drumming and be so frustrated. He would say he was never going back to practice. He said, “They all treat me like a college white boy”. I would always tell him that I could not stand up for him just because I am Native and that he would have to get there by himself. The Drummers have a very special culture and hierarchy. The Drumkeepers are even more of a specialty group. They have to be a man of integrity and a very caring person. They have to stay on the “Red Road”. Gene had become the “head singer” 10 years ago.
Interviewer: I am learning so much about your culture and the culture of the Powwow.

Teri: A Southern Native home cannot have a drum without a male in the home. There are 28 men drummers with four drums. Gene’s death was such a shock to the Louisiana Native Education Society leadership. He had the camp at Southern University for boys for decades. They came from all over the United States for his funeral. At his funeral I asked the Drummers to drum it out. That was hardest thing I faced about his death. We would carry the drums to Powwows all over the world…Africa-Brazil-Powwows in the US. We bought seats on the airlines for the drum. After he died, I lost all interest in everything Native…thoughts and culture.

Interviewer: Tell me more about Maya…your daughter.

Teri: She is Native by birth and adoption. Her boyfriend is 2nd on the drums. We still have Gene’s ashes here in the house. It is up to Maya as to what we do with them. Larry is okay with all this. He was his best friend. We will keep all of the things in this house until Maya has her own house. We [Larry and I] did 30 years with Gene at Powwows. It has been hard for both of us. I still wait to hear his voice in the circle.

Interviewer: I met you for the first time soon after Gene’s death. The first thing you told me was of his death. I could see the pain in your face.
That was the beginning of my traditional year of mourning. I had cut my hair for the first time in my life. And we do not participate in circle or ceremony for one year.

Can you tell me about your parents? Only what is comfortable for you. Their heritage?

Mom was full blood Sac/Fox and Dad was not Native. I am related to Young Bear that is spoken about in the Native American Smithsonian in Washington, D.C. Storm Young Bear was a musician. My mom’s mom was married five times. She was the youngest of the last marriage.

Are Sac/Fox matrilineal?

Yes.

I have interviewed a Cherokee woman. As you probably know, they are matrilineal as well.

What is her name? Everybody Native usually knows everyone Native.

Her story is very different from yours. Lulu [Lela Bess] Beehunter.

I have a friend is Eastern Band Choctaw. Loretta Weaver. Does Lulu know her?

If you are comfortable can you tell me about your early childhood and your feelings about the boarding school?
Teri: That was a dark time for me. My father died...he was an attorney. My mother lived for my father. We lived closed to the reservation. We spent the summers on the reservation. Dad died of cancer when I was seven years old and Mom willed herself to death when I was 12 years old. My Mom brought my grandmother to live with us, but she just sat in her rocking chair. I decided when I became a sudden widow that I would not be like my Mom and drop out of life. I promised myself that Maya and I would survive this tragedy well.

Interviewer: Tell me about Larry.

Teri: Larry is from Church Point, Louisiana. He is a Native and carries a medicine pouch. We use green corn, not Sundance in the South. He is a Mason. He goes to the Masonic Temple Meetings on Tuesday night and stays in his house in Church Point. We are still newlyweds and are still deciding our fate. My mother was a negative influence in widowhood. Maya would not have gone back to the Native culture and circle if I didn’t. So I was determined to keep it up, even though I really was hesitant.

Interviewer: Does Maya know who her parents are?

Teri: No, she does not care. I am her mother and Gene was her father and Larry is her uncle.

Interviewer: Were they Sac/Fox?

Teri: No.
Interviewer: Another tribe?

Teri: Yes

Interviewer: How have you gotten through all of this?

Teri: Many things have helped, especially, Dr. Phil. A bad prognosis of cancer. My Dr. said to find a therapist. I said I have Dr. Phil.

Interviewer: The doctor must have loved that. Did he know the stories of your mom and dad? and the tribal council sending you to the boarding school?

Teri: We shared some personal stories of New Orleans, a common priest friend, and my grandmother having become a nurse in New Orleans’s Touro Nursing College.

Interviewer: Tell me more about the early years.

Teri: John [her first husband] and I came here for him to go to Loyola Law School. Gene died at Ochsner’s Hospital. There were lots of friends to support me. I found out later that John was at Ochsner’s at the same time with a massive coronary. He is now in a nursing home. How ironic that he was there the night Gene died.

Interviewer: If you had known would you have gone to see him?

Teri: I do not know how I would have reacted. I went two years before I started dating again. I am 62 years old and I had not planned to get married again. The guy I was dating then died of a massive heart attack after we
broke up. Then Larry told me his feelings. Maya said nobody is going to marry me if something happens to Larry.

Interviewer: Can you tell me about your mom?

Teri: I think she crossed the line on purpose. It could probably be called suicide.

Interviewer: You were the one to find her.

Teri: Yes.

Interviewer: The Tribal Council made the decision to send you away. Were there any women on the Council?

Teri: No. All men.

Interviewer: Did you have any other relatives?

Teri: No. My Mom was 45 when I was born, and my Grandmother was 47 when my Mother was born. I was her only child and my mom was an only child.

Interviewer: What kind of student were you?

Teri: I was a really good student. My personality changed when there were all nuns and priests. I just read all the time. I belong to four reading clubs today. The priests and nun were Benedictine. They were very well educated. Sister Gregory was the librarian. She took me under wing. I was her student assistant. I even was in the summer, because I never went
home again. The nuns were becoming more aggressive with the feminist movement and Father Daniel Berrigan. She showed me such kindness and love. The other nuns were mean and abusive. But, I have taken the opportunity to go back. I never wanted that dark time to be remembered. I have very hard feelings about it all. A friend gave me a movie about a boarding school in Texas, but it took me six weeks before I could watch it.

Interviewer: Tell me about John [the seminarian]. He watched you grow up at the school. You were there from 12 to 16 years old.

Teri: His family was very kind to me. John was wonderful, at first. I have very negative feelings about him. His family was very Irish and he was their priest candidate. He went to boarding school at 12 years old. He was five years older than me. We eloped. He was a seminarian. The nuns did the paperwork to get me emancipated so we could get married. He was not Native. His family always introduced me as Italian. We had a problem with my birth certificate so we could get married. My father had paid someone to not put my race on my birth certificate.

Interviewer: Can I ask about the history of your tribe? Were they removed on the Trail of Tears?

Teri: No. They hid. They are the 5th Band of the Meskwaki [Fox]. The Bands from Kansas, Missouri, and Oklahoma were relocated.

Interviewer: How about Maya’s history.
Teri: Her birth parents were very young. My husband knows them, but we do not. Gene and I paid for two years of therapy for them.

Interviewer: [Dialog with Teri about what it was like to be a 12-year-old and to have your life completely change. I asked her what she would do to forget what she was experiencing.

Teri: Read every great book I could get my hands on. I read all of the classics. I finished high school a month early so we could get married. We moved to Dubuque, Iowa, where I went to the University of Dubuque for a Bachelor of Science in Nursing. John had a B.A. in Political Science. He was 21 years old. I cannot picture my daughter at that age being married. We moved to New Orleans and I went to work at the New Orleans Adolescent Hospital. With my science credits I was able to translate those to a Special Education B.S and then an M.S. plus 30 credits. I worked at the Magnolia School on the River Road in Jefferson Parish for 33 years. Now, I have a new husband just three months of retirement. I am so type “A”. It has been an adjustment. Larry is so very different from my other husbands. He is definitely not type “A”.

Interviewer: Dialog about husbands with Teri.

Teri: It has been very good for me to slow down, but difficult.
Interviewer: Just a quick comment…if you think of anything you would like to tell me to include in our interview just keep notes and e-mail or call me. Tell me a little more about the nuns and the boarding school.

Teri: It was my darkest time. The nuns were so mean. Child Protection Agency should been called. There was the class ceiling. The priests were always right. Girls had to pay for their mistakes by becoming nuns.

Interviewer: Your mother…

Teri: It is cultural that a woman in mourning cuts her hair and must stay away from the circle with no dancing for a year. My mom never stopped mourning. I believe that that is very therapeutic wisdom told by the elders. No council, either. Mom was born to older parents and she was no longer involved in the culture. So from my age of seven years to 12 years old my mom never left the house and barely the bed. I am a registered member of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Sac/Fox Tribe. There is no affiliation after ¼ lineages. You have to prove it today.

Interviewer: [Dialog about Internship with Louisiana Department of Indian Affairs and the abandonment of the office in Baton Rouge. Past office was manned by Mark Ford. We also talked about the consent form and her signing for the Institutional Review Board at LSU. I gave a copy of Chapters 1, 2 and 3 of the dissertation.] How was religion pushed at the boarding school?
Teri: It was not necessarily pushed, but I was not a sleeper so I fared well by reading and staying focused.

Interviewer: When did you realize that you were in love with John?

Teri: I do not know. It was an out. It was a path to take. I question some of it now. I cannot imagine being that age now and how I made that choice.

Interviewer: That was very brave of you. Then you had a home. What about your parents’ property.

Teri: There were huge bills. My mom never worked after my dad died. That was five years. I received $12,000 from their estate. My dad was an attorney, so there should have been money, but I never went back or asked about it. I have no memory of before seven years old. Mom was a college graduate. We had a very small world. My dad’s parents were dead before I was born. I used my energy on my family and my students. I do not need to pick the scab of the past. Larry is going to teach his daughter the “the ways.” She will take the “Medicine Pouch.” They have regalia and all take part in Powwows in the organization and facilitating. Gourd Clans are very important to the Veterans. They are stopping some because it is difficult music to learn and perform.

Interviewer: Is it true that “every Native is your Brother”?

Teri: Here is Larry!!! He always says…“Lucy, I’m home!”

Interviewer: Thank you so much, Teri. What a great opportunity for me.
Interview III. Chanda Dardar

Subject and setting for Interview III. Chanda was a new acquaintance. Interviewee II Teri Bates Richard had recommended that she call me. Teri had felt that Chanda had lived experiences that would enhance my dissertation. I arranged a meeting with her in her home in Lafayette, Louisiana. This meeting was in line with my goal to interview the participants in a comfortable setting, preferably their homes, with access to family and artifacts. This idea played out well. Chanda’s husband Vincent and their 2-year-old daughter Sahkid’a (the Indian name for the sun) were both present and added depth to the interview. Chanda showed me scrapbooks and picture books to support and enhance the conversation. She seemed to enjoy sharing her Caddo (Hasinai) Princess pictures and reliving the special moments from her Native cultural experiences. Chanda was only 30 years old at the time of the interview, but seemed to have an old soul when expressing her passion about her Caddo culture. Her reality was recent, but her joy of reflecting was as real as my participants of the ages of 77 and 62 years of age.

Once Chanda began telling her story, the words flowed. She became excited and passionate about her tribal history. She had generations of history, interactions, and relations with many tribes, as is documented in the interview. She was compelled to distinguish between her tribal affiliations and the fact that she is not a member of any of the “Five Civilized Tribes”—Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, and Seminole. (These five tribes were coined “civilized” by Anglo-European settlers during the colonial and early federal period because they adopted many of the colonist’s customs and had generally good relations with their neighbors.)

Our conversations were threaded with an unusual twist compared to the other two interviews in that Chanda and her husband mentioned their affiliations with friends and Powwow
partners from many tribes. Interviewees I and II had only mentioned their own particular tribal affiliations.

**Interview format and collection procedures for Interview III.** Chanda’s interview was different than the other two interviews because of the interaction of her husband and daughter. The fact that this was my third interview was also a factor in the collection process. I had not pre-interviewed or interacted with Chanda previously; therefore, I felt the need to be more transparent in this situation. She had no previous knowledge of me except through the words of Interviewee II, Teri Bates Richard. Helpful in the bonding process were the facts that her husband Vincent is the nephew of the Chief of the Houmas, is a good friend of Teri’s husband, and he was like a son to her deceased husband. The words of all three members of Chanda’s family were recorded.

**Transcription of Interview III with Chanda Dardar.** Following are transcribed audio recordings from the interview with Chanda, which lasted approximately 1.5 hours. Chanda began by immediately showing me a picture of her son.

Chanda: My son is a member of seven tribes

Interviewer: That is incredible. I see you also have little girls’ toys. Is your daughter taking a nap? How old is she? What is her name?

Chanda: Her name is Sahkid’a, which is Wichita for the Sun. She is 2 years old.

Interviewer: She and your husband are welcomed to come and go and interact comfortably. They will not disturb us. I am recording everything that we say, and then I will glean out what will be entered into the dissertation.

This is my abstract and it summarizes what my focus is for the
dissertation. This is the consent form that you can sign now or wait until we are finished and you are comfortable giving me permission to use your story. The abstract is my words. My initial preface has been that White men wrote the history of Native Americans and that Native women were not included in that history. I believe that Native women were marginalized and not given the historical significance they deserved. You may or may not agree with me and I welcome your input. My other participants are members of tribes that have a matrilineal line of power. Who carries the power in your tribe?

Chanda: Women and men have equal power in my Caddo tribe and in my husband’s Houma tribe.

Interviewer: I have interviewed two other women and I would like to share a little of their background. I know that you have spoken to Teri and know her. My other participant is a 77-year-old registered member of the Cherokee tribe. Teri is 62 years old and is a registered member of the Sac/Fox tribe. Are you a registered member of your tribe?

Chanda: Yes.

Interviewer: You obviously are continuing to stay on the Red Road. How old are you?

Chanda: Thirty years old. We call it staying on the “Indin” path.

Interviewer: Did you say Indian? I-n-d-i-a-n?

Chanda: No. “Indin” or “NDN.”
Interviewer: Okay, please send me any info about tribes in a narrative with the names of the tribes you are related to. This dissertation is a case study signifying my writing about individuals and the stories they tell. The title of the dissertation is *How Native American Women Perceive Their Unique Lived Experiences: Three Women Tell Their Stories.*

Chanda: Oh, okay.

Interviewer: The questions I gave you do not have to be answered. They are just a guide. Please do not be nervous. This interview is just for you to tell me your story. Whatever you want to tell me is appropriate. I shared a little about my story to support our getting to know each other.

Chanda: What grades have you taught?

Interviewer: I have taught first through the twelfth grades and now university. Thank you both for giving up this time when you have a trip to take this afternoon.

Chanda: Talking is not a problem for me. I am glad to do this.

Interviewer: You can fill out the consent form now or wait till we are finished.

Chanda: I will do it when we are finished.

Interviewer: Tell me where you grew up and if you lived on a reservation.

Chanda: We did not live on a reservation. I grew up in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. My mother was from a little town southeast of Oklahoma City. My
mother raised all of us. My grandmother and grandfather worked at the tribal university of Haskell Indian Nation University in Lawrence, Kansas, for members of federally recognized tribes. My grandmother was the breadwinner. She went to topography school and my grandfather was a janitor.

**Interviewer:** Did you have any family members that were involved with the Trail of Tears?

**Chanda:** No. Well, no one ever talks about it, if they did. I am going to see my mom this weekend. I will ask her if she has that info. We lived on jurisdictions, not a reservation. We are Caddo, Shawnees, and Potawatomi. My husband just mentioned that they had a small reservation for some of the Houmas in Dulac, Louisiana. His whole family was born in Houma and belonged to the Houma Tribe. He went to a Church of God school. The students were from many ethnicities. When you ask me to tell stories, we did not pass down stories. We pass down traditions or a way of doing things. When my grandfather died we sat with the body for 4 days. We have to keep a fire going the whole time. Our way of doing things is through dancing…when you get married or you die we have a celebration. My sister is an Oteo Indian and they do a funeral a little differently. They do not keep a fire going for the 4 days. I do the ANCeNT WAY…the way we do things.

**Interviewer:** Are you mimicking the Irish or the Jewish traditions?
Chanda: No, we had no interactions with Europeans until the 1800s.

Interviewer: Is the coffin open the 4 days?

Chanda: Yes. We took my grandfather’s body to the Complex 50 miles southeast of Oklahoma City. Everybody signed up to sit with the body. Family usually, but you can be invited if you are a really close friend, and that is an honor. When my really close friend died, I was honored by the family to sit with her body.

Interviewer: Is that so sad? Did you talk to her?

Chanda: Yes. She was a really good friend all my life. She had a new baby and her sister has raised the baby. She is 15 years old now. Vincent and I have been married for 4 years and my grandfather died 1½ years ago. That is why he was asked to keep the fire. Also, Vincent’s uncle and my dad were really good friends.

Interviewer: How did they know one another?

Chanda: Powwows. His dad would hold the Powwows in Houma and my uncle would drum with him. They all traveled with Larry, Teri’s husband, and her husband that died, Gene. We all call her husband “Uncle Larry.” He is Pops to everyone. Vincent’s father was Vincent Dardar, Sr. He has been dead for 5 years. He was the Chief of the Houmas before his death.

Interviewer: Tell me more about your Powwows.
Chanda: We all have our own dances with different clothes and with different meaning. Straight dancers, Fancy dancers, Southern dancers, Buckskin dancers, Jingle dancers are examples. Powwows are usually mixed tribes and Native cultures. A typical Powwow has two styles of dance and drums. One style is Southern with slower drumming and the other style is Northern with faster drumming. We are from the Midwest and the drumming is the Southern style.

Interviewer: That was a great description. I was not aware and I am sure the non-Native cultures have no idea how complicated and unique the Powwow really is.

Chanda: Some Powwows are just for the spectators. Indians do not need an explanation of the dances. However, I think your idea of a booklet of explanations is a good idea. The Caddo Powwows are usually only Caddo, so an explanation of the dances is not needed. If you bring a non-Native friend to a Powwow, you will explain the significance yourself. Most of my friends in Oklahoma were not Native and had no idea about our culture.

Interviewer: That is so disturbing to me. The Indian…NDN culture…is so rich. Many cultures in this country have lost their traditions through assimilation. Such a powerful culture! I feel that the Cajun culture has borrowed a great deal of traditions from the Native culture.
Chanda: Interesting. Yes… the fishing industry has obliterated our living. We shared everything with the White man and they took away our oil and our culture. They would have died without us. The Natives that lived throughout the 40s and 50s have voiced their concerns.

Interviewer: Do you think that Native women are more interested in following traditions and staying on the “Red Road” than Native men?

Chanda: Everyone has not experienced assimilation. We go to church meetings and are trying to stick to the traditional ways. It is always there, but we do not talk about it. If White people are interested we will share it with them.

Interviewer: Writing about Native American women has been a very powerful experience for me. The other two women in my dissertation are from matrilineal Native cultures. The inheritances of the tribe are filtered through the women, not the men. Do you use the defining of your costumes as “regalia”?

Chanda: I feel that that term is a mainstreamed word. That may be attributed to the hobbyist.

Interviewer: What is a hobbyist?

Chanda: They are good at regalia. Powwows are mostly hobbyist. They are not really brought up in the Native ways. They are the ones with Pocahontas outfits. That is not our tradition. I have friends in New Orleans that are hobbyist. They dance with other hobbyist. Since the 60s, the interest in
Natives has increased and the regalia has gotten better. We used to laugh at them when I was younger because they were trying to mimic us. The Caddos do not have Powwows that are public with non-Natives dancing. Our Powwows only intermix tribes. Our dance grounds are on our own land. Let me grab my picture albums and share some Powwow pictures.

Interviewer: Wow, are those your albums?

Chanda: Yes, this is the Red Earth in Oklahoma City. It is our big Powwow. It is given either the first or second weekend of June each year. This is a picture of me as the Junior Princess of the Caddo Tribe. I am upset with my mother. She did not tell me that my silver braid covers were not authentic. My silver comb was incorrect, as well.

Interviewer: I would love to have a copy of your Princess picture and a few others that you feel are significant to reflect the culture of the Powwow.

Chanda: My sister can help me scan some and send to you for your paper.

Interviewer: That would be terrific.

Chanda: Dance clothes, not regalia, or Caddo garb is what we call our clothes. This is a picture of my aunt and my mom in their “Straight” dance clothes.

Interviewer: Do you go to the Gonzales/Baton Rouge Powwow?
Chanda: No. Here is a Wichita Straight dancing outfit. Here is another picture of Mom. We are probably more laid back about our culture. Caddos are called Hasinai and Indin, not Native American.

Interviewer: What are some words that are used to define Native Americans that offend you?

Chanda: Squaw. That is a word that means “vagina” in Native words. Vincent says that “Sabine” is a word that is offensive to the Houmas because it means “savage.”

Interviewer: One of the Native women authors that I admire—and I have often used her words in my research—is Dr. Devon Mihesuah. She cautions non-Native writers to be aware of our biases.

Chanda: Yeah, we are not from India. We are Indians…“Indin” or “NDN” is how we write it in our e-mails to one another.

Interviewer: Cool. You are different from my other two women in that you are younger and even more imbedded in your culture. You are Indins, not Cherokee like Lulu [Lela Bess] or Sac/Fox like Teri. You will never leave the tribe!

Chanda: Right. Three different tribes.

Interviewer: All Bureau of Indian Affairs registered?
Chanda: Our daughter is registered and will have benefit of grants and scholarships for education. I received $2,500 a semester with $3,100 Wichita Pell Grants. Nothing was received from the Kiowas. It depends on the mother. Wichita and Caddo receive more money that the Kiowas and Cheeks because they are not as traditional.

Interviewer: Are you on the Dawes Roll?

Chanda: I have no knowledge of the Dawes Roll. Is that the government Indian rolls?

Interviewer: Yes, that was the 1887 Indian Rolls for every tribe to be registered. It was the government’s attempt to divide the reservations into individual properties instead of one autonomous piece of land. What about the Houmas?

Chanda: They are not federally recognized. They have no land.

Interviewer: Do you know when your tribe actually began and what was the name of the first person or first chief of the Houmas?

Chanda: We were always here. The last maternal grandmother was Wichita and they were members of the Oklahoma Statistical Area called OTSA. They lived on Tribal Jurisdictional Areas. This was the former Indian Reservation in Oklahoma. Last chief of Tonkawa was my Caddo grandfather, and he spoke the Caddo language.
Interviewer: You have very deep lines of ancestors. Do the different bands of your tribes intermarry?

Chanda: Yes. When the elders spoke about other tribes they would call them “The Civilized Tribes” of Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creek, and Seminole to make fun of Indians that are basically White. That is Indian humor. My father was part French. His mother was one-half Comanche and French. She died when he was 11 years old. She was very light skinned and had green eyes.

Interviewer: Do you have a copy of your genealogy?

Chanda: Mom has it.

Interviewer: Could you get that from her for me?

Chanda: My friends never made the connection that I was Indin. They would make remarks about Indians without realizing. Have you read the recent info *Idle No More*? It is about a movement of Natives in Canada going into the streets to demonstrate in public their Indianess.

Interviewer: Yes, Teri mentioned this, but I have not read about it. I will research this movement.

Chanda: My mom had lots of Indians in her school. I am 1-1/2 years from finishing my B.A. in English. My dream is to have a Ph.D. by the time I turn 65.
Interviewer: You know that Uncle Larry has a daughter that is teaching Native American history in California.

Chanda: Larry’s daughter is like a sister to Vincent. He does not talk his traditions, because as children they were not allowed to speak the language or identify as native of Houma.

Interviewer: I have read about the heritage of the Houma. He has a very well-published aunt—I have read her work.

Chanda: Look above the fireplace. We got married on the beach. That is our flowers on the wall. Under that is my cousin’s pipe that he did a “smoking off.” Do you know what that is?

Interviewer: Is that a special and secret ceremony?

Chanda: Yes, but I can tell you about it. It is a meeting in a teepee for praying over individuals that are having problems in their lives. They want to be blessed and have relatives hear their prayers. You use a sacred eagle feather and burn sage and wave the feather over your body until the sage burns to ashes. That is the “smoking off.” That takes your prayers to the Creator. A celebration is always with people, food, laughter, sharing, and visiting with friends and family you haven’t seen in a while. Like the funeral fires, though, only men can keep the fires burning. They can be appointed and this is an honor. I broke with tradition when my Otoe friend died and I was asked to sit with her body. I was outside the family
and they called me their sister. They still do today. They do not burn a
fire like the Caddo. Her heart imploded on the way home from a
Powwow.

Interviewer: That is so sad. I am so sorry. You still miss her, don’t you?

Chanda: Yes. I am really good friends with her sisters. We are family.

Interviewer: How did you and Vincent meet?

Chanda: Vincent’s dad and my uncle were good friends. When his dad passed
away we went to his funeral and stayed with his friends and family.

Vincent and I met then when I was 13 years old.

Interviewer: Natives have such close relationships.

Chanda: We are raised that way. I have been dancing since I was a tottler. Indin
all my life.

Interviewer: When did you realize that you were an Indian?

Chanda: I went to a Black school. I knew I wasn’t Black. My parents bought a
little white house and then they moved to a bigger house before I was
born. I am the youngest. When I went to school all of my friends were
Black. In my elementary school almost all of the students were Black.

However, there was not a lot conflict in the school. There were probably
not more than 10 Natives in the whole school.

Interviewer: How about your high school?
It was not in the neighborhood. I talked Mom and Dad into letting me go to a different high school than the neighborhood one. I just did not want to act Black. I was a minority. I moved to a school that was Asian, Puerto Rican, and White with very few Indians. I was the top of my class until I got to high school. I do not know what happened to me. I joined a Native group called Unity. They are still my best friends. We talk all the time. Indins were either Powwow or Softball Indians. I was close to both groups. The elders use to rag on the “off tribes” and call them the “not the five civilized.” When you are a senior citizen or an elder you can say whatever you want. Respect of the elders is still strong in the community. You have to take care of seniors.

If you were with all Native women in a group talking, what would you call snooty White women?

My husband would call them “Crackers” and I would call them “Stvheke,” which means White-acting person. Just to make sure you know about the funeral fire. The soul walks the Earth for 4 days. Someone has to be with the body all the time. You do not leave the room, but it was the building for my friend’s funeral. My friend’s casket was open with a veil over the body. My mom took me to every funeral she ever went to and that was often. Celebrations are not sad.

I could talk to you all day long. You opened doors I needed opened. You shared with me so much interesting information that I did not know and
gave me another perspective. I will send you a copy of this interview.

May I use your name, family tree, narratives, and pictures?

Chanda: Yes, of course. I also need all the information I can gather. I have a lot of work to do myself. This meeting and interview will make me learn more about my family. My grandma had two babies that I did not know about until I read her obituary. I have one sister and two brothers. One of my brothers is autistic, so he is not interested in the family history. My other brother is not interested either. My sister is getting more interested because she has a daughter who is a Caddo Junior Princess. My mom only raised me in the culture. I do not know why. I guess I was the youngest and I just tagged along. The Caddo language is well recorded. The Houmas practice the Cajun French, but they do have their own language that they are not teaching.

Interviewer: This is all such great information. Thank you so much. Will you sign the consent form now? Thank you so much to you and your family for the valuable time. I really appreciate the opportunity. This is different in that this is the first time our husbands are involved with the interviews. I know how busy you guys are and I cannot thank you enough.

I then turned off the audio recorder. We did continue to visit for a few minutes and to clarify any questions Chanda may have had. I asked her to reread the abstract and to send me any additional information, in a written narrative, that she thinks we may have left out so I can add it to the dissertation.
Similarities and Differences of the Participants

To speak about the similarities and differences between the three women that I interviewed, one would have to focus on their ages as a highlight and then summarize the similarities and differences. The three women are from three different generations. Lela Bess was born 77 years ago during a time when women did not have equal rights, yet she was born into a Native culture that practiced a matrilineal line of ownership and power. Her Native grandmothers married non-Native men so that the men could use the Native land for economic purposes. Lela followed her grandmother’s history by marrying a non-Native; they live in Fairhope, Alabama. She and most of her grandmothers were educated women. She has a large extended family of Natives.

My other two participants were both married to Native men. Teri is 62 years old and had lost both of her parents at an early age; she has no living relatives. Teri’s first spouse was a non-Native, a Benedictine Seminarian, who was teaching in the Indian School where she was a student. Her second marriage was to a non-Native and a lawyer; they adopted a Native daughter. Her present husband is a Native, and they live in New Orleans, Louisiana. Chanda is 30 years old and has been married to two Native men and has a multitude of Native relatives. She has a blended family with her second husband. They live in Lafayette, Louisiana. Teri and Chanda are both educated women. Chanda has 2-1/2 years of college, and Teri has a teaching and a nursing certification.

All three of these women have lived on Native land, but never on a reservation. They have all attended Powwows, but Teri and Chanda are the two that have a long history of participation in the Powwows. They have all attended public schools, however, Teri is the only one that attended a traditional Indian Boarding School.
All three women have followed spiritually the “Red Road,” but their paths have been a little different. Lela Bess has followed the Red Road historically. All of them are registered members of their tribes, however, all are from different tribes. Lela Bess prides herself in reminding all that she is a member of one of the “Five Civilized Tribes,” the Cherokees; and Chanda reminds us that those tribes followed the White ways. Teri seems happy about any individual’s choice of how to follow the Red Road.

These three participants, from three generations and three different tribes, have followed their hearts and minds in their unique and diverse walks. The differences in their ages, experiences, educational achievements, and present lives are many; but their love, respect, and spiritual beliefs about their Native culture certainly make them kindred spirits. Lela Bess has followed the Red Road in her heart and soul, Teri has lived it after leaving it and coming back, and Chanda has never been off the Red Road.
CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

Review of the Methodology: Case Studies

The qualitative interview protocol of case studies is one of the more popular areas of interest in qualitative research design. The informal, conversational mode of interviewing seemed to best fit my case study of Native American women, *How Native American Women Perceive Their Unique Lived Experiences: Three Women Tell Their Stories*. The voices of the participants (interviewees) and researcher (interviewer) were digitally recorded and transcribed. My general interview style was to approach the interviews as a non-threatening, respectful, and open-minded researcher. I felt that my years as a high school guidance counselor had helped develop that skill.

Implications

All of the interviews were conducted at a familiar setting, the homes of the participants. The interviewees were all comfortable, thereby providing an opportunity for me to observe any non-verbal communication. The participants were able to draw on and retrieve any artifacts and easily share them with me. The home setting also gave me the opportunity to observe their lifestyle and allowed me to meet their husbands. An informal environment was conducive to developing a rapport with one another. Interviews may leave individuals reflective and with a new awareness of themselves. I felt my participants were cautious at first about sharing intimate thoughts and feelings. With the use of audio recorders, and the absence of note-taking, the interviewees seemed to forget we were doing anything but visiting and getting to know one another. The responses of the participants shaped my understanding, even though the three women were different ages, had different experiences, and had different tribal memberships.
Recommendations

Case study interviewers must not be tempted to tell too much of their own story. Have an idea of the themes that interest you, formulate questions to guide the interviews, and gently lead the discussion in that direction. You will benefit from practicing and recording interviews with your friends or family members. Learn the vernacular of the participants in advance of the interviews. An awareness of words that are taboo in their culture is very important. Get to know your participants before you record the interviews. Do not allow your caution to become your guide. Case study is a highly personal research design and methodology, and it gives one the opportunity to paint a picture for the reader. Oral history is a wonderful way to capture people’s lived experiences, so presenting your material accurately and vividly is important. Themes will emerge and provide different findings based on participants’ interviews, the differences in their lived experiences, and the stories they tell. Be open to surprises and allow your concepts to evolve.

Recommendations for interviews.

1. Always use two audio recorders during your interviews.
2. Never plan an interview for more than 2 hours.
3. Give a copy of your transcriptions to the participants for review and corrections, especially for changing and eliminating information they do not want published.
4. Give your participants a copy of your abstract and questions for review and understanding of your goal.
5. Know the vernacular of the culture.
6. Give participants the option of anonymity.
7. Control your emotional reactions to participants’ responses.
Developing Themes from Interviews I, II and III

Native men, matrilineal tribes, reservation living, tribal membership, strong culture, educational background, and anomalies of families’ lack of interest in culture became themes of great interest to me. The themes from all three interviews continued to develop in that all three spoke about their men, although the Caddo (Hasinai) the tribe that Chanda ultimately identifies with, are not matrilineal. The three women reinforced the fact that they had never lived on a reservation, and the definition of reservation was described differently than I had previously understood.

Chanda, Lela Bess, and Teri spoke about Powwows, which I identify as sharing and celebrating their culture, but their descriptions were unique to their tribe. Teri and Chanda are intimately involved in their culture, and Chanda shared her reactions to “hobbyists,” who are individuals that mimic the true meaning of the Powwow and the “regalia” (authentic clothes of a culture) with costumes. The three women were aligned in the idea that tribal membership is very important.

Chanda spoke about “stvheke” or White people. She and her Native friends call themselves “Indins.” If they e-mail one another, they abbreviate the word with “NDN.” All three women had a strong Native cultural background and commitment to their history. All three are very well educated. They all spoke about their disappointment in relatives who do not embrace the “Red Road.”

Findings

This story has just begun for me and somehow has provided some closure in the opportunity to write about it. No two Native women are the same, no two tribes are the same, and no two Native cultures are the same—yet they are one. It is a relief to find that some Native
Americans are not marginalized. I was surprised to find that some Native families had slaves, and that some Natives served and were officers during the Civil War. Non-Native men married into the matrilineal tribes to gain entrance into the land and the culture for economic reasons. I am thrilled to know that not all Native Americans are economically and educationally deprived. I did not know that all Native Americans and their ancestors had not lived on reservations. These experiences and the interviews have created an opportunity for me to get to know these women. The experience has then provided an outlet for their emotions to meld with their experiences. This was my dream! To have an opportunity to be the catalyst for this melding has been an extraordinary event in my life.

Personally, I have been touched by Lela Bess’s passion for her Cherokee ancestry and perplexed by her deep indignation toward White men, in spite of the fact that all but two of her great-grandfathers were White men. I was impressed by Teri’s survival skills and determination to rediscover and travel down the Red Road way of life. Chanda is and always has been deeply involved in her culture. She could share information about her traditions in her relationships with all of her relatives from many, many different “Indin” tribes. She wanted to continue our interview, even though her husband was packing them and feeding her daughter so they could drive to Oklahoma as soon as we finished our visit. All three of these stories make these women worthy and passionate in their efforts to continue on the Red Road of their cultural heritage. To gather this information has required the art of hearing for me!

I was surprised and, yet, I want to note that none of the three women mentioned a topic of concern for me that I had discovered during my early research. The Doctrines of Discovery is an ideology that Christians have a God-given right to overtake non-Christians legally. This was an edict during the Crusades to the Holy Land that pitted Christians against infidels and heathens.
These edicts have not been erased from the history books or the legal books. I had planned to discuss this edict with my participants, but the opportunity never presented itself. Maybe in future meetings we can discuss this, off the record.

**Future Research Implications**

Perhaps my future research and activities will include writing a book, spending more time on reservations, more involvement in Native organizations, and more research in areas of the Native American story. I cannot imagine concluding my discovery of the Native American women’s story. Powwows and Native American newspapers and literature have become a way of life. My grandchildren continuously provide me with information and questions about Native Americans and indigenous peoples.

**Summary**

My interest in storytelling comes from my fascination with family stories and the people that tell the stories. Interviews provide in-depth information pertaining to participants’ experiences and their viewpoints on particular topics. I had a list of questions (see Appendix 1) written and available for review, but the informal conversations seemed to develop into research information that I felt appropriate and answers I was looking for. Often, I did not ask all of the designed questions, but the participants preempted many of the questions with their stories, or the questions became inappropriate to the participant’s story. I am aware that this protocol creates a more difficult time of finding themes, but my interests in family and Native culture provided the ability to appropriately guide the narratives.

Personal narratives are windows into lived experiences of narrators. The object of the story is the experiences of the individuals telling the stories, not just the story itself. While they are telling their story you must learn to get out of their way (the interviewees) and let them tell
the story. Themes and structure and who the characters are will then develop. All of this became true in my experiences.

With the participation of a 62 year old from the Sac and Fox tribe, a 77 year old from the Cherokee Tribe, and a 30 year old from the Caddo Tribe, it was a temptation for me to identify with them and to share with them my personal experiences. Then the interview would have become “girl talk.” This was an overwhelming and difficult situation for me to avoid. However, the commonalities and differences in our lives also made the interviews easier to conduct. The themes that have become apparent and that have influenced all three of these women’s lives are the men in their lives, the fact that none of them have lived on a reservation, their abiding love of their cultures and the spirituality that is associated with that culture, their educational backgrounds, and the anomaly of their immediate family members lack of interest in their culture.

Teri, Lela Bess, and Chanda (my three participants) sent the following letters to me at the conclusion of each of their interviews and in closure to our hours of interviewing. Chanda of Interview III represents the present. Chanda was born 30 years ago and has been raised in her Caddo culture. She has never fallen off the Red Road. She has children and stepchildren that embrace the culture and represent a multitude of Native tribes.

**An unsolicited letter from Chanda after Interview III.**

Dear Margie,

I really enjoyed our talk the other day as you and your husband seem like very open people, eager to understand. I’m not really sure how much you’ve been around Indian communities but I feel that is where you will best get your experience—as opposed to individuals. Aside from our traditions and cultural practices, there is an attitude and common personality amongst many Indians from all regions; all nations. I have met Indians from Mississippi who made me feel like I was in Oklahoma because they shared the same sense of humor that many of us share. I have been to the Mescalero Apache “reservation” in New Mexico and felt very at home. We are a very diverse culture in
many ways and take pride in what has been passed down to us by our ancestors and elders. Whether we are from the same tribe or from a tribe a thousand miles away, I think it’s safe to say we all consider ourselves as one people. And I have to say that most of what you see in mainstream popularity pertaining to Indians is about as far from the truth as one can make up. If you want to see authentic Native Art I would implore you to visit Indian Market in Santa Fe, New Mexico every 3rd week of August. Those silly little paintings on plush canvas just ain’t where it’s at. Visit some powwows in Oklahoma. Many Indians in the Southwest still practice their ancestral traditions—but the rub with that is that you have to be invited.

I have been fortunate enough to experience many facets of my culture. I have friends and family from many tribes, backgrounds and social situations but like I said we still all have that commonality. We all consider ourselves part of each other and find strength in our solidarity!

Sincerely,

Chanda

Teri is 62 years of age and she represents the very traditional. She has embraced her future with her new Native husband. She transitioned early in her life into the White culture and has now become stronger in her Sac and Fox Native affiliation and the passion for her Native culture. She has been affected deeply by her daughter’s desire to stay on the Red Road and her husband’s desire to live it.

An unsolicited letter from Teri after Interview II.

Dear Margie,

A friend of mine once told me that when you stand and share your story in an empowering way your story will heal you and your story will heal somebody else. I believe that to be true. I think my involvement with Native culture and ways has waxed and waned throughout my years from 11 years old until 25 years old. This was a period when I didn’t have a strong affinity or bond to it. Beginning in my late 20s I needed to be near people more like me than not, this drew me towards forming more Native friendships doing more with Native friends. It was very strong once Gene and I married. We wanted children badly and I wanted these children immersed in the “Red Road” way of life. I always leave the circle, but the circle doesn’t leave me. It’s always there waiting for you to return. All things are connected. My philosophy of life shares most of the tenants of what people call life. Following Gene’s death, for three years I felt I had left the circle and walked away from my Native community, not that the community wasn’t there for me. Again, it was the impact on my daughter Maya that made me very deliberately begin again. I battled the thought to draw back closer to Native ways and the
Red Road. I was concerned if I didn’t return who would get Maya back on the road. I also wanted to give her a positive example of recovering from catastrophic experiences. Larry was one of her four directional elders at her naming ceremony. He’s been her Uncle Larry her whole life. His involvement with stomp, ceremonies, and powwows has drawn Maya and Larry closer in the Red Road way of life.

I thought of a comment I made about loving John and I don’t want to leave the impression that I did not appreciate all of his endeavors. I loved him like a first crush. Young girls love. He was my early love. He was the way for me to escape.

Gene was my adult love and family love. I thank God that Gene was my mate for 30 some years. He was my everything. He made my world. He was the perfect mate to share so much of life’s great struggles. He was very strong and a kind, loving soul through all of my miscarriages and the completed struggle with all the cancer treatments.

Larry is my companion for the last years. Life is good. Life is sweet. We have time to savor experiences and have a 25 year plus friendship deepen into sweet geezer love. We are wonderful companions for one another.

With John I tried to live within his world. Gene willingly came into my world and treasured that world.

Hope this helps,

Teri

Lela Bess is 77 years of age and represents the past. She has been on the Cherokee Red Road all of her life, but she has almost exclusively lived as a non-Native in a White world. Her love of her culture is strong and has become stronger in her interaction and identification with her grandchildren.

An unsolicited letter from Lela Bess after Interview I.

Dear Margie,

Lela Bess Kite Weber, Cherokee Osiyo!

Cherokee has always been a part of me, just another attribute like: dishwater blond, short in statue, olive complexion, and Southern Belle by tradition. I have always liked to dance, sing, write musicals and poetry and skits, make top grades, play the piano and yell for the Tigers! Just a normal Southerner growing up in a small North Louisiana town in the 40’s and 50’s. At Neville High School, grades 7-12, I was elected Tiger Cheerleader all three times, Junior drill master of the Tigerettes, Best Pledge and then President of Delta Beta Sigma national sorority, Sweetheart of Neville High, 2nd in graduating class, President of the French Club, Editor of “The Sizzler”, I could go on ad nauseum……
Neville High School belonged to the Monroe City School System which I matriculated in from kindergarten through twelfth grade. This was an imposing three story brick building with band tower on two or three city block across from the City Park, Pool and Golf Course and only seven blocks from the (nation’s most beautiful) Ouachita River on the “North Side” of Monroe.

Now that I am one of the Cherokee Elders, I still enjoy all these same things and believe that having the Cherokee spirit Gadagi has always made me an overachiever and a leader among my peers.

I was raised in a Christian home, attended and taught Sunday School in high school and set up three church libraries while in college in Ruston, Monroe and Vicksburg.

I was graduated cum laude from Louisiana Polytech in Ruston and married three days later!! So much for a career in journalism or library science…..although I eventually used my English education degree in Tallulah, L.A. and Vicksburg, MS./ Any way, I married a New Orleans boy, a forester who loves to hunt all the fish and fowl in his woods, but we eat all he brings home in the tribal tradition.

I am a registered member of the Cherokee Tribe in Oklahoma and on “The Old Settlers Roll “as my people migrated from their plantation in Georgia before the Trail Where They Cried. I have voted in Mayes County for at least 50 years and have seen many Chiefs and one Chiefess come and go through the years, but the abiding strength and loyalty and love remains in my people. I am #431 in First Families of the Cherokee Nation under the ancestor name “Nannie Beehunter” daughter of Annie Beehunter Downing.

The “artifacts” passed on to me include the Hayden Family Bible and the Bible table it stood on in Carrie’s home in Choteau (as it was saved from the fire.), “The Girl Graduate” Lela Hayden’s book from Kidd Key College, May 1908 in Texas, The Class of Naughty Eight! “American Indian Fairy Tales” by W.T. Larned. I have accumulated a personal library of Cherokee related books and lore, some 170 volumes……

The Hayden Family Bible is the “Potters’ Standard Edition” of the Holy Bible containing the Old and New Testaments and the Apochrypha and the personal entry pages of births, deaths, and marriages of the children of Rebecca Caroline Bryan Hayden and Clement Hayden, Jr. from 1869 up to the present and the latest death of my oldest son. Many mementoes are pressed in the pages of this large, leather bound, gold embossed and brass fitted Bible, including wedding notices, pressed flowers, hand tissue patterns, and personal notes of family interest, etc.

As Mary H. Manhein of LSU said in her book “The Bone Lady”, Perhaps the appeal of this tribe is due to the fact that the Cherokee——”beautiful people” as they are known, have retained an aloofness that whites grudgingly admire. Maybe is also because the word “Cherokee” rolls off the tongue with such a lovely sound.”

Wado
Lela Bess Kite
2013
Conclusion

To be fortunate enough to interview three Native Women from three different tribes with three different lived experiences was a dream come true and completely serendipitous. I guess I should keep my “dream catcher”! Thank you to the three of you. These three women are of incredible cultures and have beautiful spirits that changed my life.
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APPENDIX 1: QUESTIONS USED TO GUIDE THE INTERVIEWS

1. How have your lived experiences impacted your interpretation or perception of how you are situated in your Native American community?

2. Describe how your lived experiences have impacted the Native American community.

3. Do Native American women perceive their lived experiences as unique or as shared experiences with other Native American women?

4. When was the first time you were told or you realized you were Native American? How did you view yourself at that time?

5. What does it feel like to be a Native American in current American society? How do you view yourself now as opposed to your view of yourself as a teenager?

6. What do you see as the future of Native Americans in American society? How do they think they will view themselves in the future?
## APPENDIX 2. CHART OF THEMES AND PARTICIPANTS’ DATA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name and Age of Participants</th>
<th>Spouse(s)</th>
<th>Matrilineal Tribe</th>
<th>Reservational Living</th>
<th>Tribal Membership</th>
<th>Strong Culture (Living on the Red Road)</th>
<th>Educational Background</th>
<th>Anomalies of Contemporary Families’ Level of Interest in Culture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lela Bess (Age 77)</td>
<td>1 non-Native spouse; not active in culture.</td>
<td>YES (Cherokee) One of 5 civilized tribes with strong Colonial influence.</td>
<td>NO Lived on own private land and near Cherokee Nation.</td>
<td>YES Did not participate in powwows; high interest in ancestry.</td>
<td>YES (Theoretically) Registered member entire life Red Road.</td>
<td>White public schools; certified English teacher.</td>
<td>One (and only) sibling: no interest. Children: selectively. Historical interest: yes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teri (Age 62)</td>
<td>2 non-Native spouses; both active in culture. 1 Native spouse; always active in culture.</td>
<td>YES (Sac/Fox) Very traditional.</td>
<td>NO Removed from home near reservation at an early age following parents’ death.</td>
<td>YES Powwow participant and constant organizer; removed from ancestry.</td>
<td>YES (Intermittently) Living entire life on Red Road with short periods of separation.</td>
<td>Catholic Native Schooling; certified Special Ed Teacher; Certified Nurse.</td>
<td>No siblings. No extended family. Daughter is interested in culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chanda (Age 30)</td>
<td>2 Native spouses; always active in culture.</td>
<td>NO (Caddo) Extremely traditional.</td>
<td>NO Always lived near Caddos’ Native land.</td>
<td>YES Powwows are integral part of life. Living the history of her ancestry.</td>
<td>YES (Passionately) Living entire life on Red Road.</td>
<td>Black public school; studying 2 years to be English teacher.</td>
<td>Entire family highly active in culture.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX 3: APPLICATION FOR EXEMPTION FROM INSTITUTIONAL OVERSIGHT

Application for Exemption from Institutional Oversight

Unless qualified as meeting the specific criteria for exemption from Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight, ALL LSU research/ projects using living humans as subjects, or samples, or data obtained from humans, directly or indirectly, with or without their consent, must be approved or exempted in advance by the LSU IRB. This Form helps the PI determine if a project may be exempted, and is used to request an exemption.

- Applicant, please fill out the application in its entirety and include the completed application as well as parts A-F, listed below, when submitting to the IRB. Once the application is completed, please submit two copies of the completed application to the IRB Office or to a member of the Human Subjects Screening Committee. Members of this committee can be found at http://research.lsu.edu/Compliance/PoliciesProcedures/InstitutionalReviewBoard%28IRB%29/item/24737.html

- A Complete Application Includes All of the Following:
  (A) Two copies of this completed form and two copies of parts B thru F.
  (B) A brief project description (adequate to evaluate risks to subjects and to explain your responses to Parts 1&2)
  (C) Copies of all instruments to be used.
  *If this proposal is part of a grant proposal, include a copy of the proposal and all recruitment material.
  (D) The consent form that you will use in the study (see part 3 for more information.)
  (E) Certificate of Completion of Human Subjects Protection Training for all personnel involved in the project, including students who are involved with testing or handling data, unless already on file with the IRB Training link: (http://php.nihtraining.com/users/login.php)
  (F) IRB Security of Data Agreement: (http://research.lsu.edu/files/56774.pdf)

1) Principal Investigator: Marjorie L. Kopaci
   Dept: ETPH
   Ph: 210-215-6205
   Rank: Ph.D. Student
   E-mail: mkipac1@tigers.lsu.edu

2) Co Investigator(s): please include department, rank, phone and e-mail for each
   *If student, please identify and name supervising professor in this space
   Dr. Earl Cheek  Director of School of Education
   echekke@lsu.edu

3) Project Title: How Native American women perceive their unique lived experiences: Two women tell their stories

4) Proposal? (yes or no) [ ]
   If Yes, LSU Proposal Number
   Also, if YES, either
   [ ] This application completely matches the scope of work in the grant
   [ ] More IRB Applications will be filed later

5) Subject pool (e.g. Psychology students)
   *Circle any "vulnerable populations" to be used: (children <18; the mentally impaired; pregnant women, the aged, other). Projects with incarcerated persons cannot be exempted.

6) PI Signature
   [ ] Date
   [ ] No per signatures

** I certify my responses are accurate and complete. If the project scope or design is later changed, I will resubmit for review. I will obtain written approval from the Authorized Representative of all non-LSU Institutions in which the study is conducted. I also understand that it is my responsibility to maintain copies of all consent forms at LSU for three years after completion of the study. If I leave LSU before that time the consent forms should be preserved in the Departmental Office.

Screening Committee Action: Exempted
Signed Consent Waived?: Yes [ ] No
Reviewer Krista A. Gorse Signature Date

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VITA

Marjorie Larson Kopacsi is a lifelong learner originally from Baton Rouge, Louisiana. After beginning her Doctor of Philosophy at the University of the Incarnate Word in San Antonio, Texas, while working as a high school guidance counselor, she and her husband moved to Baton Rouge. She continued and completed her Doctor of Philosophy at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, where she was inducted into the Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi. As an Education retiree from Texas and New Jersey, she and her husband will be returning to New Jersey so she can continue her teaching career as a professor in a university in New Jersey. Ms. Kopacsi’s interest in the Native American culture prompted her 6.5 years of research and the completion of her dissertation with extensive interviews of three Native American women.