



January 2017

Navajo Nation Brain Drain: An Exploration of Returning College Graduates' Perspectives

Quintina Ava Bearchief-Adolpho

Brigham Young University, qadolpho@gmail.com

Aaron P. Jackson

Brigham Young University, aaron_jackson@byu.edu

Steven A. Smith

Brigham Young University, steve_smith@byu.edu

Moroni T. Benally

Diné Policy Institute, moroni.benally@gmail.com

Recommended Citation

Bearchief-Adolpho, Q. A. , Jackson, A. P. , Smith, S. A. , Benally, M. T. (2017). Navajo Nation Brain Drain: An Exploration of Returning College Graduates' Perspectives. *The International Indigenous Policy Journal*, 8(1).

DOI: 10.18584/iipj.2017.8.1.7

Navajo Nation Brain Drain: An Exploration of Returning College Graduates' Perspectives

Abstract

American Indian tribes face the phenomenon known across the world as the brain drain. They invest millions of dollars in educating their members only to have little return on their investment. Many nation members leave reservations to get postsecondary education but never return. Those who get education off the reservation and choose to return are the exception to this rule. Although there is an abundance of literature regarding brain drain across the world, there has been little research done with American Indians. In order to begin to understand the brain drain phenomenon, this study analyzed unstructured qualitative interviews with 17 Navajo Nation members who left their reservation, obtained a degree, and returned to work on the reservation. Themes resulting from the hermeneutic analysis of transcribed interviews were (a) Family Support, (b) Community, (c) Cultural Identity, (d) the Simple Life, (e) Reservation Economy, and (f) Commitment to the Reservation. The analysis found that constant, lengthy, and meaningful relationships were motivating factors in drawing participants back to contribute to their reservations. Further study is needed to understand how communities and tribes can ensure that these relationships are built and maintained.

Keywords

brain drain, American Indian, Native American, education, Navajo Nation

Acknowledgments

This study was funded by the McKay School of Education at Brigham Young University and was conducted in collaboration with the Diné Policy Institute at Diné College in Tsaile, Arizona.

Creative Commons License



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

Navajo Nation Brain Drain: An Exploration of Returning College Graduates' Perspectives

When this study's first author, a Blackfoot First Nation woman, was a young girl, her father would often gather his loved ones around a fire and recall legends passed down to him from his grandmother. The creation story he told has been the foundation of the first author's education. The story goes like this:

The Creator created this Earth, which we live on, and desired to provide food and resources for his children to live. Even today, many Indigenous people know this Earth as Mother. After he finished the creation, he called his animal creations to gather around him so he could give names to them. "Stah' tsi'tapi" was the name given to all that live under the ground, or the underground people. "Ksah 'kwi'tapi" was the name given to all that lived on the surface, or earth people. "Ohki'tapi" was given to all that live in the water, or water people. "Spoomi'tapi" was given to all that flew in the air, or the air people.

The Creator then asked his animal creations for a volunteer to feed, nourish, clothe, and shelter his children that are down on the earth. A mouse came forward, but he was much too small. A gopher, badger, coyote, and wolf each offered, but were also too small. The bear was too lazy and grouchy for the purpose. Just then, they all felt the ground trembling and saw a thick cloud of dust approaching the group. They couldn't make out the cause. Suddenly, they saw a huge buffalo bull with black horns flashing in the sunlight, and all his followers running behind him toward the group. The other animals were scared and quickly cleared a path for them to run through to the Creator. The bull ran directly at him and stopped just short. With his chest out, and snorting and pawing the earth he said to the Creator, "My people and I will give ourselves as your children's food, clothing, shelter, and anything else they need to live." The Creator was pleased and the plan was complete.

The Creator announced that they were ready to make the journey to Earth. It was night when the buffalo began their journey. The old people tell us that on a clear moonless night if you look straight up at the night sky you can still see the buffalo's path. White people call it the Milky Way.

The buffalo had a significant role in supporting many American Indians for many years by providing clothing, shelter, tools, food, and trade. However, we are now in an era that requires different resources to provide our economic necessities. Many tribal Elders consider education to be the new economic hub around which quality of life turns. They say, "Education is the buffalo of today."

Many tribes have come to see education as central to their survival and success. They have seen that education can be correlated to economic growth (Office of Navajo Nation Scholarship and Financial Support, 2011). The Navajo Nation, for example, spends millions of dollars to develop their human capital; however, it has not realized a return in economic growth for the reservation because tribal members leave the reservation to obtain their education in areas with developed economies. Their experiences with postsecondary education often prompt a personal dilemma for members—the difficult decision about whether or not they will return to work and live on the reservation. A similar dilemma exists for many from developing economies around the world.

Global Perspective

Human capital, the collective set of skills individuals possess that add economic value to a population (Human Capital, n. d.), is ranked as one of the top four factors that determines a nation's economic development (Berry & Haklev, 2005). The literature consistently points to raising the level of human capital through education as a primary means to resolve a nation's poverty concerns and produce economic growth, thereby providing its citizens with a higher quality of life. Citizens from nations with developing economies have little access to higher education and are dependent on primary education and basic literacy as sources of raising the level of human capital (McKenzie et al., 2013). As developing economies struggle to improve their education systems, their best and brightest citizens migrate from their native lands to developed receiving countries, searching for education as a solution to their economic welfare. As Berry and Haklev (2005) have stated,

In many developing countries, the value of knowledge is in its capacity to save and enhance human lives. The absence, loss or restriction of such knowledge impacts at the lowest levels of disadvantage and poverty, in death and disease. (p. 2)

Temporary migration for education is important to the welfare of developing nations. However, permanent or long-term migration of skilled human capital produces a negative effect on the native sending countries when educated, human capital fails to return—a phenomenon called brain drain (Kwok & Leland, 1982; Zweig, 1997). Brain drain causes developing countries to lose precious human resources and thereby indirectly subsidize developed countries' labor forces (Ahmad, 2004).

Berry and Haklev (2005) found that individuals participating in brain drain chose to emigrate for reasons such as security threats, political unrest, discrimination, economic necessity, or professional opportunities. These are what Berry and Haklev (2005) have called push and pull factors, indicating that push factors repel students from their native countries and pull factors attract students to host countries. Push factors include a lack of employment opportunities, lower comparative salaries, and political unrest and instability (Gibson & McKenzie, 2011; Kupfer, Hofman, Jarawan, McDermott, & Bridbord, 2004; Kwok & Leland, 1982). Common examples of pull factors include significant increases in annual income, comfortable living conditions and lifestyles, opportunities for career advancement, better working facilities, educational opportunities and safety for families, and opportunities to learn from the top professionals in the field (Gibson & McKenzie, 2011; Zweig, 1997).

Skilled individuals tend to look for the greatest opportunities afforded to them. Skilled individuals who desire to maximize their returns will generally migrate in search of the highest paid opportunities or the best living conditions (Iredale, 1999). Such individuals, according to Iredale (1999), choose a location “where they feel they will be better able to use their capabilities and enjoy superior conditions of work and existence” (p. 90).

Navajo Nation Brain Drain

The Navajo Nation has struggled for decades to raise the level of human capital on its reservation by spending millions of dollars to facilitate the education of tribal members. However, the direct economic returns on such financial investments are low (Office of Navajo Nation Scholarship and Financial Support, 2011). Navajo Nation-funded scholarships have produced an educated tribal membership; however, scholarship recipients graduate from college and fail to return to the reservation in significant numbers. Therefore, the communities of the Navajo Nation are failing to forward their economic objectives. Not only is the Navajo Nation failing to realize the benefits of an increase in educated and skilled human capital, but it is also experiencing loss of capital by indirectly subsidizing other economies.

Brain drain in many developing countries has been examined, but very little has been done to study the effects of brain drain with respect to the Navajo Nation or other Indigenous communities. A Navajo Nation brain drain study, conducted by McKenzie et al. (2013) identified some of the reasons college-educated tribal members leave the reservation and do not return. Participants provided personal accounts of why they did not return to the reservation after receiving a college education. The research identified some common push factors, such as no job opportunities, no housing, and few conveniences. This study also found that tribal members desire to return to the reservation to live and to work, but many members experience economic and social barriers that prevent them from doing so (McKenzie et al., 2013).

Research has not been done to identify pull factors that attract educated Navajos to permanently return to work on the reservation. We determined that a study examining the reasons that college-educated Navajo members might return to the reservation after receiving education would prove beneficial for the Navajo Nation and other Indigenous communities. The intention of this study was to explore those reasons and to help the Navajo Nation realize a better return on their educational investments by contributing to the development of policies that produce systematic solutions to overcoming poverty and promoting economic growth. The primary research question for this study was: What are the perspectives of college-educated Navajo Nation members on why they chose to return to the Nation?

Method

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) have stated, “Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 3). This study utilized qualitative interviews to understand, in depth, the experiences of participants (Evely, Fazey, Pinard, & Lambin, 2008).

This study incorporated a hermeneutic qualitative method to explore the perspectives of participants. This method is based in a relational ontology. The fundamental assumption of relational ontology is the belief that relationships are primary and necessary to understanding human experience (Gergen, 2009; McKenzie, et al., 2013). The philosophical foundation underlying this method appears to fit well with the American Indian belief that relationships provide meaning and understanding. American Indians traditionally believe that relationships with their family members, extended family, tribal members, and surrounding environment all contribute to who they become (Trusty, Looby, & Sandhu, 2002). The epistemological foundation for this method is based on hermeneutic modes of understanding (Gadamer,

2004). Broadly, hermeneutic inquiry refers to the process of interpreting human experiences as texts with the intention of finding deeper meaning and understanding (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Participants

A team of investigators, composed of members of the Diné Policy Institute and faculty and graduate students from a nearby university, conducted semi-structured, face-to-face, one-on-one qualitative interviews with members of the Navajo Nation who met the following criteria:

- a. They had lived on the Navajo Nation for the majority of their childhood years, which was defined as having spent at least one-half of their school years (K–12) attending reservation schools;
- b. They had left the Navajo Nation to pursue and complete a post-secondary degree; and
- c. They had returned to the Navajo Nation to live and work.

We conducted interviews with 24 potential participants. This study only 17 analyzed interviews. Seven of the interviews were excluded because either (a) it was determined the participant did not actually meet inclusion criteria, or (b) the recording was inaudible.

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) suggested that an interview-based qualitative study should incorporate 15 interviews, plus or minus 10. The final determination of the number of participants comes from whether or not the collected interviews provide sufficient saturation of the topic of interest. Based on this criterion, we determined that the 17 interviews provided sufficient depth and breadth of responses for the purposes of the study.

Procedure

Participants were recruited in 2012 at the Gathering of Nations, one of the largest North American Pow Wows, held in Albuquerque, New Mexico. This site was selected for recruitment because it allowed efficient access to a diverse set of Navajo tribal members. The Diné Policy Institute and Diné College set up a booth and allowed the research team to use the space for interviews. The research team posted a sign that asked participants to take part in the research study if they met the criteria for inclusion. Those potential participants who said they met the inclusionary criteria were asked to complete a brief demographic questionnaire and an informed consent form. The study had approval from the Brigham Young University (BYU) Institutional Review Board (IRB) and was supported by the Diné Policy Institute. It did not require Navajo Nation IRB approval because the study was not done on tribal land.

Researchers participating in this study were trained in qualitative interviewing. A list of interview topics with guidelines and sample questions (see Appendix) were used to help interviewers maximize the depth and breadth of the interviewee responses (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Interviewers conducted the interviews in person and one at a time. The interviews ranged anywhere from 20 to 50 minutes, with interviews typically lasting approximately 40 minutes. Each interview was recorded and transcribed by members of the research team.

Data Analysis

The same philosophical and theoretical assumptions that were utilized when conducting the interviews formed the foundation of the study's analysis. The principal investigator analyzed the transcribed interviews using a hermeneutic interpretive method, as outlined by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009). The hermeneutic circle can be described as a cyclical approach to looking at both the whole and the parts of the whole and allowing them each to inform the analysis of the other. This cycle or spiral of going from whole to parts, moving back and forth, ultimately leads to a meaningful and comprehensible analysis that goes beyond the initial interpretation of either the whole or the parts of the experience. The following describes the process the research team followed to analyze data.

1. The text of all the interviews was read and reread to ensure overall understanding. This was done to carefully study the interviews in order to identify overarching meanings set forward by participants in the interview dialogue (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).
2. The data were analyzed, using the hermeneutic circle, as described below:
 - a. The text was read and reread to determine and clarify interpretations and meanings.
 - b. Each paragraph and sentence was read and analyzed.
 - c. The whole text was reread to discover further meaning.
 - d. Notes were taken for each interview and summarized.
3. The summaries of each interview were read to determine existing patterns. This process is referred to as the hermeneutic circle, and has been described as a spiral or reflexive process through which investigators seek to uncover progressively deeper levels of meaning in a text (Hoshmand, 1989; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Polkinghorne, 1984).
4. Common themes from across all of the interviews were identified at this stage and consolidated in summary form. This process reflects an effort to identify the meanings articulated in the text (Jackson & Patton, 1992; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Furthermore, at this stage the primary investigator focused on emerging sub-themes that were associated with and categorized under broader common themes between interviews.
5. An experienced auditor helped validate the primary researcher's interpretations (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Once the auditor supported interpretations, the primary investigator worked to organize and effectively communicate the findings. The main intention of the researchers was to communicate uncovered meanings and themes in such a way as to be true to the participants' experiences and perspectives.

Investigator Assumptions

There were several assumptions made in this study. First, it was assumed that the participants attending Gathering of Nations were representative of the educated population on the Navajo Nation. Second, it was assumed that participants felt comfortable enough in the interview setting to be open and frank in

their comments. Third, it was assumed that the hermeneutic method of interviewing is an effective way of obtaining meaning and themes that communicate the experience of these Navajo Nation members.

Furthermore, the principal investigator recognizes that the study's research question and the themes that emerged from the data were influenced by her experience as a Blackfoot First Nation woman who graduated from post-secondary education, returned to her Nation to work, and then left again to pursue further education. It was assumed that through the hermeneutic process and the use of auditors, the researchers' biases and assumptions would not harm the trustworthiness of the results.

Results

Primary themes and sub-themes were identified through the study's hermeneutic analysis. Six primary themes were prominent concerning participants' reasons for returning to the Navajo Nation. Four of the primary themes required greater clarity, utilizing additional levels of sub-themes. Primary themes included the following:

1. Family: Family Support and Traditional Upbringing;
2. Community: Giving Back and Positive Community Role Model;
3. Cultural Identity: Cultural Traditions (songs, stories, customs, etc.);
4. The Simple Life: Livestock, Mountains, and Environment;
5. Reservation Economy: Networking, Social Circles, Job Availability; and
6. Commitment to the Reservation.

Family

Family relationships and familial connections were significant reasons for participants returning to and residing on the Navajo Nation. Reasons for desiring family and familial connections varied, and continued analysis led to sub-themes of Family Support and Traditional Upbringing.

Family support. The participants received or gave familial support in specific and identifiable ways, which will be discussed below. This theme was divided into sub-themes of family needs, giving back to family, and role models.

Family needs. Participants described wanting to return to the reservation to support family members during difficult life situations.

One female participant noted that she felt the need to return to help both an aged relative, who was unable to care for herself, and a parent who was dealing with this circumstance alone:

My grandma's like 92. And that's the reason why. And also my mom, she's kind of like by herself and all her kids are grown up and she needs some extra help and that's why I'm there now. (Participant 9)

Another participant expressed similar sentiments, concerning the death of his partner's family member:

The reason why I ended up going back was because of the person I ended up with, because her kids were situated back in the reservation. At the same time I lost my mom. And for my grandmother, that was her only daughter, so she took it pretty hard. That kind of made my decision just to go back. (Participant 7)

Giving back to family. Many participants spoke about their desire to offer support by giving back to their families. Because they had left the reservation to gain life experience, they desired to come home afterwards and give their family members greater opportunities. Participants wanted to enrich their families' lives by giving back.

One female participant indicated that she felt a need to give back because she was the oldest child:

Yes, definitely. The decision I made, you know, got me a job. Because I come from a large family, I was also able to help my parents. Since I'm the oldest of the family basically helping with my brothers and sisters, being there for them as well—kind of like a second mother, having to go to their interviews for like parent teacher conference. So I would go to those types of things, athletics, up in the mountains stuff, and their studies, helping them and guiding them—things that my parents didn't necessarily know about, and so I was always constantly pushing them, as well. (Participant 5)

Another participant was taught the importance of giving back to family, and that was why he sought to move back:

I grew up on the reservation. I guess a part of the way I was raised was to ... give back to your hometown and to give back to your family and to be around them and to move back to your land. (Participant 12)

Role models for other family members. Many of the participants spoke about offering family support by returning as role models. One female participant spoke about how she was told that her brothers and sisters looked up to her.

Yes. I was always told growing up that my brothers and sisters are looking to me and I needed to be an example and for a long time, you know, I was doing what I needed to do—which was no problem. I took on that responsibility. And I didn't, you know, my personality is not to cause any problems or really fight too much and argue. So that's what kept me on that path. (Participant 5)

Traditional upbringing. The theme of Traditional Upbringing was divided into sub-themes—Family Expectations and Family Connection—that conveyed clearer reasons why participants chose to return to Navajo Nation.

Family expectations. Some participants were expected to come home after they were done with their schooling. One female participant commented:

I think that had to do with a lot with my family upbringing with my parents. My father was a traditional practitioner and I still had my grandparents and my great grandparents. And they always said, “This is home and you can go out and do stuff but always don’t forget your language. Always come home and there’s going to be a time when we will no longer be here and you need to carry on.” And I’ve always taken that to heart. It’s driven me all along. (Participant 14)

Family connections. Participants also noted a sense of connection to their families, with one male participant expressing a desire to just be around his family:

I wouldn’t say really, it was for culture; it mainly was just to be there with family, as far as family goes. (Participant 7)

Another participant expressed that her family was very close and thus it was hard to be away from them:

Well mainly because of my family. I came from like a really close, close family where my grandparents, my aunts, my uncles, my brothers, everyone was always coming back every weekend for something. (Participant 17)

Community

Participants in the study expressed a sense of community as one reason for returning, insofar as they both valued their community experience growing up and wanted to use their education to give back to that community. By contrast, others noted that they had had rough experiences growing up and sought to use their education to give back and thereby improve their community. Sub-themes within the primary theme of community include Giving Back and Positive Community Role Model.

Giving back. Many participants expressed a desire to give back to their nation by returning and finding employment in industries such as teaching, athletics, or community services. They shared a strong sense of desire to return to the reservation and utilize their educations to help others. One participant expressed this desire clearly, stating:

Because I feel that, you know, a lot of our own people do not go back to our reservation once they get their degree, their education. They go elsewhere and give services, you know, outside the reservation. So I thought maybe going back to the reservation, and helping our own people will help, you know—benefit from my knowledge and skills that I have learned—and put that back to my people. (Participant 2)

Another participant indicated that many American Indians have a hard time living away from the reservation because they are not well prepared, and so they do not complete their postsecondary education. This recognition prompted his desire to go back to the reservation after graduation to help

youth in the community learn how to survive living outside of the community until they complete their degree, rather than returning before they had finished the program:

The biggest influence was when I started school, I made a promise that I would go back, you know. So after I finished teaching, I wanted to coach and help the American Indian students because it's a big, big, different world out there. Coming from [the town] where I came from and being you know all in one place and never travelling and going out and meeting all the other cultures and meeting all the different people and religions, it was quite a difference. And now I understand why a lot of American Indians don't survive out in the world because they are not used to it at all. When I played [college] basketball you know I questioned my coach, "Why don't you get Native girls? They are good enough to play here." And she told me that, "I would love to have them here but they don't stay. They never stay. They get lonesome and homesick. We give them full ride scholarships. We give them everything they want and they won't stay." Which I can understand, because it is a lonely place when you are not used to living in the White world. So that was my main goal, my main promise was to come home and work with the American Indian kids and so that's why I went back. (Participant 6)

Another participant indicated that when she was younger, she would see others leave the reservation and come back, and she wanted to do the same:

The key issue is that when I was growing up in my community there were a lot of improvements that needed to be done. And there're even some people that went on to college and came back, but didn't have all the resources. And I thought I might be one of them to go off and learn as much as I can and bring a lot back to my community.

This same participant expressed a great desire to help the younger people:

... I'm proud to be Navajo, and I want to help my Navajo people. I want to reach down to the grassroots. And I want to reach down to the young people ... and all the way to this generation now ... That's what made me to come back. Because I explained to my younger generation that school is very important. You have to learn something and bring it back and help us. (Participant 11)

Another participant expressed that she felt obligated to give back because she was given the Navajo Nation Scholarship:

Well, I feel that way because I took the Navajo Nation's scholarship money and I feel like I should do my part. I should be able to come back and give a little bit of myself back and, not in a way of money, but in a way of time. (Participant 15)

Positive community role models. Participants also desired to give back by being a positive role model for younger generations. For example, one female participant indicated that she wanted to inspire kids:

Like I said, you know, I want to be here for the Native kids and some way, somehow inspire them and even down to my own kids. (Participant 13)

Cultural Identity

Some participants were raised in families that were traditionally based. To them, cultural identity was high among their reasons for returning. In this context, cultural identity was tied to songs, stories, customs, etc. Their cultural beliefs and teachings were very important to their identities and to their children's identities. One female participant noted that the reason why she did not want to leave the reservation was that she wanted to stay connected to her traditional beliefs. These same beliefs drew her back after she completed her degree:

Yeah, that's where our traditional beliefs, our traditional culture—that's where—that's why we don't want to move from the reservation. (Participant 2)

Several participants indicated similar beliefs. They expressed that they were raised traditionally and had a deep respect for their Elders and their teachings:

Well I'm very raised traditionally and I respect my Elders. My paternal grandparent and also my maternal grandparents were still alive at the time. And so there's a lot of teaching—once you go off the reservation you have to know some songs, once you pass your boundaries of the secret mountains. And that was how much respect I had for my Elders. (Participant 4)

Another participant connected the importance of carrying on cultural traditions by returning to the reservation to improving their homeland and to helping people in the community:

We were pretty much really traditional. We grew up on traditional teachings and the majority of what we learned, or what we were brought up on, was kind of like getting taught through our Elders. So pretty much that's how we were growing up. My grandpa always used to tell me that you can't just leave and forget where you came from. You have to come back. And you have to either try to make things better or try and help your people. So that's just the way I was taught. (Participant 17)

Culture plays a significant role in the lives of some participants, causing them to return so that their children will not miss the opportunity to know their culture. Several participants conveyed the importance of passing on cultural traditions to their children, and the sense of responsibility that accompanied this process. One participant emphasized the importance of giving his children the culture of reservation life:

Because I have a lot of friends that gained degrees and live off the reservation, their children don't really understand reservation life. I raised my children on the reservation; they know what reservation life is . . . But I just wanted them to know what it's like to be on the reservation, culture wise. It's part of our identity. It is who we are. That's why it is important. (Participant 1)

Another participant expressed her desire to teach her child her culture:

So when I graduated, my idea was that I wanted to come closer to home so that I could be around my family. And I also had a desire for my daughter to know something about her culture

because we were around Hispanic people all the time, but she never was around Native people. So I wanted to live close to home. (Participant 8)

The Simple Life

Participants identified that they returned to the reservation for a simpler lifestyle outside of the city. Indeed, participants were passionate about leading a lifestyle that fit with their desire to live a less complicated life than the one they encountered in the city. One participant noted, for example:

Part of me still likes the simplicity and living the simple life, and having livestock and being around family all the time. And so I moved back and just started working on the reservation and started a career there. (Participant 12)

Another echoed this desire, stating:

Mainly my love for livestock. I mean I lived in [city] for almost a year, and I couldn't do it without having some kind of responsibility for livestock. So I had to go back and eventually just started taking care of my horses again. (Participant 17)

Another participant also returned to raise livestock, but added that another reason for returning was to have the rodeo lifestyle, which was difficult to enjoy when living in a city:

Yeah, so my kids are into lifestyle; they're into rodeo. So if we move to city there's nowhere to put our cows and horses and all that. (Participant 2)

Another participant tied lifestyle to living in the mountains. She could not place her finger on exactly what drew her back, but her love of the mountains kept her residing on the Navajo Nation:

Oh, yeah definitely. I love the Navajo Nation that was something that I already knew I was going to do, right getting out of the college. [College] didn't necessarily have anything, a career set for me or anything like that. So I just kind of went home. But since I love [town] and like I said the mountains and it's so cool up there, I wanted to stay on the Navajo Nation. (Participant 5)

Reservation Economy

Many participants indirectly identified the reservation economy as a motivating factor for returning to the Navajo Nation. Within that broader theme, the analysis identified Job Availability and Networking, and Social Circles as secondary themes.

Job availability. One female participant came back to the reservation because there was work for her in her field of employment. She noted that having a job that fit the reservation economy provided great security for her:

They called me because I was a nurse. It's like I told my kids; I feel really bad because I got into nursing and at that time it was like a need, so I never had any problems getting a job, never. I mean I was unemployed maybe about a month and that's about it. (Participant 3)

Networking and social circles. Participants indirectly identified that successful integration into the reservation economy had a lot to do with whom you knew and who your family members were. One female participant directly identified that she returned to utilize this advantage. In this instance, the participant indicated that a relative's connections in the community were beneficial to her in getting a job, even though the subject was not well known:

My grandpa knew a lot of people. A lot of people knew him as a rancher. And he was a code talker. He had a lot of contacts. Even today I'm able to use those contacts and help. Like I said he was a rancher . . . I'm able to work some work for them. (Participant 5)

This same participant reported utilizing her connection with her father's hunting buddy, who was employed in a government position, to quickly get employment and move up in rank:

After I graduated . . . I actually was recommended by my father's friend who we used to go hunting with all the time. He worked at [government agency] and mentioned to my dad the [government agency] was looking to hire a [specific profession]. And so . . . put in my application and within two weeks I had a job with [government agency] as a [specific occupation]. And from there I moved up to [specific occupation]. (Participant 5)

Commitment to the Reservation

Participants expressed a number of obstacles that individuals many encounter upon returning to the reservation, but noted that they were able to overcome them because of their deep commitment to returning. When we asked participants to make suggestions about how they thought the tribe could encourage college graduates to return to the reservation, they did not hesitate with their responses. This indicated that these topics were already on participants' minds before they were even considered candidates for this study. The participants recommended that the Navajo government make improvements in the areas of employment, housing, and conveniences.

Employment. Given the economic challenges of living on the Navajo Nation, it was not surprising that employment was a salient issue for the participants. This proved to be a complex and nuanced theme and included the following subthemes: Hiring Systems, Wages, Job Availability, and Future Career Growth. These topics are described in the following sections. Within the sub-theme of Employment, participants suggested the following areas required improvement: hiring systems, wages, job availability, and future career growth. These topics are described in the following sections.

Hiring systems. Participants implied an inconsistency in the hiring process as a place for improvement. Participants stated that some are hired simply because of whom they know, others implied the presence of nepotism, and yet others identified a problem with utilizing a non-Native workforce:

It just kind of depends what kind of degree you got, and yeah there are a lot of limitations. But yeah there are a lot of barriers, and I guess you just need to know the right people and be in the right place in order to get a job on the reservation. (Participant 13)

Participants also indicated that finding a job depends both on one's institutional connections and whom you know.

Um, because of the traveling and the distance I think the job that he has it's like it's sustainable for him. He tried traveling back and forth but the kind of job that he has, there's no way he's going to find that kind of a job on the reservation and a lot of it has to do with what I call lateral [indiscernible]. You know you go in and apply for a job and how you look and whom you're related to and how . . . I mean there's been jobs where you can apply for and if you belong to a certain family they won't hire you. (Participant 3)

Start early. There are a lot of connections you can make with people that have been in that similar situation. Use your relatives, your connections. In the Native world there's no such thing as seven degrees of separation. There's one or two. So you're always able to find someone somewhere, someway, somehow. (Participant 5)

Well one of the key issues—you know how they say Navajo preferences? It would have been nice if they'd keep it like that, instead of bringing in all these Anglos. And I know with the school system we have a lot of Teachers for America, and I think that's really inappropriate because they didn't go to school, it's just like an on-the-job training type of deal. And yeah there are a lot of coming in from different places and that's why there's a lack of jobs for the people that really went to school, that got the degree you know. (Participant 13)

Wages. Another common area recommended for improvement was wages for workers on the reservation. Participants identified low wages as a reason why many educated Navajos do not return to the reservation following graduation. They link the role of tribal government with low wages because the tribal government is a primary employer and because the tribal government is responsible for negotiating contracts with many other employers.

I think it's the tribe itself; they need to look into—nowadays it's money. It's a moneymaking thing, you know, to support a family and everything. So I think that the Navajo Nation needs to up their salary wages for a lot of these people that have degrees to come back to our reservation and to get these jobs. (Participant 2)

I travel a lot in my job and I find a lot of these highly qualified Navajo people out there working in the world. And they express they're coming back, but they express also that the pay is not there on the reservation. But definitely it's all coming back to our government. It's our own fault, too. If we really want our kids back, then do something and improve a lot of things in our government. (Participant 11)

Job availability. Participants also noted the lack of available jobs on the reservation. Participants assumed that as the tribe provides more jobs, more educated Navajos will return:

The recommendation I would make is provide more jobs and maybe provide more houses you know; just pretty much provide more stuff for the Navajo people to come back instead of leaving the reservation. I guess basically just helping them out with their scholarships like that, so they can proceed even more with their education. (Participant 13)

I noticed that a lot of kids, a lot of students have graduated, but there's no job for them, so they stay in town or they go to [large city]. There's a classmate that I had. She's an engineer and she went to [large city] and got a job out there and hasn't returned. I mean she comes once in a while, but she's not here anymore. That makes me sad to see our own people go off like that and not have to be here anymore because of jobs. (Participant 15)

Future career growth. Participants noted that a significant reason many do not return is the lack of career growth opportunities on the reservation. One participant recommended the tribe make arrangements to promote greater career growth for returning educated Navajos by only offering scholarships that are strategically aligned with reservation needs.

I think it all starts from the scholarship. To me, I think the scholarships should list some career titles—what I'm trying to say is do what the China people do. They tell you, you're going into social work. So, the money's there for social work. You're going to go into engineering; the money's there for engineering. Something like that should be set up for the Navajo scholarship in this case. It's not people just want to have that money and they just go off to and want to be whatever they want to please. (Participant 11)

Other participants recommend that youth find a way to observe what career they want to do in the future on the reservation, and then choose a degree that naturally fits that availability, thereby promoting future career growth within Navajo Nation. Participants' suggestions relied upon a proactive approach by Navajo citizens to consciously choose careers that grow with the reservation, as a means of career growth security.

I really think that a lot of students from high school should make a decision on what they want to do in their future careers to do for their future careers or their future lives. And that's what I did you know—observe what I wanted to do when I was younger and I observed what kind of jobs they have on the reservation and what there is a demand for and how I could be a part of the network on the reservation rather than finding something that isn't made available to you on the reservation . . . I think a lot of people I know choose careers that are not available on the reservation. They choose careers that are only available in the city, you know places like that. And I think it would have been nice if they would choose something that would benefit them and benefit the people of the Navajo Nation, as well. (Participant 12)

Housing. Some participants noted that they returned because they qualified for housing, but they recognized that there is a housing shortage on the reservation, and that current housing policies favor low-income candidates. They recognized that their peers would return if housing were made available, but will continue to reside in cities since it is not. These participants recommend that tribal government provide housing so people can return, affirming:

You know what, it was hard to find a job on the reservation. It's tough even for those who want to do, which I wanted to do. You have to find a place that will hire you. It's really hard to find a good place to live on the reservation—that's nice, some places you want to raise a family. I was lucky with the place I got hired because housing was part of the employment. If you are low income you can find a place easy, if you are not, guess what. If they are going to require that, they need to make accommodations for people to live, not just low income. (Participant 1)

I was in one of those little cubbyholes, studio apartments. It was good. It was really exciting. I applied at NHA [Navajo Housing Authority], checked on their prices—but it was very high—and being a single person, you don't want a three-bedroom home for yourself. It's not very good. But I eventually did move to [place] and got me an apartment over there. So the issue for me was just, where am I going to live? . . . I have a cousin that's an architect. I have a cousin that's a pharmacist. But they all left. They didn't come back but they're needed. They want to but there are really no housing opportunities as far as ownership—being able to go through that whole process. So they're living comfortably in the city. Big house, you know, nice car. They could come back with their knowledge that they've gained and really do some good. (Participant 5)

Conveniences. Participants expressed their opinions that reservation life did not provide the conveniences of a city lifestyle, and recommended that the tribe provide conveniences that are similar to that of cities. One participant noted, for example:

I have one friend who is a doctor and one who is a lawyer, and they chose to live off the reservation. So that was their choice, they are happy and productive people, but it's not easy to live on the reservation; you give up a lot of the conveniences. (Participant 1)

Discussion

As mentioned previously, there has been little research done to date on brain drain on American Indian Nations, with even less research concerning the question of how to stop the brain drain effect for these nations. The purpose of this study was to obtain the perspectives of college-educated Navajo tribal members who returned to reside on the reservation after obtaining their education to discover what motivated their decisions. Prominent themes included:

- Family,
- Community,
- Cultural Identity,
- The Simple Life,

- Reservation Economy, and
- Participant Commitments to the Reservation.

In considering these prominent themes and previous studies, we found that relationships were the most important reason for return—these relationships were tied to family, community, culture, the simple life, and/or the reservation economy.

Our analysis found that the relationships that motivated participants to return were created through constant, lengthy, and meaningful contact (cf. McKenzie et al., 2013). The themes, sub-themes, and sub-topics discussed in the findings allow us to identify different areas in the lives of each participant where they have developed these kinds of relationships. For example, a participant expressed having consistent experience with family and cultural traditions growing up. Their family participated in traditions of songs, stories, and sacred mountains regularly. Such experiences were frequently repeated year after year, over a long time, and thus became integrated into their self-identity. As a result, the participant identified family and cultural traditions as the motivating factor for returning to the reservation after getting their education (for parallel findings related to college retention, see Heavyrunner & DeCelles, 2002).

Other studies show that, to the Navajo, identity and relationships are developed from gestation, when the individual's clan is announced, and in different ceremonies throughout one's life. Ceremonies are the tools used to teach individuals that they are unique and special to family, community, environment, and spirits (White, 1998). It is precisely because these relationships are deeply rooted in and based on constant, lengthy, and meaningful contact that Navajos who leave the reservation seeking education are willing to go to extreme lengths to regularly return in order to maintain them. A participant in the study by McKenzie et al. (2013) reported that even though he lived off the reservation, he would drive 5 hours each way at least twice a month to visit his parents and return for ceremonies and family events. Participants from the same study also indicated that connections to their culture and to reservation life acted as a sort of magnet, constantly on their minds, pulling them to return. Participants indicated that they wanted their children to learn their culture. Another expressed a deep connection to the reservation, indicating that there is no other place like it in the world.

According to McKenzie et al. (2013), participants unable to permanently return to the reservation were often able to preserve their self-identity while away at school, even after being integrated into dominant society, through cultural practices and the aid of other cultural tools. Similarly, Haskie (2002) developed a grounded theory, which proposed that individuals from different cultures and backgrounds can preserve the foundation of their cultures even though they may integrate into the dominant society. She stated:

In order to survive the integration with a dominant culture, the secondary culture must meet certain conditions. When these conditions are met, people successfully preserve their culture. These conditions include practicing Hozho doo K'é, becoming educated, utilizing tools (products of preservation, such as customs that have been recorded on tape and in books), practicing leadership, changing, and adapting. (p. 81)

Even when tribal members leave the reservation, those with strong relationships back home continue to seek ways to maintain constant, lengthy, and meaningful contact, even when they were not easily available. Maintaining previously cultivated relationships produced a greater ability for participants to stay focused on returning once they completed their education. Lee (2006) reported that Navajos believe it is important to know who one's relatives are and how each human being is connected with all relations on Earth and in the universe. The participants of this study reported that these strong and enduring cultural ties were responsible for cultivating Navajo self-identity, and this study found that such a self-identity, tied to the reservation, promotes return.

A Surprising Paradox

The principal investigator was raised a member of the Blackfoot Nation, a First Nation in Canada. She, like many of the study's participants, had a traditional upbringing with tribal songs, dances, stories, and ceremonies, but left the reserve (the word used in Canada in place of reservation) seeking higher education, eventually returning to reside on the reserve and serve in tribal political office as a member of Chief and Council. The themes that have emerged both in this study and in other research concerning the Navajo Nation's brain drain surprisingly mirrored many of her own experiences as a member the Blackfoot Nation.

The principal investigator's experience as a political leader helped her recognize an underlying paradox in the participants' suggestions about how to increase the number of people returning to the reservation. When asked if participants could offer recommendations that would encourage educated Navajos to return, their responses implicated tribal politics in their proposed solutions. Participants suggested that if the tribal government could offer better jobs, housing, or other conveniences, then highly educated Navajos would return. However, the political experience of the principal investigator suggests that governmental programs are short-term solutions and do little to mitigate the barriers to economic success and political agency.

Indeed, when the principal investigator won a council position in her nation, it was her turn to make a difference. Initially, familiarizing herself with governmental processes proved challenging. In her efforts to be creative, however, she found that her hands were tied, and she was unable to productively direct her tribe's affairs. Further investigation revealed that temporary government programs did not remove barriers, but rather perpetuated them. For example, her research revealed federal tax distributions valued First Nation members at 25% less per-capita than non-First Nation members. Calculations revealed that on-reserve public programs were significantly underfunded but were held to the same standards of expectation as off-reserve programs. Moreover, funds that filter through to the tribe were distributed through highly regulated channels, leaving very little room for tribal leaders to use creativity in designing progressive projects. As a last effort, at the end of her term, the principal investigator traveled to Ottawa to make her case to the Federal Government of Canada, only to discover even more bureaucratic processes impeding potential change. She concluded that seeking solutions through tribal politics and government policies does little to mitigate economic barriers. In some ways, these policies can hinder constant, lengthy, and meaningful contact, weaken relationships, impede the return of educated members, and perpetuate the brain drain. Rather than approaching the problem by focusing on government policy solutions, we see value in a relationship-focused approach, an approach that utilizes constant, lengthy, and meaningful contact as its foundational point of emphasis.

Implications

This study explored an important aspect of the Navajo experience in order to uncover why educated Navajos chose to return to reside on the reservation. We anticipate that our findings will inform the Navajo Nation's efforts to produce a brain gain by suggesting ways in which tribal policy makers may create an environment for strengthening relationships through constant, lengthy, and meaningful contact. This study also has implications beneficial to other Indigenous nations and communities that suffer a similar loss of human capital.

We see a need for a two-pronged approach to addressing brain drain. While short-term needs must be fulfilled, we believe a long-term vision will produce greater stability and growth, thereby promoting stronger relationships. We believe a long-term nation-building approach holds the greatest promise. A nation-building approach is consistent with the findings of Cornell and Kalt (2006): "We have called this the 'nation-building' approach, thanks to its dual focus—conscious or unconscious—on asserting tribal sovereignty and building the foundational, institutional capacity to exercise sovereignty effectively, thereby providing a positive environment for sustained economic development" (p. 11).

Cornell and Kalt (2006) have suggested that the foundation of such an environment is based upon five attributes, which can be easily customized to a specific tribe's cultural values. They are:

- a. Real sovereignty, in which self-governance places the development agenda in American Indian hands, and decisions and consequences work together to produce efficiency;
- b. Effective governing institutions as a fixed constitution through which the American Indians agree upon the "rules of the game";
- c. Cultural match, in which the "rules of the game" are Navajo rules, and based on Navajo values;
- d. Strategic compass, referring to a plan of strategy that resists quick fixes in exchange for long-term, visionary rewards; and
- e. Nation-building leadership, referring to a system of leadership that is not primarily focused on redistributing government funds, but rather utilizes a model based on efficiency and success, both in politics and within the community.

A strategic long-term approach fashioned in this manner holds the promise of a positive environment and a sturdy foundation upon which economic growth, cultural preservation, and deep relationships can be built.

A new mentality, which is free of the hegemony of colonial regulatory ideals and emphasizes bringing the political battle to familiar terrain in which decision-making is done on the reservation, for the reservation, and by the reservation, would place the residents of a reservation both in control of their destiny and hold them fully accountable for their decisions. Rather than waiting for the lengthy, bureaucratic processes tied to government latency, tribal leaders who make decisions can be held accountable for the choices they have made and the programs they have implemented. Accountability on the part of tribal

leadership would produce a strategy involving the input of the nation (insofar as tribal leaders would depend on members of the nation for re-election), thus tying the choices of tribal leaders to the ideals of tribal members, making both leaders and members directly accountable for all decisions made. Moreover, accountability would necessitate better communication on the reservation and require that nation members increase their awareness of how the mechanisms work and their role in the process. This would restore the tribe's reliance upon constant, lengthy, and meaningful contact—upon which its survival and future depend for the strength of its relationships. Changing the nation's approach to emphasize constant, lengthy, meaningful relationships will affect the mindset of the people. This approach would align with what naturally draws Navajos to return to the reservation, and would produce an even greater attraction for educated Navajos to return in future.

Regarding the second aspect of a two-pronged approach, in the short-term, policy makers might find a higher yield on their investment in human capital through education by awarding more scholarships to students studying in fields that align with long-term tribal growth. Converging the growth of the nation with the growth of its citizens encourages hope for both a returning educated population and greater economic stability. In addition, prioritized scholarships have the potential to improve return on investment in educated human capital by fitting current tribal needs with available skilled human capital. However, without the foundation of the long-term strategic thinking outlined above, even policies such as this may have no impact or even contribute to further brain drain.

Limitations

As with any study, limitations were inevitable. One limitation of the study is the place from which participants were drawn (a cultural gathering in Albuquerque, New Mexico), insofar as the study assumed that those attending this cultural gathering offered a good representation of college-educated Navajos who had returned to live on the reservation. However, the opinions of participants in the findings may not represent the opinions of the Navajo population as a whole. Perhaps less social or less politically involved individuals on the reservation would have had different perspectives and reasons for returning.

A second limitation is the inherent biases of the interviewers, which have been outlined above. Much was done in the study to design questions and employ a method that allowed participants to express their ideas freely. Likewise, the hermeneutic method is aimed at articulating and exposing bias. However, interviewers came from different disciplines and backgrounds, which may have produced a tendency to conduct interviews or make interpretations based in their own assumptions, which, in turn, may have distorted some of the findings.

Recommendations for Future Research

Throughout the study, we recognized a strong tie between the tribe, on a macro-scale, and individual families, on a micro-scale. This study suggests relationships could inform tribal governance. Participants suggested that relationships were the main factor in their decisions to return to the reservation, with family relationships mentioned most often. Further research that focuses specifically on the principles and teachings that were taught in the families of returners may be beneficial to identify the reasons why individuals have a desire to return. A study on families who have a high rate of returning members versus families with a low rate of return may also provide new insights—such a study would

require a method that allows for a sustained relationship between investigators and participants to get a deeper and more personal view into the matter.

Moreover, collaborative studies conducted by Indigenous investigators and non-American Indian investigators may uncover greater detail about the causes of brain drain. An outsider's view and an insider's view, together, could produce a better view of the whole situation, thereby providing better recommendations and a greater justification for implementing recommendations. We suggest that if a relationship-based approach would produce greater brain gain on the reservation then it might also prove productive in the investigative work aimed at uncovering solutions. Such a collaborative approach would enhance non-American Indian investigators' understandings of the difficulties of the reservation, and could provide a more sophisticated approach to issues affecting American Indians on the reservation by uncovering ideas that may have been missed by the cultural insiders.

Conclusion

For decades, developed economies have recruited the brightest educated Navajos, while the Navajo Nation has financed its members' education and realized little benefit. Since 1863, when Navajos lost their autonomy and were politically subjugated, the U.S. federal government has heavily influenced the Navajo Nation, and it has in many ways perpetuated the Trail of Tears¹ (Ruffing, 1979).

Tribal sovereignty has gradually evolved and is slowly returning agency to American Indian people, but it has not done so quickly enough (Cornell & Kalt, 2006). The price of the Navajo diaspora exceeds calculation in dollars lost, especially when considering the effects on quality of life of Navajo Nation residents and their limited potential for future economic prosperity. Despite heavy losses, however, the persistence and resilience of members of the Navajo Nation is evident in this study and elsewhere.

The experiences shared by participants of this study echo a call from the past for fundamental Navajo values to return to the Navajo Nation. Participants shared one of more of the following reasons for their return after getting an education: Family, Community, Cultural Identity, the Simple Life, Reservation Economy, and/or Commitment to the Reservation. The overarching theme that was present across respondents' reasons for returning was relationships built on constant, lengthy, meaningful contact. Given this, the degree to which the Navajo Nation can cultivate relationships built on such contact is the degree to which the Navajo Nation can experience brain gain.

However, in order to create an environment that will cultivate such constant, lengthy, meaningful contact, we recommend a renovation in response to the subjugation of the Navajo by and to a foreign government. We recommend that the foreign foundation be replaced by a two-pronged approach toward self-governance (Cornell & Kalt, 2006). From the beginning, Navajo values have stood in contrast to the purposes of the colonizing government's principles. The principles behind the colonizer's government have created a harsh environment that negatively affects Navajo relationships. However, uprooting the foundation of colonizing government policies, and replacing them with a sovereign nation-building approach (Cornell & Kalt, 2006), will perpetuate the return of college-

¹ The Trail of Tears refers to the journey taken by the Cherokee people who were forced to leave their lands by the U.S. government (see Cherokee Nation, 2017; National Park Service, n.d.; WGBH Educational Foundation, 2010).

educated members to the Navajo Nation. We hope that this study will have implications that are beneficial to other Indigenous nations and communities that have suffered a similar loss of human capital.

References

- Ahmad, O. B. (2004). Brain drain: The flight of human capital. *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*, 82, 797-798.
- Berry, A., & Haklev, S. (2005). *The global issue of brain drain*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Cherokee Nation. (2017). *A brief history of the Trail of Tears*. Retrieved from <http://www.cherokee.org/About-The-Nation/History/Trail-of-Tears/A-Brief-History-of-the-Trail-of-Tears>
- Cornell, S. E., & Kalt, J. P. (2006). *Two approaches to economic development on American Indian reservations: One works, the other doesn't*. Mesa, AZ: Native Nations Institute, Udall Center for Studies in Public Policy, University of Arizona.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Introduction: Entering the field of qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. W. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 1-17). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Evely, A. C., Fazey, I., Pinard, M., & Lambin, X. (2008). The influence of philosophical perspectives in integrative research: A conservation case study in the Cairngorms National Park. *Ecology and Society*, 13(2), 52-67. doi: <https://doi.org/10.5751/ES-02679-130252>
- Gadamer, H. G. (2004). *Truth and method* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Continuum.
- Gergen, K. J. (2009). *Relational being: Beyond self and community*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Gibson, J., & McKenzie, D. (2011). Eight questions about brain drain. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 25(3), 107-28. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.25.3.107>
- Haskie, M. J. (2002). *Preserving a culture: Practicing the Navajo principles of Hozho doo K' é*. Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI NO. 3077247). doi: <https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.25.3.107>
- Hoshmand, L. T. (1989). Alternate research paradigms: A review and teaching proposal. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 17(1), 3-79. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000089171001>
- Heavyrunner, I. & DeCelles, R. (2002). Family education model: Meeting the student retention challenge. *Journal of American Indian Education*, 41(2), 29-37.
- Human Capital. (n.d.). In *Dictionary.com Unabridged*. Retrieved from [http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/human capital](http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/human%20capital)
- Iredale, R. (1999). The need to import skilled personnel: Factors favouring and hindering its international mobility. *International Migration*, 37(1), 89-123. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2435.00067>

- Jackson, A. P., & Patton, M. J. (1992). A hermeneutic approach to the study of values in counseling. *Counseling and Values, 36*(3), 201-209. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-007X.1992.tb00788.x>
- Kupfer, L., Hofman, K., Jarawan, R., McDermott, J., & Bridbord, K. (2004). Strategies to discourage brain drain. *Bulletin of the World Health Organization, 82*, 616-619.
- Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2009). *InterViews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (2nd ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.
- Kwok, V., & Leland, H. (1982). An economic model of the brain drain. *The American Economic Review, 72*(1), 91-100.
- Lee, L. L. (2006). Navajo cultural identity: What can the Navajo Nation bring to the American Indian identity discussion table? *Wicazo Sa Review, 21*(2), 79-103. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1353/wic.2006.0020>
- McKenzie, J., Jackson, A. P., Yazzie, R., Smith, S. A., Crotty, A. K., Baum, D. . . . Bah'lgai Eldridge, D. (2013). Career dilemmas among Diné (Navajo) college graduates: An exploration of the Dinétah (Navajo Nation) brain drain. *The International Indigenous Policy Journal, 4*(4). doi: <https://doi.org/10.18584/iipj.2013.4.4.5>
- National Park Service. (n.d.). *The Trail of Tears and the forced relocation of the Cherokee Nation*. Retrieved from <https://www.nps.gov/nr/twhp/wwwlps/lessons/118trail/118trail.htm>
- Office of Navajo Nation Scholarship and Financial Support (2011). *2010 annual report*. Retrieved from www.onnsfa.org/Portals/0/docs/ONNSFA%202010%20Annual%20Rpt.pdf
- Polkinghorne, D. E. (1984). Further extensions of methodological diversity for counseling psychology. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 31*(4), 416-429. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.31.4.416>
- Ruffing, T. (1979). The Navajo Nation: A history of dependence and underdevelopment. *Review of Radical Political Economics, 11*(2), 25-43. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/048661347901100203>
- Trusty, J., Looby, E. J., & Sandhu, D. S. (2002). *Multicultural counseling: Context, theory and practice, and competence*. Huntington, NY: Nova.
- WGBH Educational Foundation (Producer). (2010). *Trail of Tears* [Streaming video]. Available from https://utah.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/akh10.socst.ush.exp.trail/trail-of-tears/#.WMq6bBC_Ex-
- White, K. (1998). *Navajo adolescent cultural identity and depression*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Utah, Salt Lake City.

Zweig, D. (1997). To return or not to return? Politics vs. economics in China's brain drain. *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 32(1), 92-12. doi:
<https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02696307>

Appendix

Guiding Questions

1. Can you tell me a bit about your life growing up on the Navajo Nation? Where did you live? Where did you go to school? What activities were you involved in? What did you want to be when you grew up?)
2. After you graduated from high school, you began attending college. Can you tell me a bit about your experience in college? What colleges did you attend? What did you study? Whom did you live with or spend time with? What extracurricular activities were you involved in?
3. What were your career plans as you were working on your college degree? How did these change over time?
4. What thoughts did you have while you were in college about returning to live on the Navajo Nation?
5. As you considered your plans after graduation from college, what were your thoughts about returning to live on the Navajo Nation? What were the key issues as you considered this possibility? As you consider your future, what thoughts do you have about living on the Navajo Nation? What are the key factors you will consider as you make future plans?
6. What advice would you give to others who are considering the question of whether to live on the Navajo Nation after they graduate from college? How do you see the issues involved in the decision changing over time?