

SCHWAB, KARA J. Ed.D. Sports participation as a protective factor in students that have attended Sherman Indian High School, an American Indian Off-Reservation Boarding School (2024)

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Many benefits are associated with interscholastic sports participation. These include physical, mental, emotional, social, as well as academic (Logan et al., 2019; Piercy et al., 2018; Trudeau & Shephard, 2010). In California, sports played through the school system are referred to as “education-based” and are regulated through the California Interscholastic Federation (CIF.) These are education-based due to the student’s representation of school, connection to school and their academic requirements for participation. The protective model theory states that a connection to school through extracurricular sports can act not only as a positive influence but also a means in which to steer student-athletes away from negative choices (Moilanen et al., 2014). These are evidenced at Sherman Indian High School (SIHS) an American Indian Off-Reservation Boarding School (ORBS.) The student-athletes that have completed a sport at this ORBS are becoming more physically fit, exhibit fewer behavioral incidents, have higher grade point averages and are returning to school at an increased rate in comparison to those that do not participate in sports. Using a qualitative research design, this study investigated what former student-athletes regarded as factors supporting their sport and academic success. Data was collected through focus groups in the form of Talking Circles (Cook-Sather, 2020; Mayes, 2020; Pierce, 2018; Pranis, 2014). The results indicated that connections were the strongest protective factor that led to the former student-athletes’ athletic and academic success. The participants categorized them as a connection to the sports program, social connection to the coach, and social connection to their peers. The expected outcomes are that these findings will offer insight at the SIHS Athletic Departmental, SIHS administration, and Bureau of Indian Education (BIE)

levels when considering interscholastic sports offerings, implementation, sustainability, and maintenance (Colvin & Sugai 2018.)

SPORTS PARTICIPATION AS A PROTECTIVE FACTOR IN STUDENTS THAT HAVE  
ATTENDED SHERMAN INDIAN HIGH SCHOOL AN AMERICAN INDIAN OFF-  
RESERVATION BOARDING SCHOOL

by

Kara J. Schwab

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Approved by

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Dr. Michael Hemphill  
Committee Chair

## DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to all the student-athletes that have completed a sport at an Off-Reservation Boarding School, especially Sherman Indian High School. Your dedication, determination, spirit, perseverance, resilience, strength, and commitment are ever impressive.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation written by Kara J. Schwab has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Chair

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Michael Hemphill

Committee Member

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Eric Drollette

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Laura Pipe

June 20, 2024

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Acceptance by Committee

April 22, 2024

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Final Oral Examination

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## CHAPTER I: PROJECT OVERVIEW

Participation in extracurricular sports is linked to many physical, mental, social, and cognitive benefits (Logan et al., 2019; Trudeau & Shephard, 2010). Physically, each participant will meet or exceed the recommended Physical Activity Guidelines (PAG) for daily physical activity. The PAG recommends 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity a day for youth. Being a member of a high school sports team, through organized practices and games, youth will meet or exceed these recommendations. This may result in improved bone health, weight status, increasing cerebral circulation, cardiorespiratory and muscular fitness, and cardiometabolic health (Piercy et al., 2018). Mentally student-athletes exhibit higher self-esteem, confidence, and self-worth while reducing the risk of depression (Piercy, 2018). Socially, student-athletes gain and retain friendships at a high degree, have a greater sense of belonging, create positive attachments with peers and adults, and learn valuable life skills (Moilanen et al., 2014; Schaefer et al., 2011). Participants in education-based sports experience a stronger connection to school which results in an increase in motivation and attention, a higher engagement and achievement in academics, and less incidents of inappropriate behavior (Ewing, 2007; Ishee, 2004; Thouin et al., 2020; Trudeau & Shephard, 2010). Participation on a sports team results in a decrease in the drop-out rate thus allowing for a better quality of life as well as life choices beyond high school (Krisberg, 2019).

Each of these benefits have been witnessed within the interscholastic athletic program at Sherman Indian High School (SIHS) an American Indian<sup>1</sup> Off-Reservation Boarding School

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<sup>1</sup> SIHS is funded and operated by the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE). The terms Native American and American Indian are used interchangeably throughout the Bureau of Indian Education (bie.edu) website. These terms are used in reference to the Indigenous people of the United States. For consistency, this paper will be utilizing the term American Indian unless otherwise noted by participants.

(ORBS) located in Southern California. Specifically, these are referencing sport offerings within this high school for the purpose of competition between two or more schools while following state guidelines. This does not include nor reference travel or club teams, intramurals, or other community activities. This study is specific to the interscholastic athletic program on the campus of SIHS.

SIHS follows the state regulations for athletics as mandated by the California Interscholastic Federation (CIF). These are the guidelines that every school in California must follow to compete in the state. Amongst them are maintaining a 2.0 grade point average, attendance in high school for eight consecutive semesters, and an age requirement of 18 or younger before June 15 of the student's senior year. As such SIHS offers 10 varsity sports and 3 junior varsity sports. It has been found that the student-athletes that have completed a season of sport, at any level, are becoming more physically fit, exhibit fewer behavioral incidents, have higher grade point averages and are returning to school at an increased rate. These student-athletes return to SIHS 85% of the time the following school year. This is in comparison to those that do not participate in sports, which return to SIHS at a rate of 50% (Sherman Indian High School, 2021).

Though the research is clear on the benefit of team membership, there is a need for more research regarding the effects of interscholastic sport within a school setting. There is even a greater need for its effects within the American Indian community especially as it pertains to the current ORBS (Logan et al., 2019). This study will investigate what past members of the SIHS interscholastic sports teams consider as factors that contributed to their athletic and academic success.

## Protective Factor

Adolescence is a significant stage in one's development. As children grow and develop into adults this stage encompasses biological changes along with the need to discover one's identity and ability to healthily relate to others. These skills are needed to transition into successful adulthood (Sandre et al., 2020; Zimmerman, 2013). At the same time, adolescence can be a vulnerable time. Economic status, family history, and community can act as either potential risks or protective factors for youth. Examples of significant risk are adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). Adverse childhood experiences are those traumatic experiences that can negatively impact a youth's ability to grow and develop into a confident individual who can successfully regulate their emotions and healthily relate to others (Racine et al., 2020; Wiglesworth et al., 2022). Counter to these risks are protective factors. These are conditions or attributes that act to mitigate risks, promote positive well-being, healthy development and help counteract ACEs. They have been viewed not only as a preventive device but also as a strengthening. Protective factors can be evident at the individual, family, community, and cultural levels. They include self-efficacy, positive family support, peer and adult connections, involvement in community, programs, religiosity, and culture (Khan & Ungar, 2023; Racine et al., 2020; Wiglesworth et al., 2022). The protective factors approach also helps increase youth's self-efficacy and resilience while developing skills, characteristics, knowledge, and relationships that offset risk exposure and contribute to both short- and long-term positive outcomes (Khan & Ungar, 2023; Wiglesworth et al., 2022).

One strength-based community strategy to support the well-being of youth is the provision of sports. Sports are particularly a positive intervention strategy for those youth who have encountered risks and especially ACEs (López-Gajardo et al., 2023; Racine et al., 2020). A

youth's participation in a team sport serves as a protective factor when educators and coaches intentionally foster a teen's resilience and social connections while recognizing the impact of the teen's trauma on their behavior, confidence, ability to navigate challenges and form positive connections (Racine et al., 2020; Wiglesworth et al., 2022). Resilience is the ability to adapt to or cope with adversity in a positive way. It is not developed in one moment, but is rather a process which involves behaviors, thoughts, and actions that can be learned over time (Galli & Pagano, 2018; Hill et al., 2018). It can be nurtured through positive relationships with parents, caregivers, and other adults. Resilience in children and youth who have experienced risks including adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) enables them to thrive despite these experiences (Moilanen et al., 2014; Racine et al., 2020; Wiglesworth et al., 2022.)

American Indian youth who attend boarding schools reside separately from their families. They are no longer surrounded by the familiarity of their community. Being a member of a sports team is a means in which to build connections away from home (Liebenberg et al., 2019; Moilanen et al., 2014). Additionally, sports have the potential to provide adult guidance from educators and coaches to help youth learn strategies to overcome the challenges inherent in the participation of sports (Davis et al., 2019; López-Gajardo et al., 2023; Sedillo-Hamann, 2023). Participation in sports provides a platform for youth to learn new skills, develop healthy habits, manage conflict and adversity, experience failure and success and form positive connections with others, all of which contribute to a youth discovering their own identity and self-confidence. Coaches and educators can often be a caring, nurturing adult who can be a positive role model for youth. Additionally, participation in sports naturally provides an opportunity for teens to learn ways to relate to their peers and develop meaningful social connections with the guidance of a healthy adult (Racine et al., 2020; Wiglesworth et al., 2022).

Though the research is clear that sports involvement has led to many positive outcomes in youth, it is important to point out that not all sport's programs are the same (Logan et al., 2019). Simply offering sport options will not produce change, it is the offering of a well-designed program that is evidenced to have the most positive impact on youth (Norris & Norris, 2021). Some key elements that have been identified as components of an effective extracurricular athletic program will be one where sportsmanship is emphasized, where coaches encourage students to deal with challenges that occur during activity, the offering of both recreational and competitive environment, athletes that participate have a sense of belonging, there are life skills education infused within, academics are at the forefront, and where participation in a wide variety of sport is encouraged (Logan et al., 2019; cifss.org).

#### Background of American Indians

Kinship with all creatures of the earth, sky and water was a real and active principle. In the animal and bird world there existed a brotherly feeling that kept the Lakota safe among them. And so close did some of the Lakota's come to their feathered and furred friends that in true brotherhood they spoke a common tongue. (Luther Standing Bear)

The early American Indian tribes of the United States were hunters and gatherers. They lived off the land and would often travel between food sources depending on the climate and fertility of the area (Clarkson, 1995; Oxendine, 1988; Warren, 2014; Watras, 2004).

This began to change as early as the 1400's, when various countries, such as France, Great Britain, Russia, and Spain began to colonize the American Indians. Though each did so for a variety of reasons, and in different regions, the intent was the same – have the American Indian deny their cultural roots and assimilate into the dominant culture (Teresa, 2008; Urlacher, 2021).

For centuries many territorial wars were fought. By the 1800's, the United States had established a governing body with the same intent of colonizing the American Indian (Urlacher, 2021).

In 1830, the Indian Removal Act was established. The government forced American Indians to move west to "reservations" that were less fertile and afforded no way of life (Garcia, 2020). The American Indian plummeted to poverty levels over night. The result is less access to many positive resources for youth including extracurricular sports or activities (Moilanen et al., 2014). With less opportunities for youth to connect and engage with school, results in an increase in high school dropout rates (McGonigle, 2021).

#### History of the Off-Reservation Boarding School (ORBS)

By the late nineteenth century, the government focused its colonization plans on the American Indian youth. It was then that a government official inspired the Off-Reservation Boarding School (ORBS). These are residential schools not located on any specific reservation, but on federal land. The intent was assimilation – voluntarily or many times - not (Evans-Campbell, 2008; Garcia, 2020; Gone, 2013). Once attending, the students had to cut their hair, wear a uniform, were given a new name, forbidden to speak their native language nor practice their culture. Military drills were a regular part of their strict schedule (Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2010).

Sports were offered within the ORBS. Though the students had never played sports such as baseball, basketball, and football, they soon took hold of each and creatively revitalized and reframed their cultural identities through them (Howell & Howell, 1978; Rogers & Sisquoc, 2020). Their stories included victories over major colleges and universities, success on the



national stage, gaining worldwide notoriety, and producing All Americans greats such as James Johnson and Jim Thorpe. Through these activities, assimilation remained at the forefront.

In the early 1900's Sherman Indian High School was known by its original name, Sherman Institute. Funding was always an issue and sports were used to attract public attention. The school's administration began to schedule games with the surrounding schools including the University of Southern California (USC) which Sherman beat in football every time they met from 1902-1906 (Bahr, 2013). The student's athletic prowess and victories were used for recruitment purposes. Soon other sports were added to the repertoire including baseball, girls' and boys' basketball and long-distance running. The runners from the Hopi tribe in Arizona soon made a name for themselves as gifted runners. They became so renowned that the famous Olympian Paavo Nurmi ("The Flying Finn") wanted to compete against them. In 1924 a race was organized, where he narrowly beat the runners of Sherman (cifss.org).

In 1971, Sherman Institute became an accredited high school. At that time the students lobbied and changed the school's name to Sherman Indian High School (SIHS.) During this time, the school became a member of the California Interscholastic Federation (CIF) participating in high school sports. California's public schools were growing in numbers forcing the state to divide into ten sections. SIHS was placed into the CIF – Southern Section (CIFSS.) Through all these transitions, the runners from SIHS continued to win championships in cross country. Most of the runners were still from the Hopi tribe. From 1973 – 1994 the school won ten CIFSS Championships and were runners up four times.

## Sport and Culture

Sport and games have been part of the American Indian landscape for centuries. Whether they be competitive, spiritual, communal, or recreational, each play an integral part within the

culture (Fleischhacker et al., 2016.) American Indian participation manifests much deeper than for pure entertainment. They were used for recreation, healing, and worship as well as for training, educating, and connecting the body, mind, and spirit (Bloom, 2000; Oxendine, 1988). This multi-faceted approach can be witnessed across tribal affiliations. Sports and games have strengthened the bond between the environment, the spiritual, and the competitors themselves within American Indian culture. Leisure activities link them to the Creator, nature, and to those who share the same affinity, but the effect on the tribe is at the heart of participation. Every athlete is recognized as an individual entity yet at the same time part of a greater whole. Though each person is uniquely created, each is also part of a larger community, ancestral line, and environment (Forsyth & Heine, 2017).

For most American Indian youth, sport reflects the culture of the participants. For them, playing sport goes beyond the competitive experience and encompasses both spiritual and communal aspects of participation. Winning at all costs never enters the American Indian thought process. They play not solely for the victory, but also for the chance to bring recognition and glory to their people. Rather, the inherent belief system across tribes is that sport and the ability to play is a gift from the Creator and should be revered. They are quick to celebrate the accomplishments of others and of themselves (Forsyth & Heine, 2017).

This communal viewpoint does not diminish their effort or determination, but rather enhances the satisfaction of competing to the best of their abilities for a purpose greater than themselves. Although American Indian youth are fierce competitors, it is within the context of the game. Students participate to honor the Creator, represent their tribes, community, family, and themselves. Participation is considered good medicine not only for the body, but also for the mind, spirit, and soul. Competition is an important part of cultural gatherings and at times is the

embodiment of the ceremony itself (Forsyth & Heine, 2017; Oxendine, 1988). Winning or losing is the secondary product of the deeply rooted tenet that bringing honor to the community through competition is of paramount importance. It is not an individualistic act. These beliefs provide a sense of belonging and worth (Aicinena & Ziyanak, 2021).

#### Current Off-Reservation Boarding School

The Off-Reservation Boarding School (ORBS) today is vastly different from that of its origin. Attending an ORBS is no longer compulsory, but a choice; it is an option for American Indian youth. Each can choose to remain at home and attend the local public or private school or choose to leave home and go to an ORBS. To attend an application is required. Any American Indian student from across the country are eligible to submit. Once accepted, travel, room and board, educational needs, and the participation on interscholastic teams is free of charge. Located on the SIHS, 88-acre campus are dormitories, classrooms, cultural center, student center, an auditorium, and all athletic facilities. SIHS has an average enrollment of 450 high school American Indian youth grades 9 – 12. Of the 574 federally recognized tribes, there are usually 70 - 80 tribes represented each year. These are predominantly southwest tribes from the southwest states. Students come from Alaska, Arizona, California, Utah, New Mexico, Mississippi, Wyoming, and South Dakota. Approximately 70% of the enrolled students are from reservations (Sherman Indian High School, 2021).

Culture is evident throughout the SIHS campus. Although geared toward the Southwest tribes, many intertribal activities are offered. Included within the graduation requirements are classes on Indian Studies and Tribal Government. There are cultural activities offered beyond the academic day including Powwow dancing, basket weaving, and drum making. Trips to local Powwows and reservations are common occurrences. Guest speakers and elders often share their

stories and traditions in the dorms and cultural center. Each is given with respect, acknowledging that students attend with various amounts of exposure and experience to culture and traditions.

Not all students that choose to attend SIHS remain at SIHS. Of those that attend, less than half choose to return to SIHS the following year. Yet, there is evidence of an anomaly (Whalen, 2014). In contrast, student-athletes demonstrate a dramatic increase in retention. Over 85% of the student-athletes completing a sport return to school the following year (Sherman Indian High School, 2021). Additionally, over 65% of the Academic Honor Roll consists of student-athletes. Many more are in the National Honor Society and student-athletes make up the bulk of the Honors and Advanced classes. Students involved in athletics typically have some of the highest-grade point averages; better behavior records, less absences and a higher number tend to enroll in post-secondary education when compared to those students who do not play a sport. This opportunity for participation in a well-structured school activity with a supportive adult is yielding positive results (Thouin et al., 2020).

#### Sherman Indian High School (SIHS) ORBS in Southern California Athletics

As with attendance, sports are voluntary at the current ORBS. At SIHS, the students live in dormitories hundreds of, and for many, thousands of miles away from home. They do not have the day-to-day physical support of their family. A “local family” is considered a 2-to-4-hour drive away from the school. As high school students, they range in age from 13 – 19 years old. Thus, if the students choose to play a sport, they must be self-reliant to go to practice, be on time, work hard, stay focused, overcome challenges, and remain committed. Each participant must maintain grades, sacrifice time with friends, exercise time management skills, possibly miss dormitory and recreational trips, and maintain good behavior. Thus, it is a great feat for each student that chooses to begin, remain in, and complete a sport.

## Storytelling

During the less structured time storytelling begins. Oral tradition is one of the most common means in which to communicate within the American Indian community. It was the means in which culture, traditions, and language were passed from one generation to the next (Oxendine, 1988; Pierce, 2018). Each tribe has its own set of stories whether it be of creation, community, or balance, each has its own purpose. Through this process, teaching and learning come together as a way in which to share cultural values. It allows for a time of reflection, purpose, and search for new and individual meaning (Pierce, 2018).

From its beginnings, American Indian education was based on listening, looking, and learning. Their original mode of education was hands on and communal (Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2010). Interestingly, that has been my American Indian educational journey. For more than 3 decades as a teacher, coach, and athletic administrator at SIHS, I have listened to countless stories, have observed student-athletes' behaviors, and have learned a great deal. As I have gotten to know hundreds of students, each begins with a story. At first the stories were of life on the reservation. The students shared about grabbing a mattress, throwing it in the bed of a parked truck, and sleeping under the stars while being annoyed with their horse nibbling on their hair all night. Others shared about summers and the early mornings with their family gathering wood so their homes could be heated in the winter. Many others were filled with antics and laughter. As the athletic season progressed so did the stories. There were now more details. After more time, they began to tell more complicated stories. These shared with the same ease. No matter how deep these stories, they were filled with the supportive bond of family, dignity, character, loyalty, and a balance of humility and pride. Information given a little at a time. They were matter of fact in the telling – it was just a story. In these moments, I realized that an

exchange had taken place subtly. I was now the student, and they were the teachers. I made sure not to interject, as a non-American Indian, I could not relate to many of these stories, but I could listen, and I could learn. Our shared bond of sport allowed moments of shared experiences.

### Student Voice

Incorporating student voice into educational reform is on the rise (Mayes, 2020). This is the intentional act of creating mechanisms where students' perspectives inform real change within their educational process. It is an opportunity for both teacher/coach and student/athlete to come alongside each other to exchange ideas, perspectives, and experiences. It is not a replacement of one or the other, nor a minimizing of roles. It allows for a sharing of power. Essentially, each participant's perspective matters. Within this exchange, the students must know that their stories matter.

### Talking Circle

A means in which to bring student voice and storytelling together is that of Talking Circles. This has historically been a common strategy within the American Indian community. They have used these for understanding, healing, sentencing, support, community building, conflict resolution, reintegration, and honoring (Garner, et al., 2011; Pranis, 2014). They are a means in which everyone gets to share, everyone gets to listen, and everyone gets to learn. They place the group on common ground. Respect is at the forefront. Each voice is valued. Its primary purpose is to hear different perspectives, but not necessarily reach a consensus (Pranis, 2014; Rogers & Sisquoc, 2020). Everyone has an opportunity to speak, and everyone's voice is validated and respected. There are no right or wrong statements. Intentional learning is taking place as each participant shares their story.

Integral to the Talking Circle is a talking symbol. Historically, a talking stick was used. It is not required to use a talking stick for every Talking Circle; other talking symbols may be used if it is meaningful and relates to the subject matter being discussed (Roger & Sisquoc, 2020). Each Talking Circle consists of a moderator and participants. An inquiry would be made by the moderator, and the participants would pass the talking stick around the circle. Only the bearer of the talking stick would be allowed to speak. If necessary, the talking stick would be passed multiple times around the circle so every participant would have the opportunity to answer fully. Every member of the Talking Circle gets equal opportunity to speak. It is less likely for one person to dominate the conversation as the talking symbol moves from person to person. There is no place to interrupt. This is important within American Indian culture. The journey is just as important as the destination and at times more so (Roger & Sisquoc, 2020).

Also important in the American Indian culture is direction. Thus, the talking symbol is passed clockwise around the circle.

### Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to identify the factors pertaining to sports participation and academic success with those student-athletes, who have attended Sherman Indian High School (SIHS), an American Indian Off-Reservation Boarding School (ORBS).

### Aims

Aim #1 – Determine what former student-athletes consider as factors regarding their completing a sport at SIHS, an American Indian Off-Reservation Boarding School.

Aim #2 – Determine what former student-athletes consider as factors regarding their return to SIHS and their academic success.

## Methods

The intent of this study is to determine what American Indian high school student-athletes that have attended Sherman Indian High School (SIHS) an Off-Reservation Boarding School (ORBS) consider as factors relating to their participation in education-based, interscholastic sport and which contributed to their academic success. This study used a qualitative narrative research design. Its purpose was to gather the participants' lived experiences at the ORBS in sports through storytelling. For cultural relevance, the data was gathered through Talking Circles. Using open-ended questions, this methodology allowed the participants to go beyond the surface of content and reveal deeper layers (Cook-Sather, 2020; Gockel, 2013). They reflected on the time when they were students and participated in sports at SIHS. Talking Circles are not new to the students of SIHS. The Cultural Leader on campus often conducts them for various groups involving a variety of topics (Rogers & Sisquoc, 2020). It is the central reason this methodology was chosen. The Talking Circle is common within the American Indian community, it allows everyone an opportunity to share, it gives everyone an opportunity to act as an intentional listener and places all participants on equal ground within the conversation. As the moderator, it was my responsibility to explain the expectations, ask the questions, and ensure that each participant had ample opportunity to share as well as listen.

### Positionality

My first introduction to SIHS was in high school as a competitor. I had no knowledge of the culture or traditions surrounding the school but was impressed by the energy and knowledge of the coaching staff. A close friend's mom was one of the best coaches. When I graduated from college, she informed me of a job opening and asked if I would apply. I followed through on the request and now over 30 years later have not left. As a non-Native, my educational journey



began immediately. I was young and naïve and loved to listen to the students' stories. Soon I was playing basketball in American Indian "open" tournaments and leagues. It allowed me a deeper connection to the families and culture. I became well versed in frybread, Indian tacos, acorn stew and mutton. At the student's or their families request, I have participated in ceremonies of all varieties. My job soon turned into an experience rather than a career. Although I have a responsibility to fulfill each expectation and guideline within my positions of Athletic Director, Teacher and Coach, to be effective, I realized these were simply starting points. American Indian education is about community. SIHS has found a place within this community and still deeper is the community of student-athletes. Hours of time spent on the court, track or field yield these relationships. The beauty of this was evident in the 10 participants who so graciously gave of their time and resources. I coached 6 and was the Athletic Director during the tenure of 3 of the participants. Their honesty and willingness to share is evidence of their unwavering selflessness which are common traits of the American Indian community.

I come from a military family and thus value respect, structure, discipline, and hard work. I have witnessed the reward of struggle. I learned early that there are great benefits gained through mental and physical endurance and perseverance. My students have taught me the value of community, relationships, laughter, a free spirit, and process. They taught me the power and beauty of moments. As I coach, it has been my intent to merge these philosophies. Thus, I keep learning, within the structure and challenge, to always leave room for students to be able to share their story through sports and to always leave room for the community.

#### Participants

Through purposeful sampling, ten alumni participated (Creswell, 2015). They were over the age of 18. The majority represented southwest tribes. Each participant completed at least one

sport at SIHS with nine completing multiple sports. All sports offered at SIHS were represented within these groups. These included baseball, basketball, cross country, football, softball, track and field, and volleyball. Participants represented both male and female sports. The participants in this study were former student-athletes, which gives a unique look of the past. They could reflect and process mitigating factors contributing to their success (Please see Figure 1.) Five of the participants travelled less than three miles to participate, while five travelled from 2-4 hours.

**Table 1. Participants Demographics**

Pseudonym	Tribe	Gender	Sport	Years of Participation
Keyah	San Carlos Apache, Navajo, Luiseno	Female	Track and Field, Volleyball	2012-2016
Tipa	Colorado River Indian Tribe, Mohave	Male	Cross Country, Basketball, Football, Track and Field	2018-2020
Nezhoni	Mojave, Ute Mountain Ute, Inupiaq Eskimo, Navajo	Female	Basketball, Softball, Volleyball	2012-2016
Ohoba	Bishop Paiute, Tule River Yokut	Female	Basketball, Softball, Track and Field, Volleyball	2000-2002
Hózhóǫ́gi	Bishop Paiute, Navajo	Male	Football, Baseball	2016-2019
B3	La Jolla Indian Reservation, San Carlos Apache, Navajo	Female	Basketball, Softball, Volleyball	2010-2014
Rodney	Bishop Paiute	Male	Baseball	1986-1987
B.Bezhon	San Carlos Apache	Female	Basketball, Softball, Volleyball	1993-1995
Nadawunay	Bishop Paiute, Shoshone	Male	Cross Country, Basketball, Football, Track and Field	2011-2014
Poganobi	Bishop Paiute	Female	Basketball, Softball, Volleyball	2000-2004

Their participation in this study was voluntary throughout the process. If at any time they no longer desired to participate, they had the option to leave.

## Procedures

The Talking Circles began in the fall of 2023. Participants were invited via a flyer sent through the SIHS museum curator's Facebook page (Appendix B.) As a current employee of SIHS, this page was chosen to add a layer of anonymity from myself as the researcher/moderator and the potential participants to prevent any sense of obligation. Individuals willing to participate were asked to email me for further instructions. Once they reached out emails and texts were exchanged to confirm availability, attendance, and other pertinent details. A consent form was sent to the participants to review (Appendix A.) Participation was voluntary. The Talking Circles took place in San Diego and Bishop, CA. They were conducted on a Saturday afternoon and lasted multiple hours. Each Talking Circle followed the same procedure (Pranis, 2014). They were broken into: Welcome, Guidelines, Blessing, Introduction, Questions, and Closing.

Welcome – as the participants arrived, a meal and greetings were offered. This took place at a table and each participant was invited to sit around it. As the meal was being shared, everyone became familiar with each other through natural conversation.

Guidelines – When appropriate, at the table, during the meal, the guidelines were shared. Participant input was requested, and a discussion ensued regarding the afternoon's Talking Circle. It was explained that the participants and moderator would remain seated in a circle around the table. As the moderator, I would be asking questions one at a time. These would inquire about their sports and academic experiences while at SIHS. There were no right or wrong answers and each was encouraged to speak freely. After the question was asked, a talking symbol would be passed around the table clockwise (Garner et al., 2011.) When answering the question, one would only do so when holding the talking symbol. The talking symbol for the day was the SIHS varsity letter. When not holding the talking symbol, the expectation was that

participants would become intentional listeners. The discussion would be audio recorded. After the guidelines were shared, the discussion opened for questions or suggestions (please see Appendix C.) It was at this time that the consent forms were reviewed, signed, and collected.

**Blessing** – As the Talking Circle was to begin a blessing was offered. Acknowledging that Blessings are part of American Indian ceremony (Bull & Guillory, 2018). The request was that “The Creator be with us during our time as we respect and learn from one another.”

**Introduction** – Introductions are common practice within the American Indian culture. As an acknowledgement to this, the first-round question was that each participant introduces themselves by name, tribe, city and state, and what sport(s) they completed. After the talking symbol completed its round another reminder of confidentiality was given.

**Questions** – the moderator asked each question one at a time. The questions were specific to each protective factor (please see Appendix D.)

**Warm-up questions.**

What were the reasons for attending SIHS?

What were factors for your return?

**Sport specific questions.**

What were the reasons/motivation for playing sports?

What was the biggest challenge in completing a sport and how did you overcome them?

What were the differences between playing sports at this ORBS and other schools?

**Support/specific protective factor questions**

When you were a member of a sports team, please describe how happy you were? (Self-efficacy)

What role did your family play in supporting you during your time as a member of a sports team? (Family support)

Was there another adult that played a role in supporting you as a member of a sports team, if so, how? (Adult support)

Did a peer or friend play an active role in supporting you as a member of a sports team, if so, how? (Peer support)

How did being on a sports team help you make friends/get along with others? (Program support)

How do sports align with your tribal values? (Cultural values)

How has being a member of a team impacted you today?

What accomplishment are you most proud of?

**Academic question**

How did playing a sport influence your academic performance? (Program support)

Closing – at the completion of the discussion, a thanksgiving was offered to the participants for their time, honesty, and perspective and an inquiry was asked if they had anything else to share. We passed the talking symbol one more time around the circle to ensure that every voice was heard. It was interesting that every participant did indeed share more integral and informing information.

#### Data Analysis

At the conclusion of the Talking Circle, the audio-recordings were transcribed and used as the data. I, as the researcher, transcribed each. The data was analyzed using the four elements of creating codes, categories, patterns, and themes (Kim, 2016). Every participant's answer was given a code. Once labelled, they were placed into categories. Patterns emerged from within this data and were identified. Keywords that evoked the main ideas, images and associations with other words were chosen and separated. These were chosen for their frequency, inference, and reference by multiple participants. Through this process, the main themes emerged.

#### Trustworthiness

Triangulation of the data was used to aid in the trustworthiness of the results. This was done with follow-up communications with the participants for accuracy of finds. The results were shared and reviewed by subject area experts. One was an American Indian peer who has worked at SIHS for over 25 years in Sport. The other, a subject area expert working with protective factors in youth within the Los Angeles area.

#### Findings

Students who have participated and completed an organized sport at SIHS shared how their involvement in sports was a positive experience in their life. They explained that every practice completed, every game experienced, and every challenge overcome, enhanced their

physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional growth. The students' commitment to their sport contributed to their experiencing self-confidence, self-discipline, and self-motivation, which helped them feel successful. This feeling of success helped participants aim for future success, on or off the court, field, or track (Ewing, 2007). Tipa explained it as, "Challenges get overcome and you get motivated to do it over and over again."

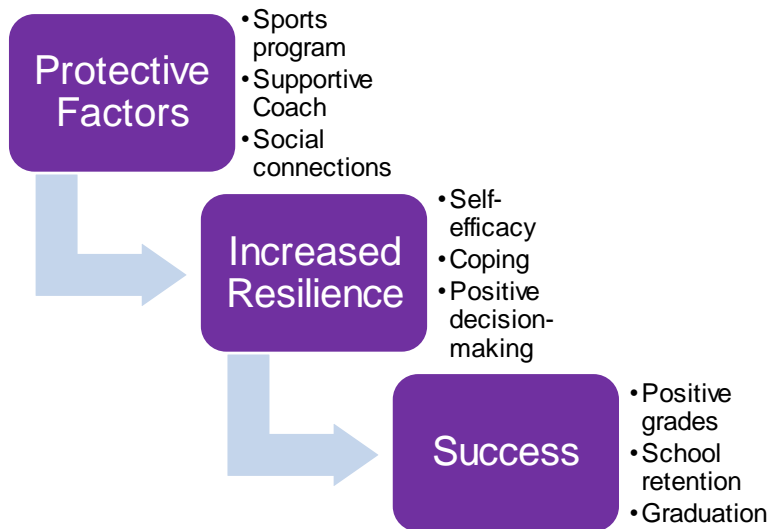
The Talking Circles began with each participant sharing their reasons for choosing to attend SIHS. Eight of the participants stated that they attended to escape. Nezhoni referred to it as, "I actually ran away to boarding school." Rodney shared that he attended to make up credits so he could graduate on time. Ohoba stated that she "wanted to get out and see the world a little bit because I lived here (the reservation) all my life and really hadn't left." Poganobi stated, "I saw the direction my friends were going, and I didn't want that. They were making bad decisions, but I wanted more." B. Bezhon called it "A generation thing." Her grandmother had attended as well as her mom, dad, aunts and uncles.

Though each participant chose to attend SIHS for various reasons, they all shared a common theme for staying. The major theme that emerged was that of connections. The connections that were identified as the greatest protective factors for the participants were those to the sports program, social connection to a supportive adult, and most importantly, social connection to positive peers. These garnered the most favorable outcomes for success (Figure 1).

The participants shared that these connections also strengthened their self-efficacy, coping skills, and allowed them to make better more positive decisions. Tipa explained, "You become a better person, a better individual, and a better leader through sports." Poganobi stated it as, "That was probably the happiest times of my high school years was playing sports." Nezhoni shared, "It was a way to connect with my parents – because I was longing to have that

connection.... after the first sport that’s exactly what it felt like, it felt like being with family.” Six of the participants stated that their friends were going in a different direction, and they wanted something new. Tipa noted, “Basketball was like a second chance. I was supposed to be the kid on the street doing nothing with their life.” The participants wanted to share in the legacy, become independent, have a fresh start, and experience new things. Sports supported each participant in this journey.

**Figure 1. Outcomes of Sports Participation**



**Table 2: Keywords from study**

Theme	Keywords from study
Connection to the sports program	Challenging, welcoming, legacy, culture, structured, consistent, respect, discipline
Connection to a supportive adult (coach)	Seen, celebrated, valued, congratulated, supported, role models, mentor
Connection to a positive peer	Bonding, shared culture, shared experiences, family, deeper

**Table 3: Key Quotes from the study**

Theme	Key Quotes from the study
Connection to the sports program	Nezhoni stated, “Sports-wise at Sherman - is very special. It’s something that you get to experience once in a lifetime. People look like you, they understand what you’ve been through, there’s a legacy, there’s forever friendships, it’s very unique, and it also helps build your future – having that support system there.”
Connection to a supportive, positive, adult (coach)	Hózhóqígi stated, “We would go to practice early or stay late just to talk with the coaches and hang out. They were true role models and taught us not only the sport, but how to play it with discipline, respect, class, and how to be good human beings.”
Connection to a peer	Keyah stated, “My life friendship partners have come from sports, so it wasn’t just on the court it was also off it wasn’t just on the field it was off and that went deeper, that connection was deeper built through sports.”

Connection to the sport’s program

A factor in connecting with the sports program at SIHS was that everyone looked the same, was treated the same and shared the same cultural values. There was a large diversity as far as tribal ceremonial participation among the participants, but all agreed that sports at SIHS aligned with their cultural values.

Participants in the study also connected with the program because past relatives played as well. Seven of the participants had grandparents, aunts, uncles, or siblings that played sports at SIHS. This legacy and their pictures around campus made them feel connected to the program as well as their family through sports.

Six of the participants shared stories of walking through campus and having students approach them about how well they played the night before. B. Bezhon told of one of these times saying, “The other students that came to watch us play, at the end of the game they’d come up to me and say ‘Hey, I didn’t know you were that good – you have nice 3’s.’” This is unique to education-based sports. Games are played on the school site; thus, fellow classmates, teachers,



and other staff have a better opportunity to observe play. This deepened the student-athletes' connection and identity with the school.

The participants shared how they were drawn to the consistency, structure, and challenge of the sport's programs. Keyah and B. Bezhon noticed that everyone was treated the same regardless of their skill level. Showboating was not tolerated, and elite student-athletes had the same expectations as the rest of the team. Nadawunay shared how his basketball coach, "Just ran a phenomenal basketball program." B3 stated, "I mean the discipline. I know I'm like hurting, in practice and aching all the time, but it feels good. We're actually learning something."

**Table 4: Connection to Sports Program Quotes**

Aim #1 Athletic Success
Keyah – You're always welcomed with open arms.
Hózhóǵgi – "It's taught me things like dedication, working hard, pushing myself to be better."
B3 – "Through the challenges like all the hard stuff like practice, getting better physically, mentally, especially, meaning, you become a stronger person, like all around."
Aim #2 Academic Success
Keyah – "I love the gpa requirement. It forces you to get your homework done and all your stuff turned in."
Nadawunay – "If I stay here (the reservation) I'm not going to graduate. I don't think I would have had the same drive, same opportunity that I had, that I would have had."
Poganobi – "Sports helped keep my grades up and keep me motivated in that way - committed to going to sports and then having to keep up with the school at the same time – it was really hard for me - without sports, I would have never kept going because it was the only thing that helped keep me, keep my grades up because I wanted to play sports so dam bad that like I just did it."

Connection to the coach

When participants were asked if there was a positive adult that supported them in their sporting endeavors, everyone in the group responded that it was the coach. Each participant

identified a meaningful relationship with at least one coach. Ohoba stated, “You know, they see you. I kind of felt like more of a person, and they really wanted you to succeed. They worked with you, and if they saw you have some potential, they’d encourage you to try other things.” Ohoba and Nadawunay shared how their primary sport coaches encouraged them to try a new sport. Both did and both succeeded. They both qualified for the playoffs and excelled. Nadawunay went so far as to set multiple records in this extra sport at SIHS.

Seven participants told of stories when they would go to practice early or stay late to talk with coaches. Nezhoni shared, “Seeing them every day after school, getting there early just to talk with them and staying after just to talk with them, building that friendship, they made a really big impact.” Regarding his Track and Field coach, Tipa explained, “My coach was my biggest mentor because she knew exactly where I came from especially like because her life was similar to mine.” The participants were comfortable around the coaches. Hózhóógi put it this way, “The coaches making you feel at home.”

Other areas in which the coach was a positive influence were fostering a positive team mentality, good sportsmanship, trying new things, and pursuing academic excellence. Eight of the participants stated the coach as an educator aided in their academic success. These coaches saw the potential and would not allow them to just get by. A particular coach who also taught English was mentioned by six participants who insisted they take advanced or honor courses. The participants admitted that this set them on their trajectory to attend college. Ohoba shared, “Sports really did motivate me to do well in school. My coach who was also my teacher would not let me just get by. She would encourage me to take Honor classes. I was given the opportunity to take college classes in my senior year. So, when I went to college, I already had my English out of the way.”

**Table 5: Connection to Supportive Adult Quotes**

<b>Aim #1 Athletic Success</b>
Keyah - “The coaches really have a bigger dream for you than in the moment.”
B3 - “Having that support from my coach really made me feel better knowing like well, even though she’s my coach she still cares about all of us like equally like that.”
Poganobi - “One of my coaches was like another parent to me, always checking up on me.”
<b>Aim #2 Academic Success</b>
Nezhoni - “I was even being congratulated for the small ‘wins.’ I was doing good in school, I had someone there to tell me I was doing good in school, I had someone there telling me I was doing good. I was never interested in doing good in school, but also, I never had that person hold me accountable until Sherman.”
B3 - “You know work on your academics first, and then if we need any help just come to me (coach) you know, and I’ll get you where you need to go.”
Nadawunay – “ Just the support from coaches... I remember I had a 2.7 when I finished my freshman year – but when I went to Sherman my sophomore year, I had a 3.4.

Connections to peers

The last, but most important factor influencing the student-athlete’s athletic and academic success was that of a connection to peers. It is noteworthy to remember that students participate in sports on a voluntary basis. They choose to participate. There is an inherent freedom to join and leave. The decision to remain implies a commitment to the program and an obligation to their fellow teammates – otherwise they would leave or quit. The conclusion is that social relations in sports are more committed than social relations in less voluntary settings. Sports then become very exclusive, which in turn, gives it meaning (Dalen & Seippel, 2021).

As mentioned earlier, sports membership aids in social connections. There are many opportunities for student-athletes to interact with one another. This is especially true for “shy” or “quiet” student-athletes. Half of the participants identified themselves as “shy” or “quiet”. B. Bezhon shared, “I was always quiet. It taught me how to participate in a lot of stuff - a lot of people were like – ‘you’re really good at sports’ – it broke me out of my comfort zone because I

was really shy, it just helped me kind of get out of my shell, start talking to other people and meeting new people.” They stated that the sports teams allowed them to make friends quickly and easily as there were other quiet kids playing as well. It helped them gain social skills and decreased their social anxiety (Logan et al., 2019).

Teammates at SIHS stated that they became more like sisters/brothers than acquaintances. Every participant agreed that the friends that they made at SIHS they are still in contact with today. Keyah also added, “That sense of community, that sense of teamwork that went into Sherman athletics – and it is pretty cool to say I have friends in Wyoming, Wisconsin, Kansas.” Seven of the participants shared that it was their peers that supported them during the victories and defeats in sports and out. Though they were from different reservations, their stories were similar. They encouraged each other and helped each other through the struggles of school, practices, games, and life at home.

**Table 6: Connection to a Positive Peer Quotes**

<b>Aim #1 Athletic Success</b>
Tipa – “Being comfortable around other Native peers... it taught me like a brotherhood, a sisterhood.”
Nezhoni – “It wasn’t just on the court, it was off, it wasn’t just on the field, it was off and that went deeper, that connection was deeper and built through sports.”
B3 – “It’s just your team bringing you back up and telling you that it’ll be alright.”
<b>Aim #2 Academic Success</b>
Keyah – “With your teammates, you leave practice you always go, ‘Did you all do that homework last night?’ And if not, ‘Do you want to study together?’ Your teammates hold you accountable in that way.
Ohoba – “A lot of the girls that I played sports with also were in those (Honors) classes so – there was just kind of that community.”
B.Bezhon – My teammates when they were struggling with their classes, help them with their grades and stuff, you know if they needed help like, with algebra or anything. If they needed any kind of help, I’d help them out – because I know they really wanted to play, and they couldn’t play if they had bad grades.

**Table 7: Increase Resilience Quotes**

<b>Self-efficacy</b>
Keyah – “I liked the person I was becoming while I was doing sports.”
Nezhoni – “I ended up becoming addicted to what it made me feel like, I was happier, I was laughing, I was social.”
<b>Adaptive Coping</b>
Keyah – “I was going through stuff emotionally and having sports having the practice be that consistent thing at the end of the day was a solid ground.”
Tipa – “Because when you’re in the moment of it, it just feels like nothing to worry about – you can just keep going – keep occupied. That’s why you got multiple student-athletes doing multiple sports.
<b>Positive Decision-making</b>
Nezhoni - “Nobody was going to get me up and tell me to get dressed for practice right after school, nobody was going to tell me to make sure to be on time, nobody was going to tell me to keep going, it was all up to me – at Sherman I had no excuse.”
B3 – “You’re learning how to be independent. And do things on your own, that’s what Sherman sports is teaching you.”
Poganobi – “I think um being on teams has helped me to create structure in my life, habits - I think being an athlete especially team captain, leading the teams in those ways has always helped me in my leadership role now today - that you’re not as good by yourself as you are with a team. Even as supervisors it’s our job to coach the rest of the team - the rest of our employees to be better and to bring them up. I’ve always looked at my leadership skills or styles taken from being on a sports team and being like maybe that team captain and how can we bring everyone else up and utilize those skills and those talents.

Discussion

According to the accreditation report generated from Sherman Indian High School, an Off-Reservation Boarding School, great gains were evidenced within the sports program. Student-athletes that completed a sport returned to school, had higher grade point averages, and better behavior than those that did not participate in a sport.

Although this study is emphasizing the benefits of physical activity through sport, it must be acknowledged that American Indians do not view things through a single lens. Physical

activity is important and necessary for life, but it is just one part of a larger whole and each part influences the others (Walsh-Buhi, 2017). This Indigenous knowledge system (IKS) is inherent within the American Indian culture (Waterman, 2023). A good example of this was an observation that Ohoba made while earning her master's degree at the university.

I think what opened my eyes is when I went to college... we were kind of talking about the different cultures and I remember somebody in my class was talking about more like their view on things more just like "I want to do good. I'm doing this for myself." And I was thinking to myself when I hear them say that – I never thought about that – like just thinking of myself, I've always thought about like, I'm bettering myself for my community - I'm going to school for my tribe to be able to come back and better them – I'm not thinking – how much money I'm going to make at the end of the day. For me it wasn't about that – because I've always been instilled to think about community, my tribe, my culture, my family. So, it was hard for me to understand their perspective on it... Because they were more about how they were going to succeed and how it was going to benefit them individually.

This mindset allowed for comfortable dialogue within each Talking Circle. Each participant acknowledged that they were an individual, yet still part of a whole. It was recognized that most students that attend Sherman Indian High School have this community mindset. The IKS is fundamentally present. Yet, student-athletes evidenced more athletic and academic success as well as an increase in resilience. This aligned with the findings. Sport participation at SIHS was more than an athletic experience. It was the community of sport that yielded the greatest benefit for student-athletes. It affected students physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually through the connection with the sports program, supportive coach,

and positive peers. The coach was vital in creating an atmosphere of competency in skill, knowledge, and strategy while not neglecting the importance of learning, empathizing, supporting, and encouraging. Though student's needs are at the forefront, when the program was adult led, it allowed teammates a greater opportunity to bond with each other.

It must be noted that simply offering sport options will not produce change, it is the offering of a well-designed program that is evidenced to have the most positive impact on youth (Norris & Norris, 2021). Although sports involvement has led to many positive outcomes in youth, it is important to point out that not all sports programs are the same (Logan et al., 2019). Some key elements that have been identified as components to an effective extracurricular athletic program will be one where sportsmanship is emphasized, where coaches encourage students to deal with challenges that occur during activity, the offering of both recreational and competitive environment, athletes that participate have a sense of belonging, there are life skills education infused within, academics are at the forefront, and where participation in a wide variety of sport is encouraged (Logan et al., 2019; cifss.org).

Identified as a key protective factor, the influence of a positive adult within an extracurricular sports program has the potential for great gains in youth. Beyond the scope of sport, not only can a connection with this individual aid in strengthening youth's resiliency but also act as a buffer against past negative experiences (Norris & Norris, 2021; Racine et al., 2020). When students have a competent coach who can foster a culture of learning, the student's confidence in oneself, involved adults and peer group grows. Competent coaches must themselves be knowledgeable and possess skills pertaining to the sport as well as the ability to promote effective relationship development.

The most important protective factor that was evidenced in this study was the social connection to a peer. Being a part of a sports team aids in social connections. Sports have shown an increase in social skills and a decrease in social anxiety (Logan et al., 2019). Sports gives peers a common goal. At SIHS, the connections are deeper due to the residential setting, the shared culture, and shared experiences of the participants.

It is interesting to note that the most influential aspects of the SIHS Athletic Department and those within the IKS were those elements that are not easily measured – they are beyond the five senses of touch, hearing, seeing, tasting, and smelling. Respect, honor, acceptance, support, encouragement, acknowledgement, celebration, trust, dignity, community, dedication, commitment, loyalty, perseverance, determination – these are more effective when simply - known.

Deeper study can be done on the similarities, differences and impact regarding social connections between American Indian student-athletes that attend high school in a residential setting as opposed to those that attend a traditional day school. This can be furthered studied in the public school setting as opposed to the schools operated by the Bureau of Indian Education.

## Conclusion

This research used a qualitative design to investigate what former student-athletes that attended Sherman Indian High School, an Off-Reservation Boarding School, considered as factors for the student-athlete's athletic and academic success. This study took a strengths-based approach in its inquiry. The focus was on the effects of protective factors as a catalyst for student-athletes academic and athletic success. The existing data revealed that SIHS students who participated in sports evidenced higher grades, better behavior, and a high retention rate when compared to those that did not participate.



This study revealed that student-athletes were exposed to a deeper level of protective factors than students that did not participate in sports. Their time spent beyond the academic day in practice and games allowed for this. It gave each more exposure to a structured program, a supportive adult, and an increase in time with peers. The student-athlete's high level of school retention allowed for even more presentations of academics, sports, deeper connections with coaches and other positive adults, peers, and programs. With every exposure greater strength was gained and more success was experienced by the student-athlete.

Culturally the athletic program at SIHS lined up and encouraged the indigenous knowledge system (IKS). It was community minded, character and integrity were valued above win/loss, while relationships were encouraged and nurtured. Hózhóǵgi shared that they were to, "Play the game how it was supposed to be played." B. Bezhon, Ohoba, and Poganobi agreed that respect was a "huge thing", and an expectation, in culture, and in athletics. "Like praying before the game. You know, I think like centering ourselves in our spiritual beings before going out and putting your body into whatever circumstances you were willing to do - just like we do, when we go in sweat lodge."

As defined, protective factors are attributes that act to mitigate risks, promote positive well-being, and healthy development. The findings revealed that sports did buffer the participants from risk factors – as evidenced by their increase in resiliency measured by their enhanced self-efficacy, coping skills, and positive decision-making. The strongest protective factors identified were a connection to the sports program, social connections to a supportive adult/coach, and social connections to positive peers.

## CHAPTER II: DISSEMINATION

This study used a qualitative approach investigating what former student-athletes that attended Sherman Indian High School (SIHS) considered as the greatest protective factors influencing their academic and athletic success. The results can give insight to the SIHS Athletic Department regarding the sustainability and maintenance of the program. They can give further awareness of the impact of interscholastic sport to the administration of SIHS. The results of this study indicate that the sports program at Sherman Indian High School (SHS), an Off-Reservation Boarding School (ORBS) acts as a protective factor to those student-athletes that have completed a sport at SIHS. The themes that emerged from this study indicate that a connection to the sports program, social connection to the coach, and social connections to their peers are the strongest protective factors leading to the student-athletes athletic and academic success.

The staff at SIHS have participated in Professional Development meetings where presenters share their findings in best practices for educating American Indian youth. Each offer the challenges that American Indian youth face. As a result, many discussions revolve around the fact that most students as well as student-athletes that attend SIHS have experienced adverse childhood experiences (ACE).

The findings of this study could help, especially new coaches at SIHS, with a strength-based approach when regarding strategies with students. Though this study is regarding sports as an extracurricular activity, many of the findings transfer to the classroom, dormitories, and recreational activities.

The primary dissemination of this study will go to the coaches at SIHS at the first coaches meeting in the fall. The information will be shared via a power point and end with an activity for discussion (Appendix G.) The current athletic staff average 19 years of coaching

experience at this site. It is anticipated that a greater depth of knowledge will be garnered from this meeting. In presenting the power point to the coaches, no introduction is necessary. Each of the coaching staff has worked alongside each other for many years. There is a comfort level within the group. Coaches spend many hours after competitions debriefing whether they coach the sport or not.

The coaches also know the students well. They understand the student-athletes diverse backgrounds, the American Indian history and culture, and are familiar with life on the reservation. Thus, the power point will be presented in a comfortable, casual setting within the gym classroom at SIHS.

Narration of the power point slides:

Slide 1- Hello, thank you for coming to this meeting. For the last four years, I have been working towards my doctorate in Kinesiology. I have been taking online courses at the University of North Carolina in Greensboro. Today, I would like to share with you that study and the findings it produced. I would like to dive deeper into this topic with you through a brief activity at the conclusion of this presentation. The focus of this study has been on the student-athletes of Sherman Indian High School. Specifically, I have researched what student-athletes of SIHS consider as factors for their athletic and academic success.

Slide 2 – For the past ten years I have been collecting data on the retention rate of the student-athletes at SIHS. I, then, compared it to the retention rate of those students that do not participate in sports. Those students that have not participated in sports have an average retention rate of 50%. Those that have completed a sport return to Sherman the following year ##% of the time. Most of our valedictorians, salutatorians, and those on the Honor roll consist of student-athletes.

This same group has less incidences of behavior as compared to those that are not involved in sports.

Slide 3 – There are many benefits associated with sport participation. The students are becoming more physically fit, they usually exhibit higher self-esteem, make friends, and gain a greater connection to adults, peers, and the school. We have noticed that the student athletes are the most common to refer to themselves as Braves or Lady Braves especially in comparison to those that do not play sports. Many of us have had a teacher or dorm staff approach us on how much better a particular student performs when they are in a sport.

Slide 4 – We have all attended many professional developments as staff members at SIHS. Each share with us the risk factors that American Indian youth face. They use terms such as marginalized and at-risk. They explain the adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) common to American Indian youth. Historical trauma is broken down and explained. This study does not minimize any of the real experiences that our students face in these arenas. I am acknowledging that each of these are real. This study is taking a strength-based approach to these very real struggles that our students go through.

Slide 5 - Counter to these risk factors are protective factors. These are conditions or attributes that act to mitigate risks, promote positive well-being, healthy development and help to counteract ACEs. They are viewed not only as a preventive device, but also as a strengthening. Protective factors include a positive and supportive family, supportive social connections with peers and other adults, involvement in community, programs, religiosity, and culture. The protective factors approach helps youth build resilience, which increases youth's self-efficacy, develop skills, characteristics, knowledge, and relationships that offset risk exposure and contribute to both short- and long-term positive outcomes.

Slide 6 – The intent of this study was to determine what past student-athletes believe were factors that contributed to their athletic and academic success.

Slide 7 – This study used a qualitative exploratory approach. Two Talking Circles were conducted. As the moderator, I asked questions regarding each protective factor's influence on the participant. The talking symbol, the varsity letter, was passed around the group clockwise. They could only speak when holding the talking symbol. Each group was audio recorded and transcribed. The data was analyzed through a narrative analysis approach. My desire was to have the student's voice tell the story. Their lived experience is the data. The stories in the transcripts were then given codes. They were then placed into categories where patterns emerged. The final step was finding the themes.

Slide 8 – There were ten participants that attended the two Talking Circles. Every sport was represented with 90% of the participants playing multiple sports.

Slide 9 – Again, after the transcripts were analyzed, themes were discovered. The three themes that emerged was that of a connection to the sports program a social connection to a positive, supported adult (coach), and most importantly a social connection to their peers. The students' stories then detailed how these connections strengthened their resiliency. They were able to make positive decision-making, adapt in the midst of adversity, and their self-efficacy increased. They associated these outcomes with their connections. Further, their grades improved, they returned to school, and each were able to graduate.

Slide 10 – This is a table of the key words from our discussions as they related to the specific themes. Having a sense of belonging came up quite a bit within both Talking Circles. As did the words consistency, legacy, and deeper relationships.

Slide 11 – This table offers a quote from three different participants regarding their connections.

Slide 12 – These findings confirmed how important it is to offer a quality sports program, maintain a positive relationship with students, and create a culture where they can bond with one another. We are going to get in groups by sport. When we are in those groups, we will ask the questions, “What do we do well?” And “Where do we need to improve?” Conclude with suggestions for strategies. We will take 7 minutes for each question. We will then reconvene and have each group share their findings.

Thank you so much for taking the time to meet and to share your thoughts and insights.

The academic administration will be given a copy of this study in its original form as well as a summary of the study (Appendix H.) A meeting will be initiated to discuss the findings and possible future program modifications.

Dissemination of this study will be through a power point presentation, the original form of the study, as well as a summary of the study.

### CHAPTER III: ACTION PLAN

The results of this study indicate that the sports program at Sherman Indian High School (SHS), an Off-Reservation Boarding School (ORBS) acts as a protective factor to those student-athletes that have completed a sport. The themes that emerged from this study indicate that a connection to the sports program, social connection to the coach, and social connections to their peers are the strongest protective factors leading to the student-athletes athletic and academic success.

The short-term plan will be to share these findings via a power point (Appendix G) with the current coaches at SIHS at the next coaches' meeting. At the conclusion, an intentional discussion regarding the implementation fidelity, sustainability, and maintenance of the Athletic Department will ensue. The National Implementation Research Network (NIRN, <http://nirn.fpg.unc.edu>) has done much work regarding these topics. They have identified 2 drivers which influence progress. They are grouped into competency and organizational drivers. Competency drivers' emphasis the work and competency of the coach. Organizational drivers are those structures that support the coaches and team's needs. These drivers will be adapted to support the sustainability and maintenance of the Athletic Department at SIHS and will guide the conversation at the conclusion of the power point presentation. The coaches will be asked for examples of what the department does well, and what needs improvement within these two areas. Examples of identifiable elements of coaching competency will be the coach's development of team culture, environment, standards, knowledge of learning rhythms, clear expectations, guidelines, delivery of feedback, competition strategy and how they leave space for seeing, empathizing, and connecting to student-athletes (Pulido, 2020). Examples of identifiable elements of organizational driver will be coach support, informed decision-making efficiency

and timeliness, adaptation to coaches and student's needs, guidelines, expectations, communication, acknowledgement, visibility, and feedback (Colvin & Sugai, 2018).

With the many years of coaching experience, there is great potential for deeper insight into the protective factors for the student-athletes. The emphasis will be on strategies to support competent coaches, the organization, and strengthen connections with student-athletes involved in the sports program. The results will be placed into the SIHS Athletic Handbook.

The midrange goal after collecting additional data from the coaches meeting will be to submit a summary of the study (Appendix H) to the current SIHS administration. This communication will be done via an email, with the summary of the study attached. A meeting will be requested to discuss the study. The expected outcome will be the provision to increase the interscholastic sports offerings within the school, the freedom for dormitory or recreational staff to coach, the maintenance of facilities, and the possibility of an increase in the Athletic Department budget.

The long-term goal will be to send the summary of the study to the director of the Bureau of Indian Education. Director Dearman is a former coach and teacher of the ORBS located in Anadarko, Oklahoma. Before reaching out to him, permission will be requested from the current SIHS administration. Once granted, the summary of the study would be sent in an email with a request for further communication.



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## APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORM

### UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO

**Project Title:** Sports participation as a protective factor in American Indian students that have attended an Off-Reservation Boarding School in Southern California

**Principal Investigator:** Kara Schwab

You are being asked to take part in a research study because you have been a member of a sports team at Sherman Indian High School (SIHS). Your participation in the study is voluntary. You may choose not to join, or you may withdraw your consent to be in the study, for any reason, without penalty.

Research studies are designed to obtain new knowledge. This new information may help people in the future. There may not be any direct benefit to you for being in the research study. There also may be risks to being in research studies. If you choose not to be in the study or leave the study before it is done, it will not affect your relationship with the researcher or the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Details about this study are discussed in this consent form. It is important that you understand this information so that you can make an informed choice about being in this research study.

You will be given a copy of this consent form. If you have any questions about this study at any time, please contact Kara Schwab at [kjschwab@uncg.edu](mailto:kjschwab@uncg.edu).

#### **What is the study about?**

This is a research project centered around your membership and completion of a sport while attending SIHS and the factors that you believe led to your athletic and academic success. It is a voluntary study.

#### **Why are you asking me?**

American Indian students over the age of 18 that have completed a sport at Sherman Indian High School, the ORBS in Southern California will be included in this study.

#### **What will you ask me to do if I agree to be in the study?**

You will be asked to participate in a Talking Circle. It will be a voluntary meeting with other alumni in person. If you are able, it will be conducted at the Inter Tribal Sports facility this fall. It will last approximately 2 hours. A meal will be provided. As with the study, you may choose to participate or leave before it is completed.

#### **Is there any audio/video recording?**

The Talking Circles will be audio recorded. Because your voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the recording, your confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. The researcher will try to limit access to the recording as described below. Once the identifying information has

been removed, the audio files will be destroyed.

**What are the risks to me?**

The Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk. However, there is still a risk of breach of confidentiality.

If you have questions, want more information or have suggestions, please contact Kara Schwab at kjschwab@uncg.edu.

If you have any concerns about your rights, how you are being treated, concerns or complaints about this project or benefits or risks associated with being in this study please contact the Office of Research Integrity at UNCG toll-free at (855)-251-2351.

**Are there any benefits to society as a result of me taking part in this research?**

This has the potential to improve the sports program at SIHS.

**Are there any benefits to *me* for taking part in this research study?**

There are no direct benefits to participants in this study.

**Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?**

There will be no payment for participating in this study. If you choose to participate in the Talking Circle, it will cost you the travelling fees associated with getting to the meeting.

**How will you keep my information confidential?**

All notes and audio recordings will be stored in the Microsoft Teams application. Participants' names will not be used. All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law.

**Will my de-identified data be used in future studies?**

All participants' de-identified data will be kept indefinitely and will be posted to an on-line repository so other scientists can analyze the data and check our results. Your de-identified data will be kept indefinitely and may be used for future research without your additional consent.

**What if I want to leave the study?**

You have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time, without penalty. If you do withdraw, it will not affect you in any way. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data which has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identifiable state. The investigators also have the right to stop your participation at any time. This could be because you have had an unexpected reaction, or have failed to follow instructions, or because the entire study has been stopped.

**What about new information/changes in the study?**

If significant new information relating to the study becomes available which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you.

**Voluntary Consent by Participant:**

By signing this consent form/completing this survey/activity (used for an IRB-approved waiver of signature) you are agreeing that you read, or it has been read to you, and you fully understand the contents of this document and are openly willing consent to take part in this study. All of your questions concerning this study have been answered. By signing this form, you agree that you are 18 years of age or older and are agreeing to participate in this study described to you by Kara Schwab.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX B: FLYER

**Attention Braves and Lady Braves**

*You are cordially invited to participate in a Talking Circle.*

This discussion will be centered around your experience as a member of an athletic team at Sherman Indian High School.

All former student-athletes of Sherman Indian High School over the age of 18 are welcome!

These discussions will be used towards my doctoral pursuit from the University of North Carolina, Greensboro and used as research.

During the Talking Circles you will be asked questions regarding your experience as a student-athlete at Sherman Indian High School. Specifically, we will reflect and discuss the protective factors you encountered and how it affected your academic commitment and success.

These discussions will take place in the San Diego and Bishop areas this fall and last approximately 90 minutes.

A meal will be provided.

If you are interested, able to join us, or offer any suggestions and would like more detailed information, please email Kara Schwab at [kjschwab@uncg.edu](mailto:kjschwab@uncg.edu). I look forward to hearing from you!

I hope all is well with you and your family!

## APPENDIX C: TALKING CIRCLE GUIDELINES

### Talking Circle Guidelines

We will conduct this discussion as a Talking Circle. We all recognize the importance of oral tradition and will remain in that mode of communication. There are no right or wrong answers, simply perspective. Please feel free to share both positive and negative responses. We will be using a talking stick to hear from each other. Instead of a stick, our talking symbol will be the varsity letter. This is a symbol of hard work and commitment at a high level. It symbolizes both athletic prowess and academic success.

One can only speak when holding the talking symbol. Others are to listen respectfully. Acknowledging that direction is important in American Indian ceremony, the talking symbol will be passed around the circle clockwise. The same person will begin the discussion and has the option to pass. The stick will be passed around multiple times per question giving everyone multiple opportunities to answer.

Out of respect and a chance to learn, I would like to be involved in listening to your stories – thus, I will be audio recording our time together instead of taking notes. I will listen to it later and code our findings.

Does anyone have a question or suggestion for our time together?

## APPENDIX D: TALKING CIRCLE QUESTIONS

### Talking Circle Questions

#### **Warm-up questions.**

What were the reasons for attending SIHS?

What were factors for your return?

#### **Sport specific questions.**

What were the reasons/motivation for playing sports?

What was the biggest challenge in completing a sport and how did you overcome them?

What were the differences between playing sports at this ORBS and other schools?

#### **Support/specific protective factor questions**

When you were a member of a sports team, please describe how happy you were? (Self-efficacy)

What role did your family play in supporting you during your time as a member of a sports team? (Family support)

Was there another adult that played a role in supporting you as a member of a sports team, if so how? (Adult support)

Did a peer or friend play an active role in supporting you as a member of a sports team, if so how? (Peer support)

How did being on a sports team help you make friends/get along with others? (Program support)

How do sports align with your tribal values? (Cultural values)

How has being a member of a team impacted you today?

What accomplishment are you most proud of?

#### **Academic question**

How did playing a sport influence your academic performance? (Program support)

## APPENDIX E: TALKING CIRCLE ORDER OF EVENTS

### Talking Circle Order of Events

The day will be broken into: Welcome, Guidelines, Blessing, Introduction, Questions, and Closing.

Welcome – as the alumni arrive, a meal and greeting will be awaiting. This will take place at a table next to chairs set up in a circle. As the meal is being shared, I, as the moderator, will introduce myself and explain briefly the procedure of the morning.

Guidelines – the guidelines will be shared, and time given for student input.

Blessing – the group will relocate to the Talking Circle in the middle of the room. Acknowledging that Blessings are part of American Indian ceremony and a volunteer requested (Bull & Guillory, 2018). If none do so, I will request that “The Creator be with us during our time as we respect and learn from one another.”

Introduction – as a first round each student will introduce themselves by name, tribe, city and state, and what sport(s) they completed the year before.

Questions – the moderator will ask each question one at a time (please see Appendix D.)

Closing – at the completion of the discussion, a thanksgiving will be offered to the Creator and the students for their time, honesty, and perspective.

## APPENDIX F: PARTICIPANT RESPONSES

PROTECTIVE FACTOR	RESPONSES
<p>Connection to the sports program</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I was going through stuff emotionally and having sports, having the practice be that consistent thing at the end of the day was a solid ground for you to ponder and think about your feelings and think about what you're going through when sweating it out and disciplining yourself... sports was the very very positive way to process those negative emotions.</li> <li>• We all had problems we were dealing with, but once practice began it all disappeared.</li> <li>• I knew I would get more exposure which could open more doors of sport for me.</li> <li>• It was such a well-structured sport program.</li> <li>• Adult led.</li> <li>• I loved the gpa requirement. It forces you to get your homework done.</li> <li>• Sherman embodies that you're a student first.</li> <li>• I appreciated the consistent treatment of every athlete.</li> <li>• We all shared culture.</li> <li>• I just really fell in love with sports at Sherman.</li> <li>• Shared stories,</li> <li>• Discipline,</li> <li>• Sports – yah there's a lot of you know pushing, through the challenges like all the hard stuff like practice, getting better physically, mentally, especially, meaning, you become a stronger person, like all around,</li> <li>• Being pushed,</li> <li>• It broke me out of my comfort zone.</li> <li>• I didn't think about that – like praying before the game. You know I think like centering ourselves in our spiritual beings before you know going out and putting your body into whatever circumstances you were willing to do just like we do, I think when we go in sweat lodge or things like that, but I was thinking respect too – is a huge one.</li> <li>• Play with class – play the sport how it was supposed to be played.</li> <li>• All were welcome.</li> <li>• All the requirements that were set at Sherman also were things that were expected of me back at home for my tribe. So, it was</li> </ul>



really easy to transfer over some similarities back at home in sports at Sherman.

- Physically as well. I'm also San Carlos Apache so we have this rite we have this coming-of-age ceremony where it involves five days of physical stuff of running and dancing and kind of like preparing foods and different things like that and a lot of it during those five days are the same values that are being instilled during a practice. Like you are tired, but you have to keep pushing through. You may be exhausted, but you got to keep pushing through – because there are all these people around and with this ceremonies everybody is invited to come out and celebrate and you know be a part of the ceremony and be a part of the process and that sense of community that sense of everybody coming together to celebrate this moment this thing.
- Positivity,
- I got to see how sports were supposed to be played.
- The routine of it all.
- Basketball was a second chance; I was supposed to be the kid on the streets doing nothing with my life.
- Sherman athletics sparked the light.
- A way to connect with my parents – they were absent in my life and to see their pictures all over school and to know they played sports there too – it felt like being with family.
- Sherman sports was like an answer to it all; what are you going to do after, that's why so many students play multiple sports rather than just their primary one.
- Showboating was corrected right away it wouldn't be left to run rampant at Sherman – they immediately got humbled and then in turn became better people, more modest and more like secure in themselves and in turn they become like overall better versions of themselves than when they first started the sport.
- If we lost a game, it wasn't the end of the world, it's like, "We'll get them next time."
- Sense of community, that sense of teamwork.
- They didn't care if you were Native, they just cared if you were good or not.
- It felt good – it was more of a cultural thing; getting to know everyone's tribe, being comfortable around other Native peers, and not getting judged.
- Sports made me feel like I always had someone, I had a horrible life, and when I was in sports, I always had someone – sports give you clarity on who's worth your time and who's not worth your time.

- I wasn't really good at it, but it didn't matter as long as I was playing the sport and having fun and I was learning, we were all there to learn how to be a team, learn a sport, and be our own selves.
- Going to sports was part of my routine.
- The rewards at the end really helped bring it all together – it was a celebration of being committed of being determined of pushing through – and I got really skinny. haha
- Practices were really good.
- We all go through different things in our lives, sometimes the same things, but once you go to practice or start a game everybody just kind of shuts all of that out and just focusses on the game. I think it's really nice and I think it's really awesome that that's what a sport can do. It can just focus on that one thing and in turn it brings something really positive in the end.
- At the end of practice, we just grow as a team and I would say the teammate aspect of the sport I don't think it can succeed at all if it's like a miscommunication team, so it was really nice at Sherman for the coaches to be tough on all the teammates and consistently say, "Your part of a team, your part of a team. You have to work together."
- Ten years later and it's like the energy never went away.
- Could feel past relatives all around you.
- Culture aligns well with sports.
- Sports teaches you how to essentially be a community member of something of a greater cause – and that's basically what being a tribal member is – that you're part of something like part of a tribe that does like practices their own, like practices their own things and teaches their own people things and while in sports you have to learn how to communicate, you have to learn how to be a team player, you have learn how to take a chip off your shoulder essentially, you have to like shed that part of yourself – you have to be humble, and be respectful, and be cooperative with other people and that's a huge part of our people is that we have to communicate with our people whether it be with our mother or father or sibling or relative or an elder we always have to communicate with one another and check on one another and you know work together to alleviate a situation or any issue going on whether it be interpersonally within your family or wide spread throughout the tribal community.
- What Sherman has created sports-wise is very special.
- Part of athletics is getting to feel the success, the failures just the struggles, the challenges.

Social connection to a positive, supportive adult

- I didn't actually think I could take it to the next level – like I did, you know. Keep playing a sport in high school and maybe move on and I did – I played at Haskell, softball,
- It's something that you get to experience once in a lifetime.
- People look like you.
- Yah and being at Sherman too, when I went there I didn't realize how proud a lot of these Native Americans like some of my friends were like – these are like real Natives like from like up there in South Dakota like these guy are like real like legit, all these Navajos too, like I didn't really know much about most of my tribe and stuff because my Dad was in the military so we were like hopping around but like as I got older that's when I realized that man, I actually want to know more about my tribe and stuff. So, I learned more about the Apache side and some of the Navajo but also Luiseno too like you know and, in the sports, too how much my teammates too put so much like their prideness into it. They want to push themselves. So, I just thought like at Sherman it was a whole different thing like that's what it was all about you know. You learn a lot about things like the cultural traditions and all of that from different reservations and so yah, that's what I learned a lot too being there.
- There was a sense of belonging.
- I was being congratulated for the small wins – I had someone there to tell me I was doing good in school.
- They saw me.
- Deeper connections.
- The teachers and coaches really have a bigger dream for you than in the moment.
- Staff felt like family.
- One of my coaches was like another parent to me – always checking up on me.
- Coaches were role models.
- Coaches taught us how to be good human beings.
- Coaches have had a positive impact on my life.
- They encouraged you to do new things.
- You were more than a student, you were a person – they see you.
- Look up to the coaches.
- Get along with others (adults and peers,)
- Always encouraged to be better.
- Having other people be proud of what you've done, and feeling that success, really just helped shape me as a person and as a mom, and as a college student, it really went farther than high school.

- My track coach was my biggest mentor – especially because her life was similar to mine, so we saw eye to eye.
- Being with the coaches and talking about our day and joking around – we had a lot of fun.
- Dorm staff were a big support system because they’re the ones that see you every day and they can kind of pick up on your moods and your behaviors and how your emotions are which is kind of scary – especially in the older dorms. When I had a bad day – they would say, “Well at least you still have your sports.” And they would encourage me to finish – they would be another set of parents. They would be the ones to listen to you and hear you out and they would be the ones to give you advice. They would always talk about the growth for us kids that have been there from freshman year to senior year... they would say – you started out scared and alone and afraid and now here you are – in a sport in the school – immersed in all of it. Immersed in extracurriculars like that was all you in a sense. It was really nice to hear that from somebody other than my own parents. Because that meant that another person other than family that I’ve known my whole life are also seeing the change in myself, individually.
- The dorm staff were very solid support systems at the school.
- The coaches would challenge us and encourage us to try new things new sports.
- The whole Sherman Faculty,
- I was never interested in doing good in school, but also, I never had that person hold me accountable until Sherman.
- The Sherman staff and coaches, we got support and that really made me excel.
- The Sherman family itself is what kept me going.
- If it wasn’t for Sherman, I don’t know what else could have possibly motivated me.
- It was also the faculty, but mostly the coaches. Seeing them every day after school, getting there early just to talk with them and staying after just to talk with them, building that friendship – they made a really big impact. One coach helped me to be who I wanted to be physically and mentally and helped me with that determination, and I was struggling with academics before I came to Sherman and another coach helped me to better understand my potential. They have supported me through everything.
- When my grandfather died and I went (back to the reservation) to the funeral my senior year and I remember feeling that there was no greater grief than this, I was feeling so many emotions and then I turn, and I look and there are my coaches at my grandfather’s funeral and that just meant the world to me.

Social connection to peer

Those who have helped me in sports and academically you know, they showed up in real life.

- To this day, I am very grateful for the impact that the coaches have had, the support they've given, and still today, they are still a part of my life.
- After football practice I would hang around and talk with the coaches and I remember they would kick me out and tell me to go make friends with kids my own age. Haha They made you feel at home.
- Deep conversations,
- Shared culture,
- Shared past experiences.
- I have a lot more fond/funny memories with the teammates.
- Encouragement,
- Shared interests,
- Yah it's my friends and Coach like having all of us teammates you know just stuck together like yah we have our own little thing going on, but like you know boyfriends and stuff but you know but we would always come together like sisters.
- Get along with others (adults and peers,)
- Team bonding,
- My teammates were my sisters.
- Meet kids from all over the place.
- Consistent support.
- That sense of community, that sense of teamwork that went into Sherman athletics – and it is pretty cool to say I have friends in Wyoming, Wisconsin, Kansas.
- We all worked together to find greatness.
- After running miles and miles and miles together you become close – you all have the same struggles at that time, but everything is out the window, nobody cares where you come from what you're going through, everybody is just focused in that moment -that's what I really loved about it and what motivated me.
- Teammates wanted you to improve, they wanted you to be successful.
- It taught me about brotherhood or like a track brotherhood and sisterhood.
- We keep in touch even after the season is over, like when we're at the dorms or at late night – just like the culture was there it was like a home base type thing even though it was just at school.
- The happiest times in sport were the team bonding times, on and off the court, on and off the field.
- The sense of community.

- Really looking up to the older players.
- Friendships kept me at Sherman and had me continue to come back.
- I made a lot of friends in sports.
- I was able to encourage the younger guys when I got older, words of encouragement.
- Being with the team and just laughing and getting to know everybody, getting close to everybody – so that was the happiest I have been at Sherman.
- Watching my friend do the impossible in sport was very inspiring – she really does embody determination, accountability, and overall resilience as a person.
- My track and field team were contributing factors to my success. They were the ones that helped me out of the hole that I put myself in.
- My teammates were the funniest people I've ever met.
- Yah, Nezhoni really went through it and she really knows how to stay consistent and be that consistent person and I feel like knowing her and seeing her, our connection, and the fact that our Dads were best friends and seeing each other grow up together it was a very beautiful thing to see, it was very beautiful to see her succeeding and – even though she would doubt herself, I would always tell her – you're doing way better than most people our age. I'm really proud of her.
- My older sister – because she did all of the sports as well.
- At the end of the day it's you, it's your brothers and sisters, you know either we can lose or we can win but we're going to do it together there's no one left behind doing it and like when one messes up everyone messes up – it's just like no one's different you know, and I felt, I felt like more of a connection of culture – not only that, but coaches, you got to respect the coaches, just like in my culture – you have to respect your elders,
- My roommates were my biggest supporters. They loved seeing me play – they never really understood.
- I really just wish those times would have just slowed – time with my friends at Sherman.
- Even though the connection didn't really happen at first, it was like destiny just brought us together – it was like a reincarnation of our father's friendship.
- There's something about growing with someone all four years and seeing them grow and be successful in so many different ways- that allows you to create thankfulness and having somebody be there and see you grow – giving you so much

Increased resilience:  
Self-efficacy

positivity, confide in each other, things that you've gone through, it grew- that's what makes Sherman special.

- When you do a sport with someone you see how far they can be pushed, you can see, you can relate to certain things, oh coach was mad that day, oh we had to run all these things, we go home to the dorm and laugh about it – and have that connection. A lot of peers that I had were the ones that did sports with me and we were able to see each other vulnerable and also succeeding and just getting through the day every single day. It's funny, because everybody could go through so many different things off court, but then as soon as you get there you see everybody's mentality as soon as they get there. And you know it's just the time to just focus on yourself and focus on the people around you.
- Sports definitely helped me make friends.
- You learn how to work as a team and when you come away from it, you have a lot of amazing friendships, different backgrounds, you have the same practice, you can still laugh about the same thing – you have that special connection.
- A lot of my life friendship partners came from sports.
- That connection was deeper, built through sports.
- Just like today, sports has brought us all back together and it's like the years have not even passed.
- It was a really big impact on everybody to make friendships that way.
- I did sports not just for me, but for my teammates also – I had to be there for them.
- Challenges get overcome and you just go on to the next one and it motivates you to do it over and over again.
- Yes, like Sherman Strong... you know even though boarding schools had a bad, traumatic experience for lots of our family members, those of us in this generation that went, experienced it in a way different way and came out of it stronger.
- I felt empty when I couldn't play sports.
- Being a captain gave me a feeling of importance.
- We're resilient. Even though we've had so many things happen to our people, or happen to our families, you know like, we've overcome it, we're here, we're still fighting and thriving, and you know that's what I think is awesome, we're here... after everything – like we shouldn't be, but we are!
- Independence.
- I felt way more happier when I was doing sports.
- I ended up becoming addicted to what it made me feel like.
- I was laughing, I was more social.
- Self-discipline.

Increased resilience:  
Coping Skills

- I laughed a lot more when I was in sports.
- Being on a sport's team was the happiest days of my life.
- That sense of community made me way more happier as opposed to when I wasn't in a sport.
- Being a part of a sport was definitely a very positive and very positive experience altogether.
- Loving who I wanted to be.
- I really liked the person I was becoming while I played sports.
- You become a better person, a better individual, a better leader.
- After finishing the first sport – I really just fell in love with it.
- It really helped to shape me as a person
- How you carry yourself. You know you want to represent the warrior, you want to represent the Native woman, so it's just what does that really mean – it means empowerment, it means um determination, overcoming, resilience, it's those types of cultural values.
- Being a part of a team definitely strengthens my sense of communication and how to work with other people with different personalities with different backgrounds, not everyone is going to be the same person as you.
- It teaches you how to work as a teammate, you know, collaborate with other people, work together to succeed.
- Excel at things I never thought I would be successful at
- Self-accountability.
- I know I'm like hurting, in practice and aching all the time, but it feels good. It makes you feel like, yah, stress free
- Overcoming social anxiety.
- I learned determination.
- Going through the drills and realizing that I could do this really set that in motion for me early on at Sherman.
- I always looked forward to the game.
- It was nice knowing I finished something that I knew my grandpa would have wanted me to finish.
- I loved the way it made me feel – just the feeling of success after practice – it's just being productive and doing something with myself instead of just being in my dorm – it really just became my joy.
- The consistency was really stabilizing.
- You feel yourself get physically stronger, it was really nice, you felt lighter and more aware of yourself, you feel more clear headed and in turn that improves your overall life and you really start to notice that the more you get into sports the more your overall physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being really improves overall.



Increased resilience:  
Positive decision-  
making

- Sports – yah there’s a lot of you know pushing, through the challenges like all the hard stuff like practice, getting better physically, mentally, especially, meaning, you become a stronger person, like all around.
- Physical activity is huge like I tell people that all the time in my profession – it’s not just about one aspect of your life it does have to be, you have to look at all of the aspects; physical, is one of them – like if you’re not physically active, you know those other parts of your life aren’t going to be where they need to be too – so you have to take care of that physical part.
- like we’ve done this for so long being active, being outdoors, you know, always constantly moving, making sure we’re like mentally like you know everything all about us, like the whole circle, mental, physical, like that came in that’s like a big thing for our communities.
- I’m stronger than I think I am, you know.... And it’s not just about strength – strength, but about mental strength and spiritual strength and all those things.
- I realized that one mistake could jeopardize my whole season – it was not worth it to me.
- What else was I going to do – probably get in trouble.
- When you don’t do a sport, you just go to school and go back to your dorm and do – what- nap or do your homework probably – probably not- most likely not – go out with your friends and you know probably see them getting into trouble and you know you’re more susceptible to doing that, you’re more susceptible to doing troublesome things
- It happens in an instance where something you wanted can be taken away from you just because of your own actions.
- I chose to go to Sherman because I saw the direction my friends were going, and I didn’t want that – they were making bad decisions and I wanted more.
- I was just thinking like – yah I’m going to go back to Sherman every year, every year I’m going to get better and better and better. And I sure did!
- If you keep doing what you’re doing good things will come of it.
- Hearing that I might not “make it” at a young age really motivated me to work harder.
- Nobody was going to get me up and tell me to get dressed for practice right after school, nobody was going to tell me to make sure to be on time, nobody was going to tell me to keep going, it was all up to me – at Sherman I had no excuse.

- I wasn't going to let something like my grades be the reason I couldn't play sports – I wanted it to be something noble or an injury.
- Sports motivated me to do well in school.
- Man, if I was going to a public school it would be so different. I'd be going home and I probably wouldn't even be doing my homework.

# APPENDIX G: POWERPOINT SLIDES

## Slide 1

UNCG  
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Sherman Indian High School  
Athletic Department  
2024-2025

Sports as a protective factor in students that have  
attended Sherman Indian High School

Fall Coaches Meeting  
Kara Schwab  
UNCG

## Slide 2

UNCG  
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**Sherman Indian High School Retention**

\*Student-athletes retention rate is ##%.  
\*The Honor roll consists of ## student-athletes.  
\*# valedictorians  
\*# salutatorians  
Better behavior in the classrooms and dormitory

School-wide retention of students is approximately 50% (Sherman Indian High School, 2021).

Little education-based sport research  
Little research on physical activity levels of American Indians  
Little research on current boarding schools as it relates to sports (Logan et al., 2019)

\*Due to privacy issues the specific updated numbers are unable to be presented with the public, but will be available to the staff of SIHS for this presentation.

## Slide 3

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**Benefits of Sport**

**Physically**  
Bone health, Weight status, Cardiorespiratory fitness, Muscular fitness  
(Piercy et al., 2018)

**Mentally**  
Self-esteem, confidence, self-worth, reducing depression  
(Piercy et al., 2018)

**Socially**  
Friendships, attachments adults and peers, life skills  
(Moilanen et al., 2014; Schaefer et al., 2011)

**School**  
Connection to school, academic motivation, grades, behavior  
(Ewing, 2007; Ishee, 2004; Thouin et al., 2020; Trudeau & Shephard, 2010)

## Slide 4

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### Past Professional Developments

Risk factors:

- Marginalized
- At-risk
- Adverse Childhood experiences (ACE)
- Historical trauma

The government's systematic change to the American Indian lifestyle has the youth topping the charts in rates of obesity, type 2 diabetes, teen suicide, substance abuse, and cardiovascular disease (Camera, 2015; Coble & Rhodes, 2006).

## Slide 5

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### Protective Factors

Strength-based approach acts as a buffer to:

- Mitigate risks
- Positive well-being
- Healthy development
- Counteract ACE's and other risk factors  
(Racine et al., 2020; Wiglesworth et al., 2022)

Protective factors may be classified as:

- Family support
- Social connections (positive adult, peer)
- Community
- Program
- Religiosity
- Culture  
(Khan & Ungar, 2023; Racine et al., 2020; Wiglesworth et al., 2022).

## Slide 6

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### Purpose Statement and Aims

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study is to identify the factors pertaining to sports participation and academic success with those student-athletes, who have attended Sherman Indian High School (SIHS), an American Indian Off-Reservation Boarding School (ORBS).

**Aims**

Aim #1 – Determine what former student-athletes consider as factors regarding their completing a sport at SIHS, an American Indian Off-Reservation Boarding School in Southern California.

Aim #2 – Determine what former student-athletes consider as factors regarding their return to SIHS and their academic success.

## Slide 7

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### Methods

- Qualitative
- Talking Circles – talking symbol the varsity letter “S”
- Deductive reasoning
- Questions built around the protective factors
- Audio Recorded
- Transcribed
- Narrative analysis
- Authentic lived-experience
- Code, categories, patterns, themes

## Slide 8

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### Participants

TRIBE	GENDER	SPORT
San Carlos Apache, Navajo, Luiseno	Female	Track and Field, Volleyball
Colorado River Indian Tribe, Mohave	Male	Cross Country, Basketball, Football, Track and Field
Navajo, Ute Mountain Ute, Impaiq, Edkimo, Navajo	Female	Basketball, Softball, Volleyball
Bishop Paiute, Tule River Yokut	Female	Basketball, Softball, Track and Field, Volleyball
Bishop Paiute, Navajo	Male	Football, Baseball
La Jolla Indian Reservation, San Carlos Apache, Navajo	Female	Basketball, Softball, Volleyball
Bishop Paiute	Male	Baseball
San Carlos Apache	Female	Basketball, Softball, Volleyball
Bishop Paiute, Shoshone	Male	Cross Country, Basketball, Football, Track and Field
Bishop Paiute	Female	Basketball, Softball, Volleyball

## Slide 9

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### Findings

Themes that emerged:

- Connection to the sports program
- Connection to a positive, supportive adult (coach)
- Connection to a peer

```

graph LR
    A[Protective Factors] --> B[Increased Resilience]
    B --> C[Success]
  
```

**Protective Factors**

- Sports program
- Competent Coach
- Social connections

**Increased Resilience**

- Self-efficacy
- Adaptive coping
- Positive decision-making

**Success**

- Positive grades
- School retention
- Graduation

Slide 10

**Themes**

Themes	Key words from study
Connection to the sports program	Belonging, challenging, constant, daily, welcoming, culture, stories, support, unique, holistic, positivity, accountability, legacy
Connection to a supportive, positive, adult (coach)	Valued, seen, celebrated, encouraged, role models, positive, discipline, consistent
Connection to a peer	Shared experiences, shared culture, deeper conversations, shared struggles, brotherhood, sisterhood, family, bonding, learned how to get along

Slide 11

**Themes**

Themes	Key Quotes from the Study
Connection to the sports program	Sports-wise has - is very special. It's something that you get to experience once in a lifetime. People look like you, they understand what you've been through, there's a legacy, there's forever friendships, it's very unique, and it also helps build your future – having that support system there.
Connection to a positive, supportive adult (coach)	We would go to practice early or stay late just to talk with the coaches and hang out. They were true role models and taught us not only the sport, but how to play it with discipline, respect, class, and how to be good human beings.
Connection to a peer	My life friendship partners have come from sports, so it wasn't just on the court it was also off it wasn't just on the field it was off and that went deeper, that connection was deeper built through sports

Slide 12

**Athletic Department**

Activity

Please get in groups by sport  
 Within your group:  
     What do we do well?  
     Where do we need improvement?  
     Possible strategies?

When we reconvene - each group will share their findings.

Our time together will conclude with a discussion of possible strategies to implement this year.

**THANK YOU!!!!**

## Slide 13

 Find your way here

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## APPENDIX H: SUMMARY OF STUDY

### Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate sports participation as a protective factor in students that have attended Sherman Indian High School (SIHS), an American Indian Off-Reservation Boarding School (ORBS).

Many benefits are associated with interscholastic sports participation. These include physical, mental, emotional, social, as well as academic (Logan et al., 2019; Piercy et al., 2018; Trudeau & Shephard, 2010). The protective model theory states that a connection to school through extracurricular sports can act not only as a positive influence but also a means in which to steer student-athletes away from negative choices (Moilanen et al., 2014).

### Methods

This study used a qualitative narrative research design. Its purpose was to gather the participants' lived experiences at the ORBS in sports through storytelling. Through open-ended questions, this methodology allowed the participants to go beyond the surface of content and reveal deeper layers (Gockel, 2013). This was done through Talking Circles. This method is not new to the students of SIHS. The Cultural Leader on campus often conducts them (Rogers & Sisquoc, 2020). It is the main reason it was chosen. The Talking Circle is an accepted practice within American Indian methodology (Rogers & Sisquoc, 2020). It allows everyone an opportunity to share, it gives everyone an opportunity to be an intentional listener and places all participants on equal ground within the conversation (Pranis, 2014). Two Talking Circles were conducted to gather the authentic lived experience of the participants. The groups were small to gain a deeper understanding from each participant.



To obtain the voice of the student-athlete, purposeful sampling was used. The ten participants were student-athletes over the age of 18 that completed a sport at Sherman Indian High School. Each of the sports offered at SIHS was represented within this group. Of the ten participants, nine had lived on the reservation during their stay at SIHS. The tribes represented were San Carlos Apache, Navajo, Luiseno, Colorado River Indian Tribe, Mohave, Ute Mountain Ute, Inupaiq Eskimo, Bishop Paiute, Tule River Yokut, and Shoshone.

### Findings

After creating codes, categories and patterns from the data, the major theme that permeated was that of connections. The participants shared in various forms how connections gave them a sense of belonging. They shared that these connections strengthened their self-efficacy, coping skills, and allowed them to make better more positive decisions. The connections that were identified as the greatest protective factors for the participants were those to the sports program, social connection to a positive adult, and most importantly, social connection to peers. These garnered the most favorable outcomes for success.

### Conclusion

It has been found that the student-athletes that have completed a season of sport at SIHS, at any level, are becoming more physically fit, exhibit fewer behavioral incidents, have higher grade point averages and are returning to school at an increased rate in comparison to those that do not participate in sports (Sherman Indian High School, 2021).

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