



"You know a lot of these people need to know our story."

Report of Findings from the Study of Micro-aggressions and
Other Hostile Encounters between Tribal Members and non-Natives
in Isabella County



Human Rights Committee
of Isabella County
2014



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INTRODUCTION

In 2008, the Isabella County Board of Commissioners established The Isabella County Human Rights Committee (HRC) to serve as a clearinghouse for examples of acts of discrimination within the community and to provide educational programs to promote an atmosphere of acceptance and tolerance. As part of that mission, in 2012, HRC sought and received an allocation from the semi-annual 2% distribution of Tribal Casino Revenues to undertake a study of the nature and extent of acts of discrimination against Native Americans in Isabella County. Native Americans and more specifically the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe constitute the largest racial minority in this community. Of the approximately 70,000 residents, the 2010 census indicates that there are approximately 1,900 Native Americans living in Isabella County.

As is indicated in the history below, tension, distrust, and hostility have characterized relations between the two communities. The project began as an effort to define what are referred to in the social science literature as “acts of micro-aggression,” subtle, less overt actions or language that demean or marginalize members of a racial or ethnic minority. One of our research participants summed up the nature of micro-aggressions well.

I guess that's what micro aggression is—the subtle feelings that people in situations ... put you in...they don't realize how they make you feel, and you just always brush it off and you live like that, you know?

Another remarked on the ways in which micro-aggressions can distract and distort interactions, taking the victim by surprise

A lot of the times, now, the innuendos are so veiled. It's kind of hard ...to really think, did I just get insulted or didn't I?

As the study evolved, it became clear that to understand tribal/non-tribal relations in Isabella County it was necessary to describe all acts of racial discrimination from overt acts (e.g, denial of service, unwillingness to rent, and ridicule) to less conspicuous acts (e.g. being purposely ignored, treated in a demeaning manner, followed in stores). As a result, instances of overt discrimination are incorporated in the data collected.

A brief history of relations between the Saginaw Chippewa Tribe and the non-Native community is useful to understand the atmosphere in which this research was undertaken.

HISTORY OF THE SAGINAW CHIPPEWA INDIAN TRIBE OF MICHIGAN

The Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe of Michigan is comprised of three bands of Ojibway (Saginaw, Black River, Swan Creek), who lived primarily in the Eastern region of what is now Michigan. Tribal ancestors lived in this area for hundreds of years prior to the appearance of European settlers.

During the time of colonization, the threats to American Indians came in many forms: wars, forced relocations, foreign diseases (such as small pox, scarlet fever, and tuberculosis), commodified governmental foods, well-intentioned missionaries, and American Indian boarding schools. The Indian Removal Act (1830), signed into law by President Andrew Jackson, resulted in an enormous loss of land and resources, as many American Indians were forced to move westward. These changes brought an unprecedented “extreme” level of destruction to the Saginaw Chippewa people and culture.

“A treaty is a negotiated, written, legally binding, ratified agreement between two sovereign nations.”

Treaties or promises were made with the Saginaw Chippewa beginning with the French and English, but most were made with the new American colonial government. Reportedly, tribal leaders were threatened, given presents, and plied with liquor during treaty negotiations. Treaty documents and the European idea of land ownership were new concepts for the people. Hungry for new lands and resources, the westward expansion of the settlers through treaties displaced many Saginaw Chippewa and radically disrupted a way of life. The last treaties, signed with the United States in 1855 and 1864, established the Isabella Indian Reservation. Totaling over 130,000 acres, this land was divided into privately-owned allotments establishing a permanent home for the Saginaw Chippewa. The grim reality of the Treaty Era was the forced removal of the Saginaw Chippewa people and a loss of the lands.

When the Saginaw Chippewa people moved to the Isabella Indian Reservation, the conditions were extremely grim and annuity payments were delayed, causing many people to succumb to hunger and sickness. During this time, Isabella County had some of the best stands of white pine in the whole state of Michigan, and lumbermen were eager to swindle tribal members out of lands. Many people sold their allotments to lumber sharks for a small fraction of their value. For many, selling their allotment was the only way to feed their families. This, coupled with numerous shoddy deals between Indian Agents and timber barons, led to a rapid dispossession of the tribal land base. Of the more than 1,500 allotments issued to tribal ancestors in the late 1800s, only a handful of these were owned by tribal members by 1934.

The Mount Pleasant Indian Industrial Boarding School was established in 1893 and did not close until 1934, enrolling, on average, 300 students each year. Native children were uprooted from their homes, their families, and their culture. Forbidden to speak their language and engage in their cultural practices and trained for only the most menial work in U.S. society, the experience

of Native children in boarding schools throughout the United States and Canada stands as one of the most shameful chapters in the history of Native/non-Native relationships in North American.

In 1934 the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) was passed, which sought to improve conditions for tribes in the United States. The IRA required tribes to adopt a constitution and elect a tribal council in order to be a federally-recognized tribe. The first tribal council was elected and the constitution adopted in 1937. At this time, the tribe acquired 500 acres east of Mt. Pleasant to establish a land base for the people.

For the Saginaw Chippewa, the past 200 years have been wrought with destruction; however, the past 40 years have brought pride and self-determination. Tribal sovereignty, an inherent right, is defined by connection and continuity to the land. The 1832 “Worcester vs. Georgia” Supreme Court case is considered a landmark decision for all American Indians. The decision recognized the inherent rights of the Cherokee Nation, and subsequently gave power to all tribal nations of the U.S. to exercise sovereignty. The decision established federal jurisdiction on Indian lands (reservations). Additionally, Act 1, Section 8 of the U.S. Constitution outlines the Power of the U.S. Congress “*to regulate Commerce with foreign Nations, and among the several States, and with the Indian Tribes.*” Act 1, Section 8 upholds Tribal status of having a “nation to nation” relationship with the U.S. Government. The Saginaw Chippewa continue to assert their sovereignty through exercising hunting and fishing rights, economic/business diversification and gaming initiatives.

Tribal gaming started in Michigan in the 1980s. The success of the Saginaw Chippewa’s gaming and entertainment operations has enabled the tribe to better provide for the needs of its community. The tribe provides a variety of governmental services to its members and the reservation community. These services include police and fire protection, court system, health care, education, cultural programs, language revitalization, housing, elder and youth support, and economic development.

The tribe also provides opportunities for non-Native neighbors as the largest employer in Isabella County. Due to the success of the tribe’s gaming ventures, not only does the tribe benefit, but so does the tribe’s residing counties and the State of Michigan. To date, the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe of Michigan has distributed \$216,313,967 to Isabella County and \$6,342,827 to Arenac County since 1994.

The Saginaw Chippewa place faith in the perseverance of their own people – past, present, and future, and unequivocally believe that all things will fall into place. As the tribe enters into more cooperative relationships with the local, State, and Federal governments, as well as the private sector, there is a hope that mistrust and racism will erode to become new foundations that will promote collective growth and understanding to meet the needs of the future for all people of Isabella and Arenac counties.

THE STUDY

In the Fall of 2012, the HRC sought tribal members to serve as interviewers. Nine individuals were selected and trained in interviewing and focus group facilitation. In the period from December, 2012 to March, 2013, more than 100 tribal members living in Isabella County were interviewed or participated in focus groups. Audio recordings of these interviews were made ranging from 15 minutes to one hour, averaging approximately 30 minutes. These tapes were then transcribed resulting in approximately 750 pages of material. A team of six members of the HRC coded the data into 1) descriptions of the overall “climate” for Native Americans in Isabella County, 2) different types of negative encounters and discrimination, 3) the nature of responses to such acts, and 4) perceptions of changes in relationships between tribal members and the non-Native American Community over the last 20 years.

Qualitative research such as that reported here allows participants to describe and elaborate on their life experiences. Such research provides a subtlety and richness that is often lacking in the more familiar survey research, where respondents are asked to fit themselves into predetermined “boxes.” Throughout this report, we have tried to let our research participants speak for themselves and in their own words. Direct quotes from interview and focus group participants are found in italics. Words added for clarification are found in brackets. When words are omitted for the sake of clarity, the omitted words are indicated by three dots (periods). Figures that provide quantitative summaries of the number of respondents who had specific types of experiences or reactions when interacting with non-Natives in Isabella County are included as well.

This research project would not have been possible without the thoughtful and often eloquent participation of the tribal members who shared their experiences, often painful and heartfelt ones, with the HRC, in an effort to further our understanding and to create a future that is more welcoming and supportive of all peoples living and working in Isabella County.

A CAUTIONARY TALE FOR A FRIEND OR RELATIVE MOVING TO TOWN

How would you describe living in Isabella County to a relative or friend who might be thinking about moving here? Would you have positive things to say or negative? Are you surprised that even in 2013, Native Americans were more likely to use negative or cautionary words rather than positive ones to describe life in Isabella County?

While it is true that one respondent talked about loving Mount Pleasant and others chose words such as “friendly” or “nice” to describe the community, negative words such as “rude” and “mean” and “cold” are more common than the positive ones. Negative comments predominate.

Indian is almost spoken like a four-letter word.

People look down on us, you know.

They treat us like they come, they come off with a how do you say it, kind of like an attitude that's...like they're talking down to somebody that, like, you're not a person.

There's a lot of tension and a lot of animosity. There's a lot of definite jealousy.

Natives and non-Natives, we clash.

You can feel that there's some tension from people, or it's just an uncomfortable feeling.

There are racist people up here and just be prepared.

Once they see that Tribal card. Even though they have blond hair and blue eyes, but they have that card. That card is what makes them have that negative; it's not so much their brown skin, brown eyes as it is their status.

One respondent who interacted often with non-Natives remarked:

I don't even belong here. I don't fit in.

Another respondent who had similar experiences noted the continuation of social distance between Native and non-Native members of the community. The sense was that there continue to be two social worlds, not one integrated community.

They don't really notice us. I don't think; I don't know. It's like they don't really acknowledge a lot of times. It just feels like we live here, you know, we're neighbors and everything, but we really don't work together on anything that's...like really intimately with the community.

It seems that in Isabella County that there is like a segregation of classes. Either you're Native or you're not Native. Either you're rich or you're not rich.

My kids knew that they had lived two lives. They lived a life in town, and they lived a life on the rez.

I just feel like it's a little overwhelming. It's a little hard to grasp at first to find a happy medium. If you're not right on the reservation, you want to be a part of the community and part of the Native community, but you also want to be accepted by the Isabella County community as well and not isolated to just your reservation.

TIMES ARE CHANGING ... FOR THE BETTER

Now, 2013 is not 1953, and respondents were asked to comment on the type of change that they had seen in the community. Figures 1 and 2 summarize respondents' overall views of the county and changes within it (Appendix #4).

We find that the number of comments about positive and mixed changes greatly exceeded the number of comments about negative change. However, many of the positive comments resulted from respondents' views about positive changes originating within the Saginaw Chippewa Tribal community rather than changes resulting from efforts by the non-Native community to reach out and create a more welcoming environment for tribal members.

Even so, respondents used words such as increased respect and acceptance to describe more recent interactions between non-Native and tribal community members.

Compared to my younger days, things in Isabella County have gotten much better.

Back about 50 years ago, it was a lot different than it is now. We weren't openly accepted in the community although you lived here your whole life.

People are starting to realize that Natives Americans, that tribal members and Native American people, are people. And that they're just, you know, they're just like them, just a different color of skin. So, there are people out there that have changed their thoughts of what they think about Native Americans, but there is still people out there that haven't and that are still, you know, have them thoughts and feel like they're better than Natives, you know, or that, right now, a lot of it's got to do with the jealousy.

Some respondents felt that there was a greater awareness of Native culture and recognition of the positive contributions of the Tribe to the community.

I feel good that we can supply jobs for non-Natives. I feel good that our tribe gives money to different parts of the Isabella County—schools, roads. I feel good about that because I feel like that's part of me that's going out there.

The economy pretty much needs the Tribe here so I think then there was a shift of outlook on people here.

I was kind of shocked that he had said that the Tribe sure has done a lot for this community, hasn't it? And I kind of looked at him, and I laughed a little bit, and he said "why did you laugh?" And I said "because not very often do you hear, excuse me, a white person thank us for what we've done for this community."

In addition, respondents highlighted a range of events in the surrounding community that suggested improved relations—including the introduction of Native drumming to bolster the spirits of a school basketball team, the acceptance of Native practices to welcome a newborn at the local hospital, and non-Native community members honoring of the survivors of the Mount Pleasant Indian Industrial Boarding School.

Respondents also expressed considerable pride in all of the advances within the tribal community, highlighting the development of the Ziibiwing Center, Andahwod Continuing Care Community & Aging Services, and the Native American advocates in the local high school for young people. Several tribal members also noted the increasing numbers of young people graduating from high school and going on to college, along with the enhanced self-esteem of young people. Further, some respondents highlighted the efforts within the tribe to maintain and enhance traditional ways of life, through the Elijah Elk Cultural Center – Seventh Generation Program and the Saasiwans Immersion School.

So to hear little kids using Anishinabe or, you know, referring to things in the world by their natural names or referring to things as having a spiritual connection that like, that blows me away.

It's the opposite of what it was years ago. Because years ago they didn't want to have nothing to do with you. Now, I would say I was Native when Native wasn't cool. Now, it's a cool thing to be.

Some respondents' views about change in the community were, however, decidedly mixed—a combination of positive and negative experiences.

Some people will welcome you with a smile and they'll say "hi" you know, and then other people would just look at you funny.

I wish Mt. Pleasant was more progressive in a lot of sense, in a lot of ways. I think that it's, I think that I would tell a family member that it's growing, but maybe not as fast as I would like.

And a number of respondents noted that hostility is expressed less overtly today although still present.

Yes, so we're not getting cut down too much, but we still are behind our backs, the ones that don't like us as a tribal member.

I don't think everything is overtly, you know, racist. I mean there are, the pockets, there are definitely still pockets.

I think it's different and that it's really—somebody described it to me that's the worst kind of—they used the word racism. Because you don't know that it's actually happening because they are so good to your face, but, as soon as you turn around, that's when the whispering and the, you know, the bad things are said about you because of who you are.

Similarly, some respondents saw the continuation of hostility towards tribal members, although the focus has changed over time.

The outside sees us growing as a community and improving as a community. They don't like that. It's either, you know, "oh, those disgusting poor Indians" or ... "look at them—they have all these nice cars, nice houses, nice clothes. It's like they just, they have a reason to hate us. It's one or the other.

Before, we were criticized for not having money. So it's like, you know, it's just a different kind of racism, I guess.

Now, it just seem like they're jealous. Before they was always acting like they was uppity-up—better than we were.

There's a little bit more acceptance. And there's also jealousy. So you have a little bit of both. But, you just got to put your head high and keep walking.

I remember being younger and people making comments about "oh, you're from that Tribe; you're just another little dirty Indian." And then now growing up it's just like "oh, you're Indian, so you can afford whatever". So we went from dirty Indians to now we don't like you because you make more money than we do.

Now that we have per cap we can, we have the houses, we have the nice cars so we kind of blend in on the surface level, but that's about it. ... It's probably the same because now they hate us for what we have. Before we didn't have anything to hate us for who we were. But now we got stuff and now they hate us for that.

They were mad when we was on welfare, and, now, they're mad because we can buy groceries.

Yeah, with the money; we do have money. So, there's more people trying to take advantage of you for that. And, 20 years ago, we didn't have it. So, like, I said. They kind of hated you when you didn't have it, and, now that you have it, they hate you still. They're never happy.

ARE FRIENDS REALLY FRIENDS?

One of the dilemmas facing Native Americans in Isabella County today is an uncertainty about whether the friendly behavior of some non-Natives toward them is truly genuine or authentic—the way that any of us would like a friend to be. Listen to these comments from respondents questioning whether friendly behavior is truly originating from a desire for a honest relationship.

You know with the community, the Mount Pleasant community seeing nothing but money. I think they treat the elders, or they assume to treat the elders like they are important, but all they really want is her money.

You know, it's just hard to find somebody up here to date that isn't looking for the money.

I hate to go anywhere where you have to be the only one from the Tribe. Because you know they got their hand out for money. They're always going to want money. And they just view you differently. It's not real

When we didn't have money, they didn't bother us. Now that we've got money, they want to be friends. But as soon as you turn around, they're talking about you and everything else. We just left and we've never been back to [store] since then.

And some respondents feel that members of the community are actively preying on them, a sentiment that surely suggests the absence of a desire for an honest relationship.

They know that you have money and so they're going to be nice to you to get your money but they're going to swindle you at the same time. So they're nice, they're chummy, they'll shake your hands but they are swindling you at the same time. That has been my experience in, in businesses and you know buying things. I try not to buy things here.

So I think it's opened up opportunities but it's also opened up a lot of challenges, you know. You have those predators that prey on our community members who may not be financially suave.

So let's explore in greater detail what the negative experiences faced by tribal members are like. What leads these Native American members of the community to describe Isabella County in negative ways even though they do also see positive change?

WORDS—AND LOOKS—CAN INDEED HURT YOU

Interaction, of course, depends on language—a language that can take the form of words or gestures and looks. Respondents described numerous experiences where derogatory, hostile, and demeaning comments or “looks” were sent their way. We must, then ask, where these particular words and where this body language—the “looks”—come from. The perceptions behind this use of language are rooted in views about group differences and from stereotypes about Native Americans that persist into the 21st century. While we return to a discussion of stereotypes below, we first need to listen to the respondents’ discussion of the words and “looks” that do indeed hurt.

We get called “dirty Indians” a lot. Remember? At the park?

I was looking for a car part or something and the guy comes behind the desk, “Oh how ya doin’, chief?”

“Squaw.” I’ve been called a squaw in the past month. That was an eye opener. I get irritated about that one.

In fact one day I went over to visit my [non-Native] cousin and I walked in, and he looked at me and said “Hau?” I said “what’s that for?” he said “well, that’s the only language you understand.”

I tend to pick up on “them” and “they” and “them ones over there”. So when they add the extra little words it does, it becomes insulting like “them people think that, you know, their money can buy anything.”... So, you get a lot of that, and it’s insulting. And so it’s kind of like, what else would you say if you couldn’t say “they” or “them?” Would you put more negative words in there, more descriptive words? How would you talk about us if you didn’t use “they” and “them?” Because I feel like that’s their safe word.

I was in [a local government building] and there was an older lady working there and she constantly said “you people” like, you know, like we were—we just got here or something or... you know, like “you people”, like we’re separate from every—even though we’ve been here for, you know, ever. You know, we’ve always been out here, but somehow she drew a line in the sand and, you know, by saying that like, I don’t know. Like, it’s “us” and “them.”

Well, I noticed the guy, when we got up from the table the guy and some of his friends, the guy that came out after and, like, flipped me off and started saying “get in your free car and go.”

She’s like, “but do Native Americans wear leopard print?” She’s like “probably.” And she was like “I think we’re going to be slutty Indians.” And they started laughing. ... And the lady, you know, ringing them up started laughing. And she was like “I don’t even know if they wear this or not,” and I was like “no, we don’t.” And they turned

around and looked at me, and they all just all just froze and it was pretty uncomfortable...

I guess I've noticed it in restaurants, where the staff and even customers have been rude, made rude comments, racial comments out loud about Native people, some even recently some really terrible, terrible stuff at the very next table over. Knew that there were a table full of Natives sitting there, and they were really pouring it on heavy. Some really slanderous stuff, almost fighting words. I mean it was terrible. I, I had to get out of there. ... and that was within the last 8 weeks. So yeah, it is out there. There is still that hate...

I was just standing on the edge when everybody was singing. And some [CMU] students, they must have just gotten out of class, but they came up and started going "whoop, whoop, whoop," like you know. With their mouth.

Very often I deal with this: "Whoop, whoop, whoop, whoop, whoop, whoop, whoop, whoop." They slap their hand on their mouth. They heard it on Hollywood.

I know my dad has a lot of white friends, and they get comfortable with him and they say really insulting things. They call us wagon burners, dirty Indians. And, it's, it's, it's when they get, when they start getting out of line 'cause my dad wouldn't say anything. I would, start saying stuff and then they'd come back to my dad and be like "oh, what's wrong with your son? Can't he take a joke?" Well it's not funny when, when someone insults you to your face and then they just expect you to laugh at it like they do.

And, respondents recounted hostile and totally inappropriate interactions with the criminal justice and school systems—both from fellow students and from personnel employed by the institutions.

Once I got there [to the police station], first thing they said was "oh great, what's this Native in for". ... I get thrown into the cell. My wife gets there, pays the \$50 for it, and when I was getting myself altogether and on my way out, he looked at me "oh gosh, another freakin' Tomahawk Indian". "We'll see you back soon," so, it kind of makes you feel pretty rotten.

I got punched in the face in fourth grade, by a teacher, because I was nothing more than a wagon burner, who didn't know how to write. ... I remember losing a lot of chances to go out into schoolyard because I had issues with my cursive writing. ... I would have to say that actually stunted my school. Also, being told that I was stupid by a lot of teachers growing up, or "you're just nothing but a dumb ass Indian."

It's just, the problems that they was having you know, like one son was getting upset because kids were spittin' on him in the bus coming

But I mostly saw it on the athletic side. Ignorance kind of hateful stuff, you know. Derogatory things about Redskins or Indians ... Yeah at Mt. Pleasant high school and Mt. Pleasant junior high. West intermediate and Mt. Pleasant high school. But again, it, it I know it sounds awful but you just kind of get used to it.

And, these negative encounters occur at the casino, as well, even though this enterprise is owned by the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe.

One time I was at the casino playing slot machines and there were some non-Natives there, and they were complaining about the machines not hitting, and they were saying that, umm, while they must be getting ready to pay their tribal members more, give their tribal members more free money so they tighten the machines. Things like that, I always hear negative comments when I'm in the casino from other players,

At one point when I worked for the casino a lot, there were several employees that were non-Native. They would make comments about, "oh, you got your job because you're a Tribal Member." And that wasn't, that, for me that wasn't true. ... I started from the bottom and worked my way to a supervisor position. I didn't, I didn't get my job because I was a member but I got my job because I worked hard to get where I was. ...

Then, there are "the looks."

Some of the people and some of the businesses here in town are discriminating. They'll, they just look at you funny when you come in.

Some stores people act prejudiced towards you. When you walk in, they just give you this funny look, like, I don't know, it's just, it's sickening.

And so to see that, you know, all I did was look [at the bottles in the liquor aisle at a local store] and I, they thought that of me immediately [that I was an alcoholic] just because I was in that aisle and I was looking. I didn't have anything in my cart or in my hand, but I had them whispering and talking about me.

But it's just, the customer's you know, they, they kind a look at you and, and they'll make, how would you say? Nudge each other, and they'll say something.

You do, you do get looked down upon. I mean my fiancé, he has long hair. He wears it back

One of the ones that we encounter a lot is my sons have long hair like I do, so wherever we go if they end up using the boys' bathroom, they've been yanked out of the boys' bathroom by people thinking they were girls, ... But even now [that they are older] I don't know how many times people call them girls on purpose.

THE STEREOTYPES THAT PERSIST

We are all familiar with stereotypes – the dumb blond, the feisty Irishman, the organized German. But, what are the characteristics of stereotypes and what makes them problematic? The stereotypes that concern us are ones that carry a negative connotation. A stereotype is a type of belief or viewpoint that is distinctive because it results from prejudging people based on their membership in a group or category. And, stereotypic thinking does not admit to difference. Our respondents recognize the key features of stereotypes.

Interviewer: So they draw their own conclusions?

Respondent: Yeah. Before, you know, before you even have a chance to know them. Or them know us.

Instead of seeing us as individuals. They see us as a whole.

And, stereotypes are irrational in the sense that they do not change when new information is presented to the individual holding the stereotypic beliefs. It is as if the stereotypic thinker is saying: “Do not lead me to question my beliefs; do not bother me with data on reality. I have all the answers.” So, the stereotypic thinker rather than adjusting his beliefs to new information readjusts the new information to conform to his existing beliefs.

Our respondents provide numerous examples of the persistence of negative, Native American stereotypes held by community members in Isabella County. Figures 3a and 3b (Appendix #5) demonstrate this prevalence of stereotypic thinking and the numbers of respondents who encountered each of six specific hostile and derogatory ones—including the historical Indian, the dirty Indian, the poor Indian, the drunk or alcoholic Indian, the uneducated Indian, and the undeserving Indian.

The continuation of these negative beliefs even in the face of a changing environment is highly pronounced in the narratives from our respondents commenting on their ongoing interactions with non-Natives in Isabella County. And, the consequences of non-Natives acting on these stereotypes leads to hostile encounters and hurt—significant hurt felt by Native children and by adults who continue to feel the hostile sting even after years of enduring it.

The Historical Indian

Many non-Natives have an exceedingly poor understanding of the culture and context of contemporary Native Americans. Their view of the Indian seems locked in a time warp and is formed more by Hollywood than by any historical understanding. As a consequence, respondents found themselves confronted with questions that at best can be considered “ridiculous” and at worst condescending and demeaning.

The questions that were asked most frequently are: Do you live in a tee pee? Do you have feathers? What kind of feathers? Do you live on the Reservation? ... Do you have electricity?

There was an old man that came in here... and he said, he said "well... I wanna know where the reservation's at", and I said "you're on the reservation," and he said "no, the Indian reservation." And I said, "yes, sir, that's correct. You are on the Indian reservation." He expected to see tee pees.

And the lady behind us [in church] says, "don't they have any concept of time? It started 30 minutes ago. They must have had to ride their horses here from the Reservation. That's why they're late."

[The whites think that] we're either carrying knives or, or we're packin' and so I just started laughing, and they go "What?" And I said "Nah, I think they carry tomahawks all the time." And this one guy goes "That's right! You know, they probably carry them under their coat or something like that." And I said "This is ridiculous."

You know they think automatically cause I'm an Indian I can, I can hunt. I don't know the first thing about hunting you know, but I can fish. ... I can tell you a lot about fishing, you know.

You know how they give you those certificates in school? ... Guess what mine was? ... Princess of the Corn Maze [like in the commercial]... And I was the only Indian there.

Like Halloween, I was taking my granddaughter down to get a Halloween costume, and there was a huge poster on the front of the building of a woman in an Indian costume... I found that extremely offensive. Extremely offensive.

The Dirty Indian

As we saw above, another negative image and the occasion for taunts is the "dirty Indian." Here is a memory about one woman's effort as a child to make a friend.

I was friends with this white girl, and one day we went back to her house after school and her mom came to the door 'cause she opened the door and her mom came in there, and she said something like "your friend is going to have to leave." And when I closed the door, I could hear her saying "I don't want those, ah, I don't want those dirty Indians in my house." And I could hear her through the door.

And, more recently, here is an encounter in a local store's parking lot, when a respondent tried to move a cart out of the way.

And he came in pulling into the parking space blowing his horn, and he said "get out of my way you dirty Indian." ... So for someone to judge me like that, it's frustrating to be looked down on and be called a dirty Indian by people. It makes me wonder why in such a day and era that we have to still live and go through this.

The Poor Indian

As we have seen in the account of the history of the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe, the substantial economic success of tribal members is of recent origin. Elders recall the stigma associated with the poverty of their youth and the false assumptions made by non-Natives about them.

I was a young kid. It was, I still remember ... like I wouldn't want to go to school, you know, I'd cry, pretend to be sick all the time, like it was like horrible, and they'd tease me because then we were really poor, like we lived in the stone house and I didn't know.

It's really kind of strange because I always thought that when we were young they didn't like us because we were poor, and they used to say people would say things about living on welfare and stuff like that. I don't ever remember we never got welfare. I mean if we got welfare that would have been cool. We'd had, you now we got commodities [from the U.S. government] and, and we picked cherries in the summer and did what we could, right?

And even today tribal members are assumed by some non-Natives to lack the ability to pay themselves for the goods they seek. Here are the exchanges between salespeople and respondents.

They always, sometimes they seem to remind me like, "well, this might be too expensive for you," or you know, "are you sure? This is like two dollars more."

Oh, just to let you know: those purses are really expensive.

I have a tendency to separate my groceries really good, and so my milk products ought to go together. And whatever else goes together, my vegetables to go together, stuff like that. And so the lady [who worked as a cashier at a local store] very rudely told me that—how did she say it? "That if I had WIC [a federal program for low income mothers] I need to put my, my card up first, or my coupons up first" and I was like, "well I don't have WIC." She goes "well, did your per cap come in 'cause that's a lot of groceries?"

And here is an exchange between neighbors in an upper income area of the county. The assumption is that the Native American must be the "paid help" rather than a neighbor.

I didn't even recognize her, and I even talked to her a couple times in the neighborhood. They lived there for years, too, not as long as we've lived there. ... She asked me, she's like, "Oh, aren't you the girl who watches the dogs, that dog sits at [address]?" She knew my address, but, she also thought I was a dog sitter, and I have lived there for almost 10 years, you know, and I was just so offended, and I was like I also pay taxes and the mortgage, you know. It's my house, and, and it just, the conversation went downhill.

The Lazy Indian

The stereotype of the lazy Indian, who will not or does not work, persists.

Even when I was attending classes at [a local higher education institution], a lot of people don't really have the accurate information to go ahead and share with other classmates about what our tribal members are really like...Like how much money we get. They just feel that we get this money, and we don't have to work. We're lazy and uneducated.

If you start talking about the Tribe, or the casino or anything like that, there is always somebody with a negative opinion to say. Something bad about it. Oh, you know, "good for nothings." Or, "all they want to do is take our money." Or, you know, "they don't know how to work for anything." "They're all just hooked on drugs." Just, even if it's not, you know, spoken. You know, just like that, you can read between the lines. And you can get from people's intonation and body language how they are feeling and the look on their face sometimes isn't so nice. So it's just things like that. It's just a bad; it's just a bad view of the Tribe.

The Uneducated Indian

High school and college graduation rates among Native Americans have been increasing, yet the stereotype of the uneducated Indian remains. It is especially disturbing that this view persists in Isabella County, given the substantial investment of the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe in schools—both for children and for adults through the Tribal College. But, rather than being welcomed by non-Natives, these efforts are demeaned and, at times, by educators themselves.

In the past, Native Americans faced outright hostility in school or on the street.

Well, even way back in school it was all like that. Like I can remember teacher thinking, I was in third grade or something, and she was very negative and she said to me "you're never going to be anything. You're, you're a girl, you're Native. All that's going to happen in your life is you're going to get pregnant, quit school, get married, and become an alcoholic." Well, I got pregnant, quit school. I went back later though. And got married, so. I wasn't going to let her win so I never became an alcoholic.

I recall was way back in the '70's when I was first coming here with our children. I asked for directions and someone says; "Oh, yeah, yeah, all them dumb Indians live over that way" and pointed down Broadway and that was how they referred, you know. And that was my greetings from the people here in Mt Pleasant.

But, the perception persists and is bound to affect the confidence and academic achievement of young people today.

I feel like the non-Native population around here feel that tribal members are uneducated and that we can't excel in classes and obtain a degree or anything. Because I've heard comments about it before—things like that so I feel that they just think that we're dumb.

And one of the school board members said right to me, "The kids from the [Native American] academy aren't as smart as the ones that go to the public school."

That's a good way to put it, yep, patronizing. Ah, coming across as a well perfect condescending. As though we don't really know what we're talking about. So "can I put these in like elementary terms for you" kind of that mentality?

In a Mount Pleasant store, the following exchange took place between the husband of tribal member and the salesperson.

Because one of my nephew's car radios went out and so they guy starts explaining something to him. He's like "oh I know about that." He goes, "well, how do you know?" And so he starts explaining what he knew about the car radio and he goes, you know, "well, I'm a graduate, I have my engineering degree so I know about these little concepts." "Oh, I thought you were one of these Indians from around here."

Here is an encounter between a worker at CMU and a Native faculty member, suggesting an unwillingness of non-Natives to acknowledge the academic success of Native Americans, even when it is literally staring them in the face.

...so I filled out the little form and I took it up to the girl behind the glass and said "I've got this thing for the parking permit." And she looked at it and looked at me and she said "So are you delivering this for Dr. X?" and I said "No, actually I am Dr. X." And she got really red and embarrassed, you know, but I don't really know what was in her mind. You know, maybe I just don't look professorial or something like that.

And some local teachers rather than embracing efforts to teach accurate information about Native American history and culture by inviting local Native experts into the schools have worked to eliminate it.

They are afraid that if somebody ... comes in and starts teaching our culture and our language that they are going to be out of a job so they just don't want it in there at all. ... They ended up not getting rid of it. They still have it. And so I was in there this last trimester teaching and in walked that same teacher. And she didn't know that I knew it was going on. She didn't know that I was aware, and she was like "oh, they'll just let any riff raff teach in here, won't they?"

Even with colleges and degrees, Native people are challenged.

They think if you're going to a Tribal College it's not because you're using your resources and using your college to promote a good name for your college through your Tribe. It's more, they think we're not intelligent enough to go to a university or go to Central when that's not the case at all

Even, this year, I was asked my credentials to work with where I work. Well, I wanted to know what credentials she had to work with our [Native American] kids.

The Alcoholic Indian

One of the most common stereotypes found in the non-Native community involves the alcohol or drug use of Natives.

They swear that everybody is on drugs or alcoholics.

I wouldn't let them know that I was Native at first because the first thing that they do is put you in a category of drunks, drug abuse, homeless, and just a drug addict.

And they spoke to me pretty freely because they thought I was white. They didn't know I was Native. ... Then I exposed myself and told them that I'm sorry that they feel that way about the Native Americans, seeing how I was one. And they are not all drug addicts. We are not all drunks. We are not all marijuana smokers and drug addicts and all that. And we don't live on skid row, and we all have families, and we live reputable lives. We work every day. We're not bums. I work 40 hours. I work just as well and just as hard as everybody else does.

Here we see the classic pattern associated with stereotypes—the unwillingness to see difference, the tendency to lump all members of a group together regardless of what a reasonable person would consider “the facts.”

I feel like they just assume that if you're Native that you have a drug or alcohol problem. That you have an addiction. That you are a not a good person. And it doesn't matter which family you come from or which Tribe you're from, they just associate you with the bad in our Tribe. They don't ever look at how much our tribe has done.

When I was an alcoholic, you know, and I was in the bar all the time, they assumed that we were all the same way. ... They don't see the people that don't. They see them as all one.

A lot of people look at them say “well, I know that person's brother, and they party all the time” so he's probably doing the same thing. They lump us together on a lot of different things.

...when I went to apply for a job—being told they didn't hire Indians because the drinking problems...

And, this stereotype has important consequences for people seeking health care in the community. If there are medical reasons for asking these types of questions, they have not been explained to the respondents. Health care providers need to ensure that these questions are asked of all patients—not just those who are “assumed” to be Natives.

Oh yeah, at the hospital here, they tried to kill me. ...They automatically assumed that I was on drugs, and I wasn't. ... Because they automatically assume that everybody here has a drug problem, and they just want the pills and that.

Going to the hospital. Going to the emerge. One of the first things out of their mouth is "how much do you drink?" I do not drink, but apparently all Native people do, I guess. That always bothers me 'cause that's happened on more than one occasion.

And non-Natives with their own substance abuse issues seem to abuse or prey on Natives.

Well, there was one time when I was tubing with my family. And there was this one, I think they were college students, and I think they might have been drunk. But, they were being really rude to my mom and called her a drunken Indian, and she wasn't even drunk. But they just called her that for no reason.

If they want drugs, you're the first person they come and talk to.

The Undeserving Indian

We see above that some non-Natives seem unwilling to acknowledge the hard work and academic success of Native Americans, preferring to fall back on their stereotypic views that Natives are lazy and uneducated. This refusal to acknowledge or embrace new social and economic realities is even more pronounced when we consider the ways in which non-Natives interpret the recent economic success of the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe.

Wouldn't a reasonable person in Isabella County be pleased that the extended family of local tribal members has invested so wisely and has become a major engine of economic growth in Isabella County? Don't we as Americans look up to people who have acquired economic success and compliment them for their economic savvy and their inherited wealth or rags-to-riches social ascent?

Yeah, does anybody yell at Paris Hilton for being a descendant from her family fortune?

When people talk per cap, I flip it around and say, "Okay, what if it was a big business such as – let's say – like the auto industry? You have the Ford family. They inherit money or it is evidenced that from the Ford Company, would you look at them differently? Would you tell them how to spend their money? Would you tell them how to invest it?" ... And when I put it that way, then people look at it a little bit differently.

By contrast, it appears that many Native Americans in Isabella County face jealousy and resentment from their non-Native neighbors. This same level of hostility is not directed toward other families in the community who have been or have recently become economically prosperous. The most prominent stereotype that we encountered is that of the undeserving Indian.

The only thing, like I notice, there is a lot of people that don't like because we made something positive on our reservation. And it's, it's sad because it benefits them too.

I've been in a bank where they've talked. I've heard people who have been ahead of me and talked about the Natives and all the money they get and how they blow it, and blah, blah, blah. This, that, and the other. It's almost like they're jealous, you know.

Anything pretty much, you know, job wise, benefits wise, our per cap, our royalties. Anything of that nature you know, there's a "why you get it and I don't? What makes you so deserving and I don't."

And it's almost like they were happier when you were down. They felt more in control.

He's like, ohhhh, you're hooked up with a Tribal Member, you've got it made. You ain't got to do nothing or pay for nothing.

And there is little understanding either of the history of Native Americans in the community or of the reasons that tribal members share in the profits from tribal economic operations, the same way that investors in a free enterprise system share in the economic success of the enterprises they own.

They call it our free money. Which, I tell them it ain't our free money. We worked hard for.

I feel like there's a lot of hate directed towards our people, and it's not because they're educated and know about us. It's because they're envious, and they think that we're just living the life and we're up here living in beautiful houses, driving beautiful cars, and we've never had to do anything about it. And I think it's funny that people compare, per cap to welfare. ... Look at the history behind why we get per cap. Do your research. Educate yourself. And that's I think I say that all the time. You should educate yourself.

And the assumption is that Natives do not work at jobs.

You know, it's insulting to me, like, I do get per cap, but I work full time. You never asked me if I worked full time. ...I didn't get a job because I needed the money; I got the job because I want to be a part of my community and people

And here is the Catch 22. Some non-Natives are critical of the tribal community for getting "free money" as opposed to money from a job, while others are critical of tribal members for working for tribal enterprises. It is this "damned if you do, damned if you don't" view which is so essential to the maintenance of irrational, stereotypic thinking. Here is the view of some non-Natives suggesting that Natives need to secure jobs.

I know there's times when I felt uncomfortable. I noticed different ones talking about us, getting us money, getting per cap. ... and, like, you could hear them in the background saying why don't they just get a job.

And here is the alternative—hostility when tribal members are employed.

[Respondent quoting a non-Native American] I don't even know why they're working. They have money. They shouldn't even be working. They shouldn't have even got hired full time. I should have got the full time. The Native's shouldn't be working full time.

A lot of people say that I have enough money. Get out of the workforce. Let someone else have a job.

And, of course, there is the altogether false assumption that all Native Americans must be receiving per cap payments, when many do not.

Maybe it's from too much media exposure to that kind of thing, but just every time I meet somebody I tell them I'm Native, the first thing they ask is: Oh, you get per cap?" I'm like "no, I don't get anything like that. No, I actually, I have a job. I have two jobs, and I go to school." And, it's just the assumption is that when people meet you that you must be, you know, living off of things that you haven't earned.

And this kind of resentment is found even within the school systems. One respondent reported that two Native children, who do not receive per capita payments, were part of this exchange with a school official.

They both were given the statement that "I don't know if it matters to you, but you're both going to make more than I do when you walk out of here."

And one mother recalls the following feelings when interacting with her children's teachers.

I would get snarls from teachers if they wore, like, fashionable stuff. It was, like, you know, say oh you know there, you're pretty spiffy today. And you know it wasn't like, you know, oh, you're spiffy today. It was like you're spiffy today. I mean it was a different tone ...the teachers were, you know, kind of resentful because they were, you know, fashionably dressed, I guess.

THE COSTS OF VISIBILITY

Social scientists use the word "token" to describe a group situation where people with specific, identifiable characteristics such as their gender or race are greatly outnumbered by others with different characteristics. The token is highly visible; he or she stands out from the crowd. This circumstance leads to interactions that are different from what one would expect if the token was removed from the group. The token tends to pay the costs for such visibility, and we see this dynamic playing out in Isabella County. Figure 4 (Appendix #6) provides a summary of the number of respondents experiencing each of these situations occasioned by their visibility in the county.

Overcharging

Visibility can bring heightened and unwanted attention to the token. Native Americans in Isabella County believe that they are systematically charged more than non-Natives for a range of goods and services, found both in commercial establishments and available through service providers.

A number of respondents indicated their belief that the criminal justice system charges them more for fines or bail. If there is a legal or jurisdictional reason for this, it certainly has not been explained to the Native American community.

They tend to be harder on Natives because of the money. The bottom line with that they do want your money, and they know the Tribal members have that so they go after that, you know, rather than say someone who maybe only makes \$15,000 a year. They are going to throw them in jail or probation or whatever, but Natives, they're going to receive a harsher fine than anybody else because they just know they got the money.

I've been in trouble before through Isabella County, the court system in town, and I've been incarcerated ..., and I've had to pay more money out because of being a tribal member than other one—a Caucasian or somebody else.

Well, like with the courts, the judges if, their first question is "are you a Tribal Member?" And that will determine whether or not your fine is higher.

And, there was a widespread view that businesses in town charge more for services.

They see you coming with your per cap check, and they know. They up their prices.

The guy went in and asked him how much this TV was, and they gave him a quote and then he had his wife go in there, and his wife is non-Native, and then they quoted her with the lesser price. So things like that just, you know, and when people know that, it's, that's not right, you know? The community shouldn't be treating people like that.

Yeah, they would say those blankety-blank people buying a car. As soon as they find out you're Native, they know you're going to be tax exempt, and they make the deal thinking you're gonna get a deal, and you're not. And, they'll go out of their way to get to a tribal member to get the top dollar. And they'll, they'll drop a non-Native, it's no bargaining, you know. I've seen them jack up a thousand dollars; the same deal they were giving to me to a non-Native, and I was charged more. And, they tried to shove more on me. Insurances, and under-coatings and stuff you really didn't need, and you really don't get.

...just even as a customer when you walk in there, if they see that you're Native, they treat you differently. Some, I've even heard 'em say "mark it up. Mark the price up."

They make you feel really welcome. Just to sell you a \$7,000 car for \$17,000 and charge you 23 after, after everything is all done.

I've noticed like getting mortgages, the banks are much, they want a higher interest rate, and they've made it more difficult for my relatives to get mortgages to buy their home or mobile homes.

Just the, the sales people in there, just you know. You'd ask them to find something cheap, you know? You know, "what do you have, you know, that's cheaper than this?" "Well, why would you want something cheaper than that? You get per cap." "Okay... so what?" You know? Why would you treat a customer like that?

There's been a joke going around about don't let them know you're Native then you'll get "the Native charge" instead of everybody else's charge.

Being Followed

A number of respondents recounted incidents where they believed that they were inappropriately and unnecessarily followed by store salespeople, who presumably thought that they were going to steal merchandise. Being helped is one thing, feeling that your every move is being seen and scrutinized is quite another.

When you go in there, and you're of color, the sales people come around you. Ah, you know, they're making sure you're not stuffing anything in your purse.

And sometimes it's nice, you know, and then other times it's, you know, are you carrying these to the register because you think I'm going to somehow sock them in a coat sleeve or something? It's like they make you feel as if they are not trying to help you. It's like we're trying to keep you from stealing something here, you know.

I think I was looking in a glass, through glass shelf where they had watches and stuff like that. And so I just, I thought they were very pretty so I was just kind of looking at them. ... And the lady come up to me, "can I help you?" "I'm just going, actually am just looking." ... Two or three of the ladies came up there, and they just, like, were watching me. I wasn't even close to the counter. I was just looking. ... For, maybe several minutes. And then pretty soon the manager come over to the counter where I was standing. He said, "ma'am is there anything I can do for you?" I said "no." I says, "I'm just a customer, just looking. Just to buy or not buy something, you know." He said, "Well, you can buy it or you can walk away." And so, you know. And I thought that's strange that he saying that like that. At that time, I had black hair [and may have been confused with a woman who had been stealing from the store]. And, as you can see today my hair is a different color and has been for quite some time. It has been since that day. Is that very understandable? ... Now, if I go in that same store, I never get treated that way anymore. You can see the elements that make them clear. There's no questions.

Even like today when I go into the stores, most of the time I'm alright, but sometimes I might get followed, or you know, I could, let's say the lady, there could be a lady, a cash register lady could be very nice and talkative to the person ahead of me you know, who's not as dark as me, then, when it's my turn, she's looking at me like she's having a bad day.

You know, when they go into a store, how they give dirty looks or else someone will follow them around in the store thinking they're going to steal something, and it's like, no, we're not gonna steal anything, and that's how I feel at times when I go into a store. Even my daughter is like, come on now, you know, I mean, you know, sometimes I may not dress to be the part, but who wants to be all dressed up and hear people say, "Oh look that person's got a lot of money. Let's take advantage of them."

Forced Into False Roles

One of the most disconcerting and distasteful consequences of tokenism for Native Americans in Isabella County is the tendency of dominant group members to force tokens into false and often negative roles. What has been called "role entrapment" may result from discomfort or lack of knowledge about how to treat people appropriately. Alternatively, it may result from the negative and stereotypic thinking of some non-Native community members as discussed above.

One of the most damaging roles, especially for children, is being viewed as "the trouble-maker."

Right, it's like if something happens and there happens to be a Native kid in the area, automatically, it's the Native kid's fault.

And then in the, it seems like in our schools that our children seem to stand out more. So, they could be doing a lot of times the same thing the other students are doing, but they're the ones that are noticed. And I'm not real sure why that is. You know, and it's not always noticed in a good way.

And they had accused her of something that she had proved she didn't do [in school], and with the help of the tribe staff, they were able to prove she didn't do it. But assuming all Native kids are bad, she had to run into that.

Well, when I was younger. When I first came here, I was hanging out with some friends, and there was drinking. We were young, and the Tribal came and I had a white friend with me, and she had drunk more than I had. And I got a MIP [minor in possession] but she didn't.

I think at the school, like, if we get in trouble I think we get, like if we get in a fight with another non-Native kid, I think we get like punished more than the other non-Native or questioned more.

So it's, it's, to me it's almost like if you're based, if you have a son, and, Native American, a son, and I don't know if this is all minorities here in Isabella County, they can't even be children. Because they're gonna be the ones that will get caught. They're gonna be the ones that are gonna get, you know, prosecuted.

The worse thing is that like four or five cars can go down the street. They [the police] pick out the Native car because of the stickers, and that's in the middle of the five cars. ... They sit right there on Broadway. I can tell you where they sit. Going from the rez to the town all the time, I'm surprised I don't get harassed.

He was yelling at me just for something that I didn't do. And he's like, "well you Native kids gotta stop this and something like that." And I'm like "well, what did we ever do to you to deserve this? And I'm like we fund you. And if you don't want this funding anymore, we can just stop right now." And, then, wouldn't you know, he just kicked me out of his office. And I'm like, what'd I do?

Well, one time me and one of my cousins were driving, and we got pulled over. And, we were leaving the big casino, and they thought we were drunk, and neither one of us were drinking. And they asked us to step out of the vehicle. They wanted to search the car in case we had anything in there which we did not. And it's just stuff like that that. It's frustrating to be judged and criticized because we're Native, and they think we're doing all these horrible things and we're not.

The men get tossed away like, it's like they have to fight for their freedom constantly.

Anytime something happens with the Tribe, like {local paper} is right on it. And they, you know, they write their stories and they make us sound like, like the worst place in the world is out here, you know. ... That they single us out. And they, like, highlight it. They highlight anything that happens out here. It makes me a mad.

A lot of people, Tribal Members, their charges get put right on the front page [of the local paper]. Yep, the names and everything. And, they're presumed innocent until proven guilty, you know. They don't seem to do that to white people.

If I go to restaurants, sometimes I feel like they look at me like oh, she's not going to tip or she's gonna cause problems. Or she's gonna want something free or, you know, and then if I go often enough, they know me and they know that's not going to happen but I just walk into places.

Also restricting and possibly illegal are efforts to highlight the differences between Native and non-Native peoples and to restrict Native people to assignments and activities "for Natives only."

Coming here to the Reservation my grandmother told me number one, number one "put your elephant skin on. You know put, wear that rhinoceros skin." ... I was discriminated against, prejudiced; I had people -- blatant racism. Even down to employment. Limited employment opportunities when I moved here because I was Native. They expect me to work for the Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe. You're Indian; you should work for the Rez. You should work for the Tribe.

My children's school. I would have to say that ...they don't seem to want to communicate directly to me. They want to use an advocate. ... As a parent, I like direct communication with my children's teachers and any educators that are working with them. ... You know, yes, I'm a Tribal Member, but you know what? I'm a citizen of America first. ...I don't need a mediator. I don't need a third party involvement unless I ask for it. And that's where I felt disrespected that oh, they don't want to deal with me as an Indian woman without their interpreter. Their guard.

I do my job and I do it very well. I'm ambitious and they [the non-Natives] don't think I can handle it, so they try to get in my face and they try to make up things about me, about my attitude when I'm just doing my job.

Even efforts to be complimentary can make children or their parents feel singled out in ways that stress difference—rather than a community with others.

I just wanted to point out that again at the school my daughter comes home, this is about a year ago, she's really excited, and she says that her ...teacher had pointed out that she is the longest... longest running Native American ... member [in the school group]. ...And you know, she was proud. ... I'm proud that she's stuck to it, but the first thing that came in my mind was "did he say the same thing about the Asians? Did he say the same thing about the African Americans? Did he point out about the Latinos?" and she says "no." it was just her.

Yeah, once in high school when a teacher asked me to be, I should pay attention to something that happened in class because of it had to deal with Native American culture, and she was trying to tell me that I should be basically be paying attention because I was a Native American.

And the annoying and false assumption is that every tribal member knows every other tribal member and can be "the fixer" for any conflict between a non-Native and a tribal member.

Then and now, because I would go in a place, like, for instance, like, I'm in the store, and they start talking to me about and they bring up an individual from the reservation's name and tell me how their checks bounced and, you know, just tell me these stories. And, I would feel so uncomfortable and well really, I said, "well, you'd have to go through Tribal Court to try to see restitution and, you know, me, alone, I'm trying to buy groceries."

Interviewer: ...If you're brown you're...

Respondent: Yeah, like I must know,

Interviewer: must know everybody.

And, Native people find highly insulting the view that some particular tribal member is different from the rest. Witness this exchange between a respondent and a local service provider.

I was talking to a realtor about trying to get a, a home and she had said, "Well, you're not like the rest of them..." and that really pissed me off, you know? And I just, that killed the deal, I wouldn't work with her after that 'cause it just, how do you know?"

Invisibility And Poor Service

Ironically, the situation of being a token, of being different, can lead to a kind of invisibility, too. The other group members become uncertain about how to behave (or they may have hostile

views), so they simply ignore the person who is different. This invisibility can result in poor service as well as to the feeling that one is being viewed as “less than” a fully worthy customer or community member. What is notable about the comments below is both how common they are and how this sense of receiving low quality and “different” service is found across institutions—in restaurants, hospitals, the criminal justice system, and real estate. Some of the behavior as described is simply illegal, as well as being demeaning and inappropriate.

At a restaurant. They just assumed that because we were all brown or whatever that ... I don't know. Just mean. I don't know how to explain it, but they were mean. They waited on us last, and they were just really rude about things which could have been done differently.

I've noticed people that order after me get their food before, way before me.

Like, if we get there first and there's two parties behind us, they get their table first and they might get their food first. It's kinda like we get so used to it we get, we joke about it now.

I've taken my elder there for her [medical test], and, yes, they do put us at the bottom of the list. Even if there's nobody there, they will make tribal members wait a very long time.

And it's just like I was not even there. That's what I'm talking about. That's why I had to give her a little piece of, you know, not to be rude about it but why did I have to wait? Why did this other person just went right in front of me? I'm sittin' there like a bump on a log.

Because she was upstairs in one of the rooms, and they kept saying that she was delusional, but to me they just wanted to get her out of the hospital so that they did not have to deal with her anymore.

I said, “sir, I have been treated like a dog. I've been like a dog” [because she did not receive service after a multi-hour wait]. Then he said, “what do you mean?” And I told him. He said, “you really mean that?” I said, “look at me! Why would I be here like this? ...What would you do if that was your ... grandmother? Or mother? That they did to, to them what they did to me just a few hours ago?” You know, that set his heart and his mind into some action. ... That was 2012 and this is only 2013.

They weren't willing to look into. They wanted to just brush it off. And it's not, and I know that I'm not the only one that's had that happen to. As far as things that are wrong, they just wanna say that you have an allergy when you actually have a [more serious medical condition that needs treatment].

I just wonder if sometimes if I was a different race if I would have been kept in there [the hospital] for those couple of days and not got shooed out of there so quickly.

And everybody [on jury duty] was visiting, and they probably all know each other. But I just sat by the wall and nobody spoke to me the whole time I was there. And that, I thought that was odd.

I'm trying to look for a house and one of the landlords asked me if I was a tribal member. And, then, he never called me back after that.

They'll speak to me, you know, on a peer level and explain things more [when the school system personnel recognized that the parent was highly educated], whereas before that, it's just like, "eh, you know, blow her off." So it worries me like, you know, are they not connecting with a lot of our parents in our community?

The Refusal To Acknowledge Cultural Difference

And when a group is both a numerical minority in a community and lacking in resources, the group's entire culture may be ignored or dismissed as something not worthy of study. History is taught from the perspective of the dominant group and the group's cultural practices are not understood (and may be violated).

I was, like, people just want Indians to be in the past. They don't want, they don't want us in contemporary times. They don't want to have to deal with it, you know...

I had two Native boys that grew up here. ... Well every year, they put on a play ... about what a great thing it was to chop down all these trees that used to be here. And how that founded the area and made the area grow and made it big and strong and how good of a thing that was. And I was standing there listening to this through one of the plays that my kids had to be in, and being Native, they were Native.

I see it ...in the school system...there's things our people aren't used to. Like people playing with their hair and actually touching them. You know, and I've seen, you know, a special education teacher grab a child across the table by the hands as if to "look at me, look at me" and shook his hands. And to me that's very inappropriate. ...So, I guess it's just not knowing our culture. And not willing to know it.

I was in my ...class and we were to use our ...skills to do a phrase in whatever, you know, language we wanted, and I chose Ojibwe, and the teacher looked at the thing that I handed in as if it were like something that had just been dropped off of Mars, you know, he had never seen these words. And he curled his face up really, you know, terribly like it was very offensive to him.

I was in a ...class and for some reason someone decided that they wanted to make humor out of the rain dance, which I was very offended by because I, I look at the rain dance as a very sacred prayer. And so I did my speech on the rain dance, and explained how it said in the Bible that you should pray in words and in dance and in song.

They all [jail inmates] on Sunday's, they all get to go to church and everything. But we can't even have a helping healer come in and or something on Sundays for us Natives.

Even though my daughter didn't look at him directly, he considered her totally disrespectful. Part of that is boarding school trauma where we don't look at people in the face. He was totally ignorant to that and just flat out upset my daughter. And he basically said, "She won't look at me. She's just totally disrespectful." She was sitting there crying. She didn't look at him. She looked up, looked past him, but because she didn't look him directly in the face, he felt that she was being disrespectful. And so I had to educate him a little bit on that.

There are some teachers that actually like our room [for Native American students at the school]. Half the teachers I'm going to say are totally against our program and what we do for the students. They think that it's a free pass, that the students come down there and play around, and that we're not helping them at all. So, they just flat out refuse to let them come down to our classroom.

REACTIONS

How do Native Americans in Isabella County react when faced with these multiple insults and hostile encounters? All of us have been in circumstances where we feel that we have been ill-treated. The difference, here, is the cumulative effect of negative encounters, occurring over an extended period of time. Figure 5 (Appendix #7) demonstrates the multiple ways that tribal members react to and cope with the hostile situation they face in the county.

Hurt And Anger

For many tribal members, the response cannot help but be an emotional one. Here are comments from respondents when asked how they react to negative experiences with non-Natives.

I just felt really uncomfortable.

You know, it's insulting to me.

I was offended.

Usually, I'm just appalled.

I was a little upset. ... Yeah. I had steam coming out of my ears.

I felt hurt.

I was just mad.

It upsets me.

It's frustrating.

She said that my face turned red, and she could have sworn that there was smoke coming out of my ears.

I get angry but I want to avoid confrontation.

Just kinda made me feel like I was "yuck."

And I started crying

That child has gone home in tears.

Some Native Americans poignantly demonstrate the emotional cost that comes with being surrounded by the hostility described above. Their comments are witness to the burden faced by Native people in Isabella County and the ways in which their daily lives are "interrupted" by derogatory comments and mistaken beliefs.

[When reacting to a rude salesperson suggesting that an elder might have been stealing]: The pain was just—cut me like no pain ever in the whole world—cut me like a knife inside. I didn't want to cry in front of my granddaughter. You, know, I didn't. I didn't 'cause I didn't know how to explain it to her. I just said: "I am sorry. Grandma's hurt right now." And, then, she said: "Did that lady hurt you when she said 'what are you doing?'"

It makes me feel bad but it, you know, and, yes, there are times that I'd like to, you know, say something, but I'm the bigger person. I wanna be the bigger person that... You don't know me. You don't know the life that I've, that I've lived, the path that I've chosen. And yes, I would like to say something to 'em, but that's just going down the wrong road. That's to me is what they want. They want me to say something. They want me to, to blow up. They want me to say something rude to them to prove to them that "alright, see what you're doing is what we think that you are, the way that you are." And I'm not going to do that. I refuse to do it. I'm a better person than that.

I was getting color done {at a local hair salon}, so, you know, I was sitting there while my colorist was doing some, another person's haircut, and I overheard some other people doing nails, and the one lady was talking about some girl she knows who has a lot of tattoos and she said, "well, on her thigh is this Indian head," and, she went on to bring the conversation back to, I don't know, you know, what goes on with this girl, ... it bothered me that I can't sit and mindlessly read a People magazine without having to think about who I am, how I should react in that situation, what would, how do I wanna

react, how will I react, I mean I just, I want to blend in sometimes without having to be on guard.

So it's a blow to the whole community, and people I don't think understand that. That we're, just 'cause we have our regular family that we're just one, we're a Tribe we feel for a whole and that's what we, we are.

Ignore And Walk Away

Many tribal members report that they simply walk away and do not engage. It is simply not worth their while to engage with people who themselves are so hostile and ignorant. Why should they spend their time trying to educate people like that? While this is often a sensible coping mechanism, there is nonetheless a cost to the individual for the frustration and hurt simply does not evaporate. Some tribal members find it useful to turn to friends for support.

I, mostly I ignore them because, you know, I just assume that they're ignorant and they don't know what the hell they're talking about.

I'm really nice about things because that's how I am. I treat people with kindness, but I just blow it off when they're that way.

I just, I just kinda smile and walk away. They have no idea. They don't, they don't live my life. They don't live other tribal members' lives. Um, it's hypocrites, you know?

Try to ignore it. Just cover, cover it up; try to ignore it. If it's really bad, I have people to talk to. But mainly you just kind of like stuff it down like you've done all your life.

I get upset, but I don't, I don't blurt out at the person. I just walk away. But then I go and talk to somebody, a friend, about these experiences. That's what I do.

Part of the turning the other cheek is an effort to ensure that confrontations do not escalate into “trouble,” especially given the episodes described above where the Native American is singled out as the “troublemaker.”

I turn the other cheek and walk away. Not that you call it cowardice. I call it smart because I'm not going to jail.

With the racism at school, it bothered me. I learned I could either let the words roll off of me and pay no attention or let it build up and react. If I let it build up and react, all I'm going to do is get myself in trouble. So, I acted like it was really not there and ignore it. Turn the other cheek. Do what Grandma taught me.

Some tribal members focus more on their traditional teachings and efforts to instill pride in their children or to educate others.

They haven't learned or they were taught a lie about what we are and who we are and then for me it's just in one ear and out the other because I don't want to, you know, carry that around or let that ruin my day or anything either. So, a lot of stuff that happens, I just brush it off, you know, shrug it off. Because my goal or my direction is to teach our kids, you know, who they are and what they are about and their history and their family so that when they hear things like that about people—about Tribal Nations or their Tribe, specifically—they can, they'll know, that's not true.

And so I try to really control myself and my emotions and in my, you know, feelings of being disrespected or, you know, whatever. Of being you know, my person is being attacked or whatever, you know try to control my negative emotions and flip it to the positive that as a traditional woman I was taught these things in order to help educate.

Sometimes I'll bite my tongue and it's getting really hard because, you know, I don't have that many teeth left. But, usually what I'll do is I end up I don't, I don't comment right away 'cause I, I think you have to think about it and do it in a good way so that they can learn from it.

If somebody comes to me and discusses something, sure I'll talk to them. I'll explain or give them a point of view. But I'm not going to argue with somebody. I'm not gonna, I'm not gonna, you know, let them, let their hatred affect me.

I was recently approached at an Idle No More rally. We did that walk, and somebody come running up to me and wanted to know what was going on, and he was really decent about it, and I took the time to explain to him, and he was very polite and thankful and it was a student. He just come running up and asked why we were doing that, and I took all the time to [explain].

Withdraw From Non-Natives In Isabella County

If you are having problems with someone and can stop doing so, why wouldn't you? And, of course, one reasonable reaction of Native people, when faced with hostility in stores and restaurants or when upset with services, is simply to stop frequenting those businesses and service providers. While it is not possible to calculate the amount of Isabella County business lost in dollar and cents terms, it is clear from the respondents that they make choices about where to spend their money, live, and send their children to school. It is reasonable to withdraw from those situations that lead to discomfort and frustration.

We go to neighboring cities when we're looking for a vehicle or big ticket prices like that.

And don't, you know, go their stores anymore or anything. If I'm treated badly, I just don't shop there.

I just walked away. ... I've never been back, and I won't go back to, to any [specific restaurant].

So, I don't shop at [specific store].

I would rather go out of town to shop for, like, appliances and big stuff versus staying in town because it seems like prices always go up when I step out of the car. Like I can go to the same dealership and in a different city and get a better price on a car versus the cars that are here or the appliances that are here whatnot. So I tend to shop elsewhere.

I might boycott someplace, you know, never go back there again if I felt like I was being discriminated against or whatever. And I would tell others. I'd spread the word that, you know, "hey, don't get an apartment there. They're racists." Or, you know, whatever.

But regardless so I, I left, I didn't get my purchase.

You know, I come here often, and I won't. And of one hundred people that I know, they won't either. That's how you feel about us Native people that we, we have bad credit and that we don't take care of our business and stuff well.

So and I felt really like, hmm, maybe I should go to Alma for my business and maybe I should go to Cadillac or Lansing, you know?

I was kind of disappointed about the situation that went on, and I just kind of walked out and never came back in there.

I went to a [health provider] here in town ... one of her customers was complaining about the Tribe. But the [health provider] got into it and she just, I thought that was very unprofessional, ... you shouldn't have to worry about going into a doctor's office and having to defend myself. And I started crying and, I ended up leaving, and I never went back.

And, some Native Americans decide to move out of the area or to remove their children from local school situations that they find inappropriate.

I've got relatives that lived here all their lives, you know. They stayed here, but a lot of them they moved out of, you know, not moved out of state, but moved out of the city. You know, because of that.

Interviewer: Do you have children who went to school in Isabella County?

Respondent: Grandchildren, not my children. I wouldn't allow my kids to go here.

I asked my parents to take me out of school ... I ended up leaving Mt Pleasant High School and went to [school in another county] for a while.

Some respondents choose not to participate in community events that involve non-Natives. The surrounding community thereby loses their contributions and the unique voices and experiences that Native Americans can bring to deliberations.

I don't attend a lot of the in-town things and it's just for the fact that I don't like the way people look at me.

I don't like going to the stuff. Or, I don't I find myself, I don't like going to events because I always find myself getting into these kinds of situations. I'm not, I don't you know, exactly know how to handle it.

The Need To Hide And Its Costs

Respondents talked about the occasions when they consciously hide their identity as Native Americans to try to avoid the negative experiences that they have encountered in the past in Isabella County. While this may be a coping strategy, there is psychological cost to hiding one's true self. And, it is also simply a nuisance to have to create a "new identity" to get through the day without hostility.

If I take my car to a shop and it's got stuff hanging from the window, from the mirror, that shows that I'm Native, I'll take it down so they won't overcharge me. I used to put stickers on my car, and I don't anymore because I don't want people to say, "oh, there's a Native and look at that. Look at their car." Just because they are Native. I don't, I don't, I don't show that I'm Native.

I try to make sure that I don't draw attention to myself for being Native American when I'm going shopping, especially if I'm trying to bid and get prices on it. Just because over the past, you know, 10 years, I mean literally we have tested this and sent family members in there that are say, spouses and that aren't Native, or that don't look Native, and they'll get a better quote than we do. And so, I strategically make sure that, you know, I don't draw attention to that I'm from the tribe when I'm trying to price quote things.

We will only go to places where we can order something, and they can't see who we are. So that's the reason why I like the drive-thrus, and I'll never go inside of a place.

I see more racial profiling from the police now because we have money. ... So, I don't put no Native nothing on my car. I just want to blend in and get right back.

The most devastating, of course, is when the difficulty of being Native American in this community is so difficult that it leads one to wish that identity away.

You know, there was a time, you know, way back that I had really thought it was so hard being Native. I thought I'm tired of being a Native. I don't want to be a Native anymore. But, then I thought, but I don't want to be anything else.

Speak Up And Confront

By contrast, some Native people respond to negative comments and experiences by speaking up.

I said something to 'em.

I stand up for everyone

I say my piece, you know.

Sometimes I'll tell somebody exactly how I feel. Not one that's gonna hold back if I've got something to say, I'm gonna say it. Or else it's gonna eat me away. You know, especially if it was directed towards my child...

And after 20, 30 minutes of listening to this [at the casino], I finally would have enough, and I would ask 'em what ethnic group were they from, you know, and they would tell me and I'd go "Well, have I made any comments towards your ethnicity?" and they'd go "Well, no, you've been quite polite." And I said "Well, then can you do me a really big favor?" and they'd go "What is it?" and I said "Could you please stop making comments about Natives to me while you're playing?" I said "Did anybody put a gun to your head to make you walk in this building?" They go: "No." I say "Did anybody force you to sit down and open up your wallet and sit down here and play?" They go: "No." And I said "Then, well, why are you saying that we're stealing, or, or taking your money, you know, unrightfully? You chose to sit there; you chose to walk through the door to begin with and you know that you're in a Native casino. Why make comments about where you're at to somebody who is that?"

One time I was with my dad—a funny story—and I don't know what restaurant we were at but the waiter said: "We got red-skinned potatoes, and we got scalped potatoes." And my dad, being my dad, he's always joking said: "What is that? Some kind of racist remark?" The guy's like, "no, no, no." And, then, the manager ended up coming down, and everyone ate for free that day.

My sons have long hair. Or my son does. My younger son. And they call him a girl. He just tells them, "hey, I'm a boy. My name is (name)," and I'm a boy and, you know, he tells. You know he just throws it out there like that. Because I'll tell them no, he's not a girl, he's a boy. He's a Native American, he's got long hair. Oh, I'm sorry, you know, so they're learning that, and um, but I also don't teach them to hate or to discriminate either. Because there is reverse racism, I don't want them to do that.

The kids at the school they would always try picking fights with me, all the white kids and so I got in a lot of fights and after a while they just knew. They said well, if we say anything to him we're gonna have to fight him, and so they started leaving me alone, and

that's when everybody started keeping their distance from me because they knew I wasn't afraid of them.

It seems that respondents are more likely to speak up when they themselves become older and more secure. In addition, the increasing success of tribal enterprises may lead tribal members to feel more secure and confident, generally, leading them to be more likely to speak their mind.

I said what I had to say and I left it at that, but I've only been doing that as I've gotten older. You know had that happened when I was younger, I probably would have felt embarrassed. I probably would have felt insecure. And, I probably would have not said anything and just internalized it and figured that was a reflection of me and been embarrassed of me. And embarrassed of my people.

... I used to blow up, lose my temper, but I'm learning today to learn how to talk to people and ignore certain things. ... So I guess try to kill 'em with kindness.

Before I would run away, literally like okay, done with you, don't want to deal. Now I'm more apt to stand there and asked them respectfully, "Why are you doing this and why are you thinking this?" I don't allow it to control my life like I used to. I guess, I guess I could say I emotionally grew up from allowing that to determine where my path should be going. I don't have to, I don't have to allow the ignorance of someone else to be able to determine where I am going.

I, respond back a little more verbally aggressively than I used to.

And I think they improved somewhat... Well, I think we've got more, we just don't sit back and take criticism.

We have seen that looks, as well as words, can be derogatory. One response from Native people back to negative encounters is a different kind of "looks."

And, I give them the look, and I just stare at them to the point where they look the other way because I'm not going to let them embarrass me.

And, they give you the look like this, and you know what I do? I go give them the look right back and look right up and down them. Who do you think you are looking at me, and I keep doing that. Well, then, they quit looking, and they look the other way.

Some Native Americans choose to deal with negative situations by filing formal complaints. They go through official channels, whether they be in stores or in governmental agencies.

I'll usually make a complaint. File a complaint with somebody's boss, or something.

I had to send a threatening letter.

And we went to management because we thought that we were being basically shunned because we were Native.

So, I've been through the ropes, and now I sit back and let them do something terribly, terribly wrong and then I have to file charges against them.

I had to go to the [local government office] to get my rights resolved. ... I used my mouth to get my rights but not in a mean way. Not in a mean way. Not in a threatening way. I had to use my mouth, but I did what I had to do. I did it with official power. With the officials. And with my mouth. I had no choice.

Well, I just continue to be a lady and smile and say "well, oh maybe I can speak with the manager. He might answer my question or whatever." Or I'll speak with the administrator. Or such and such and such, you know. I will go do that.

Educate

And some Native Americans in Isabella County choose to turn these negative encounters into teachable moments. While this is commendable and helps improve the entire community, acting as "teacher" can become a draining experience in its own right.

I try to give them a little bit of education and a little bit of history, and, if they continue, then I say my piece and I leave it at that, but I always try to educate them first and let them know that.

I try to make it educational too and I don't just go off on somebody like "you racist." You know I say, why. And I let them know you think I'm mean just wait until somebody who really, you really offend doesn't do it in such a nice way.

When faced with a negative experience I would just try to educate that individual. Saying that, letting that individual or individuals know that, that's not how the Tribe is; that's not how its members are; that's not how things operate. ... it's just an educational process.

And sure, they say stuff: "Well, how come you're learning to, to speak Indian?" and stuff like that. Well, that's a question, answer it. ... Explain why our culture is lost or how we lost our language and ... how we answer those things and how we address those things actually speaks a lot on us.

What I try to do is educate. Educate them on what they are doing. Because if I can, if I can teach one person in one family and they can change around one more person and change that person who goes on and on, maybe, you know, couple thousand years, we'll be okay.

I try to have teachable moments if I'm in an arena that I can. ... I says, well, you learned something, and I learned something today. So I try to keep it light and use it as a teachable moment. We all have room for growth.

Now it's really the ignorance—I'm not talking about it as a bad thing. It's both. People ask me questions that are bordered on racist, but that's how they were brought up. And you can't hate them for not knowing. For never being told. ... So, I try. I think I try to enlighten them rather than argue with them.

SUMMARY

In Isabella County, relations between Native Americans (in particular, members of the Saginaw Chippewa Tribe of Michigan) and the non-Native American community have been characterized by distrust and hostility for over 200 years. Discrimination toward Native Americans is no longer as overt as it once was, but subtle acts of discrimination called micro-aggressions continue to occur. This study was an attempt to determine the extent and nature of those acts as currently experienced by Native Americans in Isabella County.

A qualitative research model was used in order to provide a more intensive understanding of these experiences. Over 100 members of the Native American community were interviewed, either individually or in focus groups over a four month period. The data collected was then coded and analyzed.

The study revealed a majority of those interviewed had a negative or mixed view of the community terms of racial relations between Native Americans and non-Natives. However, most of the respondents described positive change over the last twenty years both within the tribal Community and with non-tribal residents.

Many of the results defining the nature of the micro-aggressions were consistent with the experiences of other minorities. Incidents of being followed in stores, called names, described as lazy, uneducated and privileged were extensively reported.

However, some micro-aggressions emerged that were uniquely experienced by the Native American community. Assumptions about lifestyle (living in teepees, speaking in broken English, and being dirty) continue to be reflected in comments directed at tribal members.

The data suggests that some of these acts and stereotypes have lessened since the dramatic improvement in tribal member resources resulting from the gaming industry, and as the tribe has gained greater presence in the non-Native community. This change in status has been accompanied by changes in some of the micro-aggressions tribal members now face. Some face resentment and hostility based on the perception that they are “undeservingly privileged,” receiving income from per capita distributions, defined as “getting money and not having to work for it.” Ironically, where tribal members are seen in the workplace, they are viewed as “not needing to work and taking jobs away from non-tribal residents.”

There are also numerous instances reported of being recognized as tribal and charged higher prices or receiving higher fines in the court system. Some of these instances may be a result of individual perceptions based on long standing distrust. However, in far too many instances they are supported by comparison to treatment of non-Natives, and tribal members who do not ‘look’ Native American.

The study explored the response made by members of the Native American community to these micro-aggressions. A number of respondents reported an array of emotions including anger, disgust, and a sense of being dismissed and marginalized. Visible response included simply walking away from these situations, but there appears to be a new willingness to confront the situation either with direct comments to the perpetrators or to superiors. There were also a number of respondents who indicated that they use these moments as “teaching opportunity” to try to help non-Natives appreciate the negative impact of such behavior.

This study suggests that while life for Native Americans in Isabella County has improved within the tribal community and in some relationships with the non-Native community, the numerous instances of micro-aggressions against Native Americans remain a significant barrier to forward progress in creating an atmosphere of tolerance and acceptance in Isabella County.

The goal of projects such as this one is to work together to create a community where—in the future—it will be impossible for tribal members or any community members to share a view such as the quote found below—because the American Dream and the hopes and aspirations of all peoples are realized.

It's when I come to realize, the realization that the American Dream doesn't happen to people of my skin color. And it's not because I, it's not from not trying; it's society's norms and values that they press upon you and stuff like that.

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The Isabella County Human Rights Committee,
*Shirley Decker, Maureen Eke, Raquel Fruh, Laura Gonzales, Nick Hanes, Josh Hudson,
Elizabeth Husbands, David Ling (liaison to the Board of Commissioners), Robert Newby,
Sue Poindexter, Amy Shawboose and Anne Swift*

APPENDICES

Appendix #1

Saginaw-Chippewa Tribal Members Discuss Micro-aggressions in Isabella County One-on-one Interview—Final

I. Introduction

Arrive early. Create a welcoming environment.

I am _____, associated with the Human Rights Committee of Isabella County. My role is to ask you questions about the experiences that you have had in Isabella County with non-native people. We hope that this discussion will help the non-Native community in Isabella County better understand the experiences that tribal members find insulting or demeaning so that the community can be a more positive and welcoming place for everyone.

I want to make sure that you have not previously taken part in a focus group discussion or one-on-one interview sponsored by the HRC. Is that correct?

YES

NO

II. Ground Rules

Remember the seven Grandfather's Teachings

- Wisdom
- Love
- Respect
- Bravery
- Honesty
- Humility
- Truth

Our conversation is confidential. Nothing that you say today will ever be associated with any information that could identify you.

As was explained to you, I am going to tape record the conversation.

Are you okay with that?

YES

NO

Do we have permission from you to use your quotes? Of course, your confidentiality will be maintained.

YES

NO

Reassure participants that there are no right or wrong answers

Individuals do not have to answer every question

People are asked to talk about their own experience (not the experiences of others or “things they have heard” from others)

Be mindful of age (don’t discriminate)

Be attentive to personalities

Make eye contact, as appropriate, recognizing that no eye contact is okay

No cell phones “on” during interview or focus group; put phones on silence. Disclose at the beginning if cell phone needs to be checked (e.g., childcare issues).

Additional people can sit in on interview, if the respondent so desires – provided that they are not disruptive or intimidating.

Do you have any questions? Are we ready to begin?

III. Specific Questions and Probes

1. If one of your family members were to move to the area, how would you describe your experiences with non-native people in Isabella County?

[If necessary: Just remember we are not talking about experiences that tribal members have with one another. The focus is on experiences that we have with non-native people in this area.]

2. Think over the last year or so. Have there been situations in Isabella County where you felt that you were **treated differently** than non-Native people as a customer – in a store or a restaurant or a business that provides services?

YES

NO

IF YES: Could you please describe what happened.

[If not obvious] What led you to believe that the treatment you received was based on your being a tribal member?

[If necessary] What about in the past – more than a year ago? Can you talk about experiences that might have taken place many years ago?

How often would you say that these negative experiences take place?
Would you say often, sometimes, or rarely?

OFTEN

SOMETIMES

RARELY

3. Now, let's talk about receiving services from institutions such as health care, the schools, or the criminal justice system. Have there been situations in Isabella County where you felt that you were **treated differently** than non-Native people when you interacted with these institutions?

YES

NO

IF YES: Please tell me about your experiences.

[If not obvious] What led you to believe that the treatment you received was based on your being a tribal member?

[If necessary] What about in the past – more than a year ago? Can you talk about experiences that might have taken place many years ago?

How often would you say that these negative experiences take place?
Would you say often, sometimes, or rarely?

OFTEN

SOMETIMES

RARELY

4. Have you ever been in a situation where you felt that a non-Native person in Isabella County **used words, expressions, or gestures** that **insulted** you or made you **feel uncomfortable** because you are a member of the tribal community?

YES

NO

IF YES: Please discuss what happened.

[If not obvious] What led you to believe that the words, expressions, or gestures were based on your being a tribal member?

[If necessary] What about in the past – more than a year ago? Can you talk about experiences that might have taken place many years ago?

How often would you say that these negative situations take place?
Would you say often, sometimes, or rarely?

OFTEN

SOMETIMES

RARELY

5. Have non-native people in Isabella County ever made **assumptions** about your interests or your physical or intellectual capabilities that were **wrong or insulting** to you as a member of the tribal community?

YES

NO

IF YES: Please tell me what happened?

[If not obvious] What led you to believe that the assumptions were based on your being a tribal member?

[If necessary] What about in the past – more than a year ago? Can you talk about experiences that might have taken place many years ago?

How often would you say that these negative experiences take place?
Would you say often, sometimes, or rarely?

OFTEN

SOMETIMES

RARELY

6. **TO BE ASKED TO OLDER PEOPLE:** Do you see **any differences** in the ways that members of the tribal community are treated today compared to say 20 years ago?

YES

NO

NOT SURE

IF YES: Have things improved?

YES

NO

IF YES: How would you say things have improved?

Have things gotten worse?

YES

NO

NOT SURE

IF YES: Have things gotten worse?

7. Generally speaking, **how do you respond** when you are faced with these negative experiences? What do you do?

8. Do you have any suggestions to pass on to the Human Rights Committee about ways of reducing the negative experiences that tribal members face in the community? What kinds of things do you think can be done?

Do you have any examples of positive things that have taken place in the community in recent years?

9. Now I have just a few questions about your background. This information is used for summary purposes only.

Would you mind telling me how old you are? _____ YEARS

What areas in Isabella County have you lived in? (circle as many as apply)

ON THE RESERVATION
IN TOWN OF MOUNT PLEASANT
IN RURAL AREAS
OTHER: _____

Altogether, how long have you lived in Isabella County? _____ YEARS

[IF NECESSARY: Where did you live when you were growing up?]

How many generations of your family have lived in the county? _____

Do you have children who went to school in Isabella County?

YES

NO

Interviewer—Note Gender

MALE

FEMALE

10. Is there anything that we have missed that make you feel singled out or disrespected that we have not already talked about? Anything else you would like to add about your experiences as a tribal member interacting with non-Native people in Isabella County?

List of resources to assist with any discomfort/unhappiness will be provided.

Note: Gifting and Smudging Ceremony will take place as appropriate.

Appendix #2

Saginaw-Chippewa Tribal Members Discuss Micro-aggressions in Isabella County Focus Group Guide – Final

Welcoming Responsibilities

Arrive early so that you can set up the room and can welcome participants.

Confirm that participants have not already taken part in a focus group discussion sponsored by the HRC and that none has already completed a one-on-one interview about their experiences with non-Native people in Isabella County.

Ask participants to sign that they understand the confidentiality of the discussion.

Be mindful of age (don't discriminate)

Be attentive to personalities

Make eye contact, as appropriate, recognizing that no eye contact is okay

Seat dominant individuals next to you (focus group)

Smudging ceremony

I. Introduction

I am _____, associated with the Human Rights Committee of Isabella County. With me is _____ . We are very pleased that you are here today.

My role is to pose some general questions to start the discussion. The focus of our discussion will be on the ways in which non-native people in Isabella County offend or insult tribal members – whether they intend to do so or not. We hope that this discussion will help the non-Native community in Isabella County better understand the experiences of tribal members so that the community can be a more positive and welcoming place for everyone.

II. Ground Rules for Focus Groups

Remember the seven Grandfather's Teachings

- Wisdom
- Love
- Respect
- Bravery
- Honesty
- Humility
- Truth

Additional discussion of the Talking Circle, including factors such as the following:

Our conversation today is **confidential**. I pledge that nothing that you say today will ever be associated with any information that could identify you. I would like you all to make that pledge to one another as well. What is said here stays here. **Can we all agree on that?**

It is helpful if one person talks at a time, so that we all can hear what each of us has to say. Don't cut people off when they are speaking

And, as was explained to you, we are going to **tape record** the conversation. **Is everyone OK with that?** _____ will take notes, just in case the tape recorder quits, but no notes that could identify you.

Do we have **permission to use quotes** from you so long as your confidentiality is maintained?

All comments are welcome. I may ask for your opinion, but feel free to "pass."

There are no right or wrong answers.

People are asked to **talk about their own experiences** (not the experiences of others or "things they have heard" from others)

No cell phones "on" during interview or focus group; put phones on silence. Disclose at the beginning if cell phone needs to be checked (e.g., childcare issues).

III. Beginning

Does anyone have any questions? Are we ready to begin?

Let's start by going around the circle asking you how long you have lived in Isabella County. And, just put a name on the table tent in front of you – no last name – so that we can address one another. For example, I'm ___ [first name], and I've lived here in Isabella County for _____ years.

IV. Specific Questions and Probes

1. If your cousin were to move to the area, how would you describe your experiences with non-native people in Isabella County?

[If necessary: Just remember we are not talking about experiences that tribal members have with one another. The focus is on experiences that we have with non-native people in this area.]

2. Think about the last year or so. Have there been situations in Isabella County where you felt that you were **treated differently** than non-Native people as a customer – perhaps in a store or a restaurant or a business that provides services? Could you please describe what happened?

[If not obvious] What led you to believe that the treatment you received was based on your being a tribal member?

[If necessary] What about in the past – more than a year ago? Can you talk about experiences that might have taken place many years ago?

3. Now, let's talk about receiving services from institutions such as health care, the schools, or the criminal justice system. Have there been situations in Isabella County where you felt that you were **treated differently** than non-Native people when you interacted with these institutions? Tell us about your experiences.

[If not obvious] What led you to believe that the treatment you received was based on your being a tribal member?

[If necessary] What about in the past – more than a year ago? Can you talk about experiences that might have taken place many years ago?

4. Have you ever been in a situation where you felt that a non-Native person in Isabella County **used words, expressions, or gestures** that **insulted** you or made you **feel uncomfortable** because you are a member of the tribal community? Please discuss what happened.

[If not obvious] What led you to believe that the words, expressions, or gestures were based on your being a tribal member?

[If necessary] What about in the past – more than a year ago? Can you talk about experiences that might have taken place many years ago?

5. Have non-native people in Isabella County ever made **assumptions** about your interests or your physical or intellectual capabilities that were **wrong or insulting** to you as a member of the tribal community? Please describe.

[If not obvious] What led you to believe that the assumptions were based on your being a tribal member?

[If necessary] What about in the past – more than a year ago? Can you talk about experiences that might have taken place many years ago?

6. **How often** would you say that these negative experiences take place? Do these things take place a lot or just once in a while?

7. **TO BE ASKED TO OLDER PEOPLE:** Do you see **any differences** in the ways that members of the tribal community are treated today compared to say 20 years ago?

Have things improved? How?

Have things gotten worse? Why do you think that is?

8. Generally speaking, **how do you respond** when you are faced with these negative experiences?

9. Do you have any suggestions to pass on to the Human Rights Committee about ways of reducing the negative experiences that tribal members face in the community? What kinds of things do you think can be done?

Do you have any examples of positive things that have taken place in the community?

VI: Wrap Up and Conclusions

Is there anything that we have missed that make you feel singled out or disrespected that we have not already talked about? Anything else you would like to add about your experiences as a tribal member interacting with non-Native people in Isabella County?

Note: List of resources to assist with any discomfort/unhappiness will be provided.

Provide gifts and smudging ceremony, as appropriate.

Appendix #3

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents Participating in One-on-One Interviews

Gender of Respondents

	Frequency	Percent
Female	53	70.7
Male	22	29.3
Total	75	100.0

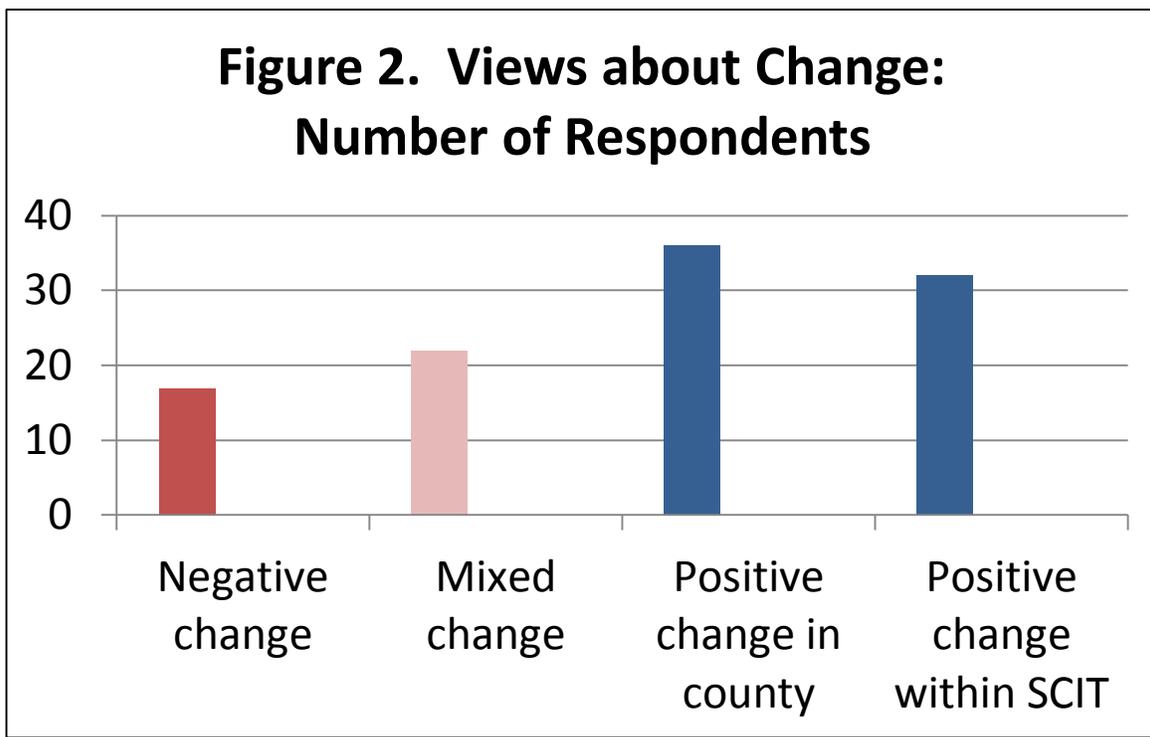
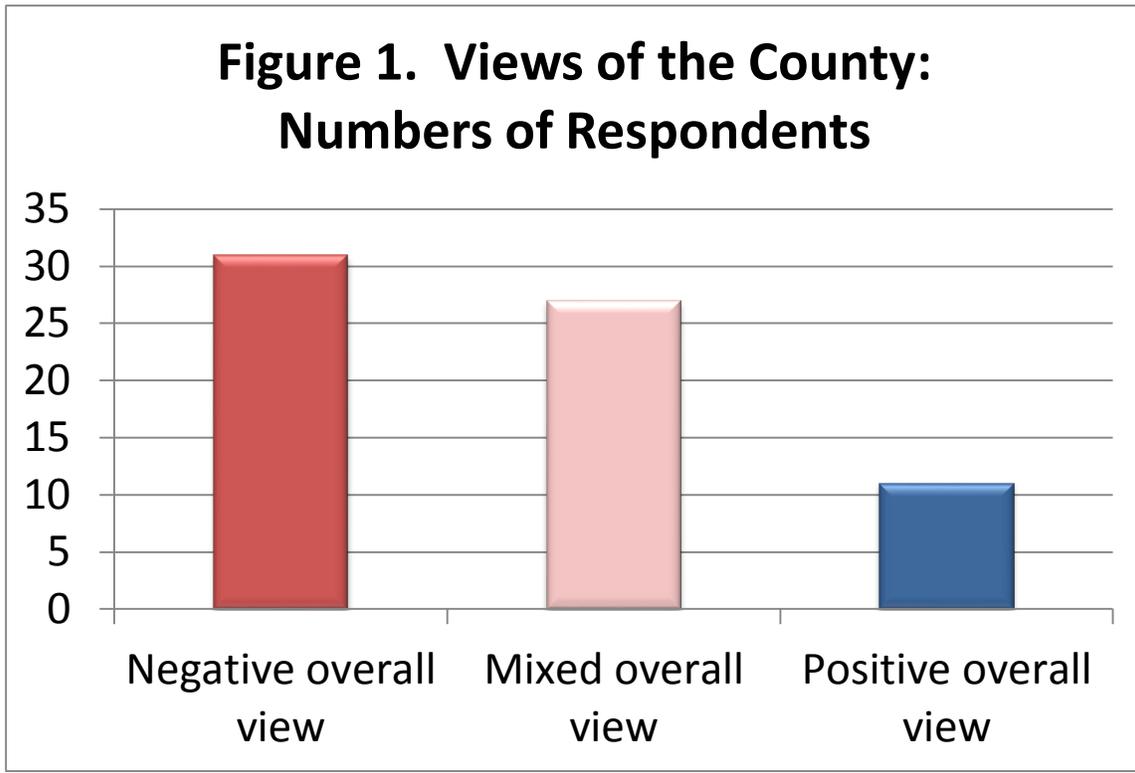
Age of Respondents

	Frequency	Percent
18-24 years	3	4.0
25-49 years	43	57.3
50 years and older	25	33.3
Less than 18 (youth)	1	1.3
Unassigned	3	4.0
Total	75	100.0

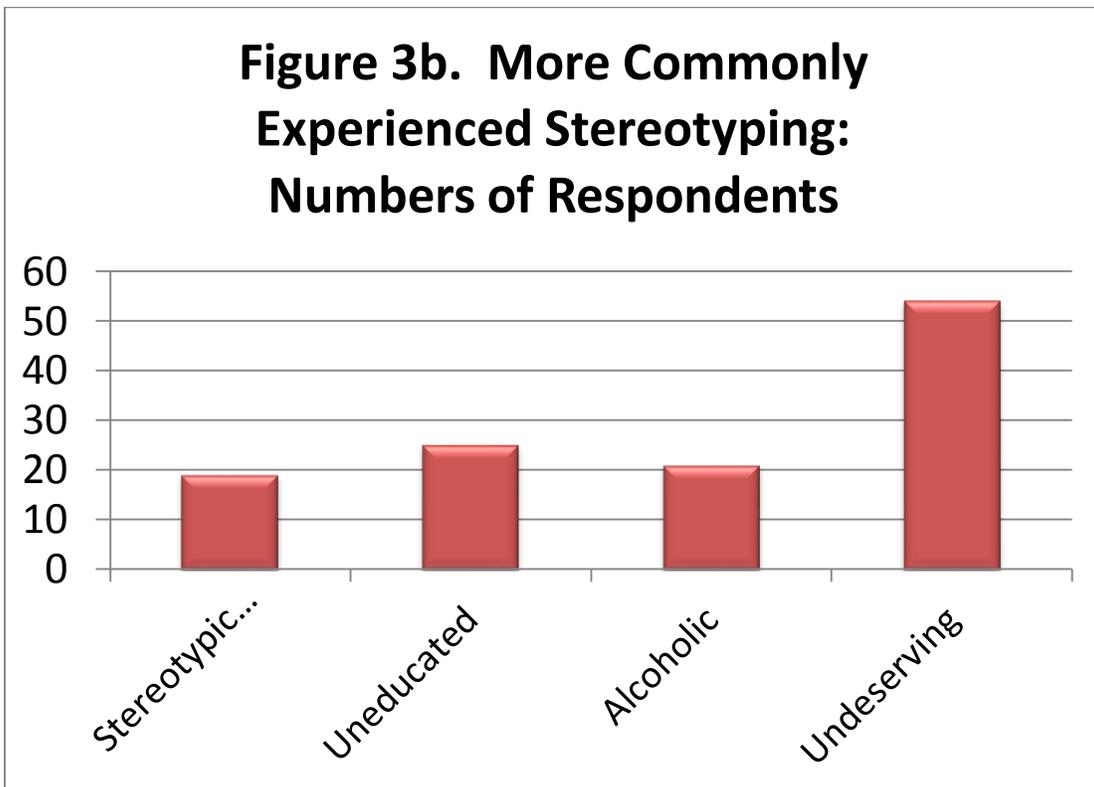
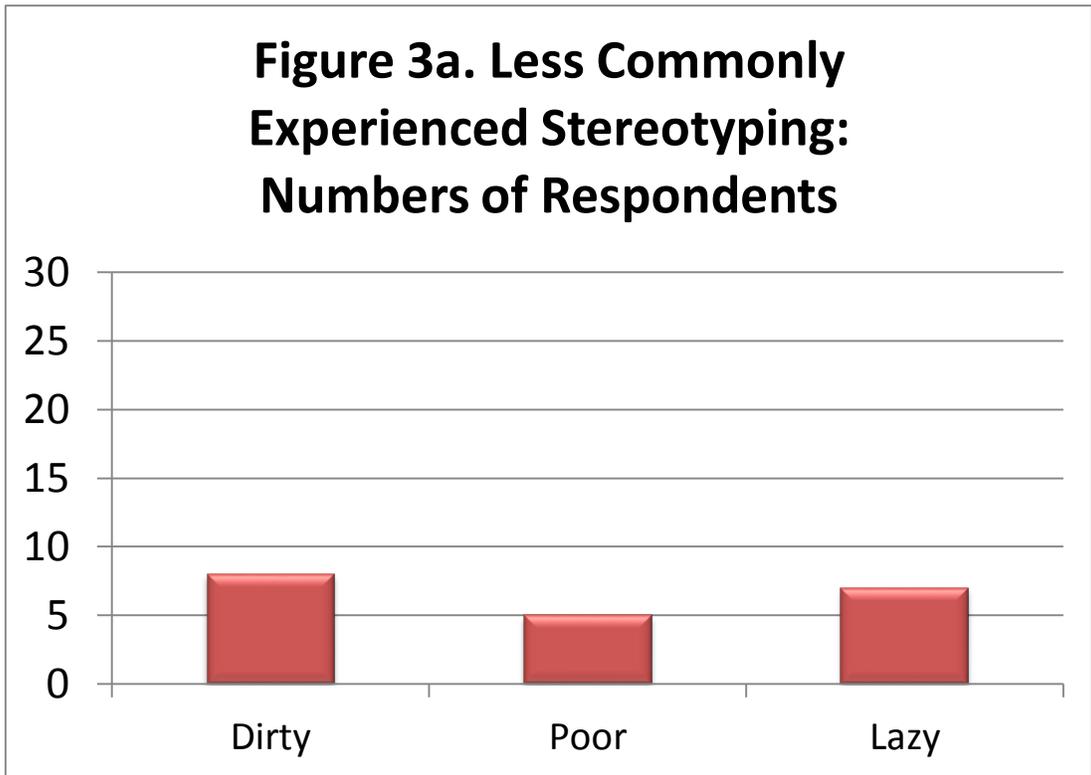
Proportion of Life Spent in Isabella County

	Frequency	Percent
Half of life or more	35	46.7
Less than half of life	38	50.7
Unassigned	2	2.7
Total	75	100.0

Appendix #4

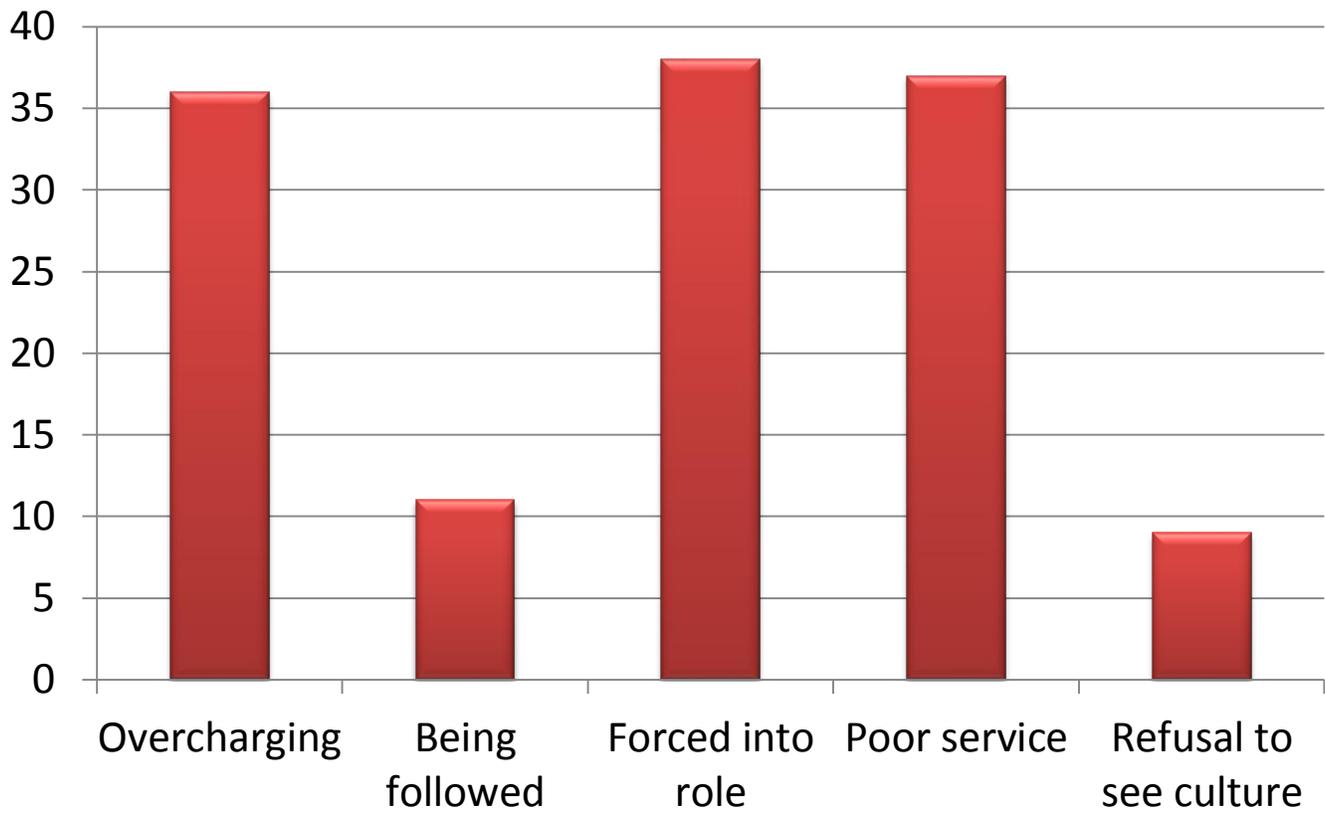


Appendix #5



Appendix #6

**Figure 4. Costs of Visibility:
Numbers of Respondents**



Appendix #7

**Figure 5. Reactions:
Numbers of Respondents**

