Native American Identity: A review of Twenty-First Century Research
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Abstract

The purpose of this literature review is to examine research on Native American identity within the social sciences in the twenty-first century in order to identify trends in research topics, various perspectives, and potential future studies. Through a review of a sample of 86 publications relating to the topic of Native American identity, the sample was retrieved utilizing three scholarly databases across a wide range of fields of study. Publications are examined by area of focus and publication year.

Introduction

In the 1960’s, the native American population, as reported in census data, increased faster than it would be biologically possible (Castle 1996, p. 384). Some have argued that this increase was a result of "reincarnation" (Castle 1996, p. 384). The number of Native American self-identifying ranged from 13,000,000 in 1960 to 18,000,000 in 1980 (NAGPRA 1995, p. 93). In 2010, 5.2 million people identified as Native American (Ihde 2014, p. 80). Several other sociopolitical influences occurred during this time including the passing of several influential pieces of legislation and the growth of a pan-Indian identity.

Native American identity gained some attention in social research, especially in anthropology, in the 1990’s. "Research into the emergence of indigenous identity and their relationship to local identities...and processes of globalization...is still in its initial stages, much is legal or historical rather than ethnographic” (Olive 2006, p. 250). As a result, various scholars have contributed to the research of native American identity over the past several decades (Morris 1992; Muealebach 2001; Strong 2005).

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Results

Native American identity, since 1990, has become a more frequent scholarly topic. However, much of that attention has been given within the venues of the behavioral sciences, health, and education fields. (Primary reasons for exclusions were for research questions relating significantly to these fields.) Following the exclusion of sources found in the citations that met the criteria, 88 publications were selected based on publication year and field of research. Those publications addressing identity directly were distributed across the fields of research as follows: 48.9% (95) Anthropology, 19.8% (37) Psychology, 19.3% (37) Sociology, 9.6% (18) Education, 12.8% (11) Other (See Figure 1). The sample data suggests that the number of anthropological studies on Native American identity, as well as psychology studies, published per year began to increase after 1996. Anthropological studies seem to be the most prevalent on the subject. The data also suggests that anthropology led the social sciences in area of research.

Methods

How has Native American Identity been addressed in social research since 1990?

The present study utilized the EBSICO Host, JSTOR, and Web of Science composite databases to retrieve social research publications focusing on Native American identity, within the time period from 1990 to 2016.

Search 1: Criteria: Directed at reviewing research primarily focused on identity
Native American or American Indian or Alaska Native - Subject (AND)
(AND) Identity - Title
(AND) Cultural Identity - Subject
(AND) Sociology or Part Racial - Type
(AND) Education - Subject
(AND) Health - Subject
(AND) Anthropology - Subject

36 of the 484 unique publications were included from the search results. 50 studies from references were included that met the initial inclusion criteria. (Not limited to peer reviewed articles)

A total of 86 scholarly publications addressing Native American identity were reviewed.

The present review considered the following topics:

- (1) Contemporary Native American identity
- (2) Impact of historical trauma
- (3) Impact of federal policy
- (4) Role of interfamily
- (5) Role of cultural revitalization
- (6) Role of identity and community

Subject categories were used to identify the keywords used for the secondary search within JSTOR were limited to the American Indian Studies, Anthropology, and Sociology categories.

Table 1: Initial Search Results Exclusions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Number of Exclusions</th>
<th>Exclusions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anthropology</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociology</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociology</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Anthropology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sociology</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Search 2: Criteria: Directed at reviewing identity as addressed in ethnography
Native American or American Indian or Alaska Native - Subject
(AND) Scholarship or Part Racial - Title
(AND) Anthropology - Subject

36 of the 484 unique publications were included from the search results. 50 studies from references were included that met the initial inclusion criteria. (Not limited to peer reviewed articles)

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The present review considered the following topics:

- (1) Impact of historical trauma
- (2) Impact of federal policy
- (3) Impact of identity and community

Search 3: Criteria: Directed at reviewing identity as addressed in psychology
Native American or American Indian or Alaska Native - Subject
(AND) Psychology - Subject
(AND) Identity - Type
(AND) Cultural Identity - Subject
(AND) Education - Subject
(AND) Health - Subject
(AND) Anthropology - Subject

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- (3) Impact of identity and community

Data Analysis

Following the completion of the search for relevant publications, the results (86) were compiled into a list. Each item was reviewed to determine the field of study to which it corresponded. Anthropology, Ethnology, Psychology, Sociology, Education, and Other. Most frequently, this was done by noting the publication journal. Books or other publications were categorized on the basis of abstracts, the authors, and actual text itself. The total for each category was calculated. Each item was also reviewed in detail and annotated for relevance to the topics under consideration. The results were then chosen by publication year and field of research. (See Figure 1: Results by Field of Study). The annotations were then piloted in order to analyze the prevalance sub-topics.

Chart 1: Results by Field of Study

Chart 2: Yearly Publications/Comparison

The topic of study continued to receive some attention from scholars in anthropology, as well as other social research. However, the results indicate that in 2004 this topic began to lose favor. The growth of psychology while developmental and cultural psychology continued to produce publications of research studies on this topic. (See Figure 2).

The pole net matrix revealed the following common sub-topics in relation to Native American identity:

- Historical Trauma
- Historical trauma, forced relocation, forced assimilation, mandatory boarding schools, acculturation, loss of traditional modes of production
- Globalization
- Discourses related to influences and interactions between local, national, and global forces
- Identity Politics
- Enlistment, membership, occupation, blood quantum, auto types, self-image, authenticity
- Identity Constructs
- Identification, cadence, place, space, history, traditions, values, oral tradition, community, revitalization, indigenous movement, participation
- Group Boundaries
- Inclusion, exclusion, conformation, performance, negotiation

More recently the fields of developmental and cultural psychology have produced research and have continued to produce publications of research studies on this topic. (See Figure 3) As shown below, some of these topics can be mapped to multiple sections of this model.

Figure 3: Markstrom Model Comparison with Findings

Conclusion

In the early twenty-first century, Native American identity received some attention from anthropologists, and other social researchers. However, focus on this topic has somewhat dwindled, though it is discussed within works central on other topics. A significant portion of this work has focused on identity politics and the role of government in shaping Native American identity due to the conflicting interests of the federal and tribal governments. Research has also tended to focus on a narrow band of influencing factors, rather than addressing Native American identity as a whole.

The linear focus of identity forced onto Native American tribes through federal policy is in conflict with the fluid nature of identity and limits those groups from shaping their own membership boundaries and therefore their cultural future. The breadth of social complications that have occurred in the past may potentially continue into the future. Further, Native Americans have a vested interest in controlling membership boundaries in order to maintain cultural continuity, distinguishable, and community resources. The federal government, which has long influenced the shape of Native American tribal identity through establishing membership boundaries, has forced numerous to limit membership inclusion for economic benefit. It should also be said that, as experts, anthropologists studying Native American identity have an ethical obligation to research this topic with consideration to the impact such research has on federal policy and its implications for tribal sovereignty.

Further research to understand the Native American identity and boundary maintenance should include the role of historical trauma, federal policy, enrollment, cultural revitalization, tradition, community, and community participation and importantly should address tribal response and cultural preservation. The Markstrom model is a potential paradigm for studying Native American identity that could incorporate important factors identified in existing research. Research is needed to determine whether the model is applicable to the field of anthropology as a means to create a more holistic picture of modern Native American identity. Importantly, it may offer more insight into how influences from outside continue to extend in order to maintain cultural continuity and group cohesion. This may eventually lead to identifying culturally specific methods of defining membership, assist in resolving the conflict of interest between tribal and federal governments, and aid self-determination.

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