Prejudice Within Native American Communities

- A literary study of the prejudice expressed in *Love Medicine* and *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*

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Abstract

The Native American characters in *Love Medicine* and *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* experience prejudice from other Native Americans and suffer from internalized norms and values. This study examines whether or not the prejudice the fictional characters in *Love Medicine* and *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* experience and express as Native Americans unite them as a community or not. It also investigates how they view white society and if the Native American characters have prejudice against the members of their own tribal community. The analysis is partially based on postcolonial theory and focuses on terms such as internalisation, acculturation and prejudice. The thesis found that the communities are united on the premises that they conform to the Native American norms but any deviation from these norms has the potential to divide them.

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Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to analyse the two Native American novels *Love Medicine* by Louise Erdrich and *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian* by Sherman Alexie. The intention is to look at whether or not the prejudice the fictional characters experience and express as Native Americans, unite them as a community or not. It will also investigate how they view white society and if the Native American characters are prejudiced against the members of their own tribal community. The primary sources for this essay are the two novels *Love Medicine* and *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian*.

Prejudice within the Native American societies, both against the members of their own tribal community and white people, will be looked upon. Prejudice in general will be examined and the chosen incidents will be analysed. The main question of the research will be: "Does the Native Americans’ exclusion from white societies in the novels unite them as a community or divide them?". The thesis will also focus on the research question, “what is the Native Americans’ view in the novels on white society?".

When working with this essay it has been interesting to find that little research has been carried out on prejudice within Native American tribes and how they view white society. It would seem that discussing prejudice within vulnerable social groups is being avoided. For example, researchers often focus on Christianity when analysing *Love Medicine* as John Purdy does in his article “Crossing the Waters to a Love Medicine”.

The analysis of the thesis will be based on a postcolonial perspective with a main focus on the terms: *internalisation*, *acculturation* and *prejudice*. When an individual has incorporated, either consciously or subconsciously, values, behaviours or patterns of culture through socialisation they have been internalized ("internalise"). When a person has fully internalized the norms of another culture they have become acculturated (Chun et al. 6). Two definitions of prejudice are relevant for the thesis. The first being when an individual has formed unfavourable opinions or feelings towards other individuals without knowledge or reason ("prejudice"). The second definition: to have an unreasonable dislike and distrust to people who differs from one self (Longman 1364). The postcolonial theory was chosen for the cultural focus the thesis aims to investigate.
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The thesis will begin with a background where a short summary of the history of the Chippewa nation and the Spokan nation, information on alcohol dehydrogenase genes, and a short introduction of the authors and their novels will be presented. Thereafter the applied theory will be presented along with definitions of relevant terms. After that the discussion follows, where relevant data will be presented and discussed. Lastly a conclusion will be drawn.

Background

Chippewa/Ojibway/Anishinaabe (the Native Americans in Love Medicine) was one of the greatest and most powerful tribes before Europeans came to their land. The Chippewas usually set up homes and only relocated if things were scarce. They often settled near rivers or lakes and farmed, hunted and gathered food (Waldman & Braun 61). They believed that all things possessed spirits, living or non-living and that these could be used to cure the sick as well as harm one's enemies. When Europeans arrived to their land the Chippewas began trading with the French and put their trust in them, and were later given French firearms. In the mid 1700s they fought the British side by side with the French and later they fought side by side with the British against the American rebels. When the British had to surrender the Native Americans were forced to surrender much of their land to the Americans. It is estimated that of today's Native Americans about half of them live in cities outside of reservations. The American government and the Chippewa nation has signed treaties to protect the Native American nation which has been violated by the government on several occasions (62). One example of a treaty, signed and violated by the government, stated that “reservations would always belong to the tribes, and that treaty payments and provisions would be delivered in full and on time” (“Broken promises”).

The Spokan/Spokane (the Native Americans in The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian) lived by rivers and dealt in fur-trade. They lived in peace with the white people who came to their land until the 1850s when they suffered from a smallpox epidemic. After that they witnessed several wars that brought measles and killing of innocents, by white men, treaties were violated and workers were treated unfairly. All this suffering eventually led to an uprising, the Spokan war, which was lost.
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to the United States; after the war they settled in reservations (Waldman & Braun 241-242).

Later in this thesis there will be a discussion surrounding the Native American relation to alcoholism where a background on genetics will be necessary for understanding the analysis. About 70% men and 50% Native American women suffer from alcohol dependency. Research has found a correlation between two alcohol dehydrogenase genes ($ADH2$ and $ADH3$ on chromosome 4) and substance dependencies. $ADH2$ is associated with lower rates of alcohol dependence and people with this enzyme are about one-third as likely to be alcoholic, compared to those without this allele. $ADH3$, on the other hand, is believed to increase the chances of becoming alcohol dependent. Research is unanimous that $ADH2$ often is absent in Native Americans. Research is not consistent when it comes to whether or not the $ADH3$ enzyme is more common in Native Americans (Long et al.; Wall, Carr, Ehlers).

Louise Erdrich

Louise Erdrich is an award winning and very influential Native American writer whose stories mainly are about the Chippewa Native Americans. Erdrich's mother was of Chippewa decent and her father of German decent (Beidler and Barton 1). Her grandfather was the Turtle Mountain Chippewa tribal chair and politically fought for the tribal community all his life (“The Art of Fiction”). Erdrich grew up outside of the Turtle Mountain Reservation and her parents worked as teachers at a boarding school for Native American children (Farry 2-3). She was raised a Catholic but as she grew older she lost her Catholic belief and instead tried to follow the Chippewa tenets of what makes a good person (Farry 9). She did not grow up learning the Chippewa language for her mothers' language skills were limited. Her grandfather on the other hand spoke with a Red Lake dialect (“The Art of Fiction”).

Erdrich began writing $Love Medicine$ while studying at Johns Hopkins. She received prizes in creative writing for “The World’s Greatest Fishermen”, which later became the first chapter of $Love Medicine$. After College she worked as a travelling teacher in poetry. In her travels she stayed in hotels where she often visited the local bars, where she struck up conversations with strangers. Many of those conversations
gave her further inspiration for *Love Medicine* and many of them ended up in the novel (“The Art of Fiction”).

The reason behind the complexity of the relationships between the characters in the novel is because Erdrich chose to neglect the fact that it might be relevant for the cohesion. She rather focused on the story and explained, “In the Turtle Mountains, everybody is related because there are only so many families. Nobody sits down and picks apart their ancestry. Unless you want to date somebody” (“The Art of Fiction”). She received a lot of critique for this and in the following novel, the sequel, she made a much clearer outline of the family trees. Many of her novels are intertwined with each other, and *Love Medicine* has a prequel and a sequel (Beidler & Barton 4).

*Love Medicine*, published in 1984, was created from several stories that had previously been published and is the first part of a series of other novels by Erdrich. The novel's setting is spread across 60 years, 1921-1981, and its coherence is provided through a correlation between individuals, relationships and events. The novel consists of 14 individual chapters and is narrated by seven different narrators. The focus is on three families, the Kashpaws, the Lazarres and Nanapush (some children of these families have other last names, such as Morrissey). The novel aims to reveal the living conditions of today’s Native Americans (Bo 1).

The novel revolves around the character June, who dies in the first chapter and is never given a voice of her own. She dies when trying to walk home to the reservation in a blizzard. As a child she was taken in by Marie Lazarre, the central main character. June has previously been through a painful childhood and is left with an emptiness that both she and Marie attempt to fill, but both fail. June moves away from the reservation in an attempt to create a life of her own but she cannot hold a job nor fill the emptiness and decides to go back home, but dies on the way.

Marie denies her Native American heritage as a child and tries to live in a convent as a nun, with the desire to one day become a saint. In the convent she is brutally assaulted by one of the nuns, because the nun believes the devil is in her. After a fight between the two the nun stabs Marie's hand with a fork and knocks her unconscious. When Marie wakes up she is being worshipped, for the nun claims the markings appeared out of nowhere. Marie then escapes the convent and on her way she runs into Nector. Nector is at first suspicious of Marie because of her last name, Lazarre. He assumes that she has stolen linen from the convent and tries to retain her in the hopes of being given a reward for catching a thief. They later marry and have seven
children, but they lose the first two children at a young age. Later in the marriage Nector begins an affair with his first love Lulu Nanapush/Lamartine. Lulu's first husband was her cousin, who permanently lives alone on an island. Lulu has nine children with several different fathers. Within the tribal community each family is associated with different characteristics such as thievery, unable to remain with the family, etcetera. There is prejudice against families because of actions done by their forefathers, for example a character named Moses Pillager (Lulu's first husband) is called a windigo (cannibal) for his grandfather ate his wife (Erdrich 75). To further describe the characters and their relationships would be too complicated and descriptions will therefore be given when needed in the discussion.

Sherman Alexie

Sherman Alexie was born with hydrocephalus and was expected to suffer from mental disabilities and thereby underwent a vast variety of therapy, among other things physical therapy and speech therapy (Margolis). Alexie was thereby educated at a very young age. He experienced a positive healthcare experience at this point but as revealed in his novel the Native Americans healthcare system failed in several other areas (Alexie 2).

The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian was published in 2007 and is autobiographical. The narrator of the novel is a fourteen-year-old Spokane Indian living on a reservation with his family, set around the 1970s. They live in poor conditions and Arnold (the protagonist) is often assaulted because of his lisp and because he is different. After finding out one of his course books was used by his mother, when she was his age, he throws it away and accidentally hits his teachers head. The incident gets Arnold expelled from the reservation school and he makes the decision to transfer to Reardan, an all white school outside of the reservation. This decision is met with anger and hate from his tribe but full support from his family. Through playing basketball he finds acceptance in Reardan but also becomes a rival to his old school and thereby the whole reservation. Throughout the novel he struggles with prejudice, hate and bullying mainly from his fellow tribe members but also from the students and parents from Reardan. The protagonist uses cartoons, created by Ellen Forney, to express his feelings which will be relevant for certain elements of the following discussion (Knoeller 25).
Theory

The theory used in this thesis is based on a postcolonial perspective and therefore a description of postcolonialism and terms relevant to the thesis will presently be defined. Among other things, postcolonialism has to do with the experience of decolonisation (McLeod 7). Decolonisation does not only have to do with returning land but also overturning the world-view taught by the oppressor/coloniser (McLeod 25). Decolonisation is a process of dismantling the coloniser discourses in the colonised nation (Ashcroft et al. 95). According to Fanon, colonised people need to reclaim their own past in order to find a voice and an identity (Barry 186). Postcolonialism aims to understand what consequences colonialism has brought (Ashcroft et al. 95; Culler 130).

Postcolonialism has partially developed from 'the study of Commonwealth literature' and 'colonial discourses'. The study of Commonwealth literature emerged in the 1950s and described literature coming from nations with a history of colonialism (McLeod 12). It was assumed that all 'Commonwealth literature' dealt with universal concerns, and not that of a specific nation or ethnic group (McLeod 15). Postcolonialism cannot be defined as 'after colonialism' for it is not a happening. Postcolonialism is rather a recognition of historical continuity and change (McLeod 39). Theories of colonial discourses investigate how colonial powers use representations and modes of perception as weapons to keep the colonised people submissive to the coloniser (McLeod 19). They are interested in how "the conditions of the world and the knowledge we make about the world—are always intertwined and mutually supportive" (McLeod 45-46). The study of colonial discourses is mainly concerned with analysing literature to find how colonialism affects and controls people's world view, a person's place in the society and peoples attitudes and values (McLeod 20).

This thesis will mainly focus on internalisation, acculturation and prejudice. When values, behaviour or patterns of culture are incorporated either consciously or subconsciously through learning or socialization they have been internalized ("internalise"). Symptoms of internalisation can be social withdrawal, feelings of loneliness or guilt, not talking to or interacting with others, feeling unloved, feeling sadness, nervousness or irritability, fearfulness and not standing up for yourself (Williams). An example of this is to regard people who are non white as inferior, even if
they themselves are non white. They are taught to believe that a white person should have a 'master position' (McLeod 20). When internalisation has reached a point where an individual is fully internalised they become acculturated (Chun et al. 6).

Acculturation is a sociocultural change; and it has to do with social and individual change of people from different ethnocultural groups. An individual's affect, behaviour, beliefs, and values change from social and environmental influences (Chun et al. 4-5). It is the effect of people from different cultures being in long term contact with another culture (6). The changes of acculturation often have an effect on the identification with their cultural origin (9).

There are two definitions of prejudice relevant for this thesis. The first is to have “an unfavorable opinion or feeling formed beforehand or without knowledge, thought, or reason“ ("prejudice"). The second definition is to have an unreasonable dislike and distrust of people who differ from one self; for example a different religion, ethnic background, or sexual orientation (Longman 1364).

Discussion

Internalisation

Throughout the novels the reader come across several occasions when the Native Americans express prejudice against members of their own tribal community, and on some occasions even towards themselves. Generally the prejudice and internalisation are expressed in the same manner in the two novels but they are presented differently. In Love Medicine the narrative begins with the death of a family member but thereafter tells the story of the general lives of the characters. The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian however focuses on the events of Arnold's (Junior's) transfer to an all white school.

In Love Medicine the main character Marie has been fully acculturated, and because she is not a “full blood” Native American it has led to her denying her Native American heritage. The reason for her denial is connected to her upbringing, as she was brought up by non biological Native American parents who belonged to the two families that have the lowest status in their community. The reason behind Marie's emphasis on the family's low status is that she has internalized norms from her Native American
community, “Those Lazarres just stood there, yawning and picking their gray teeth, with the girl between them most likely drunk too” (Erdrich 86). These internalized norms will be discussed later in the analysis. Marie has also developed a powerful hatred towards the people who raised her due to the fact that they are Native Americans. Because of her mixed heritage she has a lighter skin tone than what Native Americans generally have and lays heavy weight on this. For example she believes she has a greater chance when it comes to finding a partner because of her lighter skin tone and claims she can choose any man on the reservation because of this (Erdrich 48). Her aspiration in life, as a young girl, is to become a nun and the nuns residing at the nearby convent are all white. Marie has a degrading view on Native Americans and strives to separate herself from them:

No reservation girl had ever prayed so hard. There was no use in trying to ignore me any longer. I was going up there on the hill with the black robe women. They were not any lighter than me. I was going up there to pray as good as they could. Because I don't have that much Indian blood. And they never thought they'd have a girl from this reservation as a saint they'd have to kneel to. But they'd have me. (Erdrich 43)

Her aspiration to become a nun or a saint appears to be about power because even though she looks “white” she lives with and is treated equally to other Native Americans. By joining the convent she believes she will be equal to white people and hence be granted the same power and superiority. She cannot see equality between ethnicities. Her Catholic belief contributes to her negative view of Native Americans, and she blames the smallpox death on they committing a sin, “I was like those bush Indians who stole the holy black hat of a Jesuit and swallowed little scraps of it to cure their fevers. But the hat itself carried smallpox and was killing them with belief” (Erdrich 45). She justifies the status of Native Americans and how they were treated through the sin they committed when they first encountered and were introduced to the Lord. Her belief has therefore taught her that Native Americans are sinful and are allied with the devil, “Evil was a common thing I trusted. Before sleep sometimes he came and whispered conversations in the old language of the bush. I listened. He told me things he never told anyone but Indians” (Erdrich 46). Through Catholicism she is taught that with prayers, devotion to God and a little torture the Indian savage (devil)
can be driven out. After being praised as a saint she deserts the convent but she never fully abandons her faith in God. When she no longer resides at the convent she overturns her acculturation but still faces the internalized prejudice against her own family. Her new aspiration in life becomes to remove herself from the name and the label that follows with it, and she does so through marriage, “I had decided I was going to make him into something big on this reservation. I didn't know what, not yet; I only knew when he got there they would not whisper “dirty Lazarre” when I walked down from church” (Erdrich 89). After leaving the convent she eventually accepts her Native American heritage but occasionally the remaining internalised norms makes themselves reminded and she once again denies her heritage. All Native American characters of the novel struggle with internalised norms but most of them take pride in their heritage.

In *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* the main character Arnold is the primary example of internalisation, mainly because he is the narrator. Additionally, since Arnold is the narrator the Native American community is only presented through his interpretation. His interpretation can be seen as representative of the tribal community because of Arnold's intentions. He constantly tries to defend the community's actions and behaviour and glorifies the community on several occasions. The tribal community he lives in has developed norms of how Native Americans should conduct themselves as well as how white people conduct themselves and how they treat Native Americans. These norms have been internalized by the whole community and throughout the novel Arnold struggles to fight them. One of the most accentuated norms is that Native Americans are supposedly of lesser value than white people, “Just remember this,” my father said “Those white people aren't better than you.” But he was so wrong. And he knew he was wrong. He was the loser Indian father of a loser Indian son living in a world built for winners” (Alexie 55). Arnold's tribal community live in poverty which affects the self-esteem of all the members, especially Arnold after his transfer to Reardan, “I wish I were magical, but I am really just a poor-ass reservation kid living with his poor-ass family on the poor-ass Spokane Indian Reservation” (Alexie 7). The tribal community's economic situation contributes to a flawed education; for example the course literature is outdated. The feeling of lesser value, their economic situation together with a flawed education has led to despair and lack of hope, “But we reservation Indians don't get to realize our dreams. We don't get those chances. Or choices. We're just poor. That's all we are” (Alexie 13). Arnold shares the view of his community but when he transfers to Reardan he discovers that his community itself is
holding the members back. The norms of his community are however internalised and it takes him till the end of the novel to repel them. As previously mentioned Reardan, the school Arnold transfers to, is an all white school upon Arnold’s arrival. This causes Arnold to experience a strong feeling of displacement and the internalised norms he has causes him to feel unworthy of anything, “I didn't deserve to be there. I knew it; all of those kids knew it. Indians don't deserve shit” (Alexie 56).

Before leaving for Reardan Arnold’s thoughts of himself and his tribal community were, as previously mentioned, low and he was not very well treated because of his attributes that were out of the “normal”. His feeling of displacement did, however, increase when he no longer was seen as a true member of their tribal community, “Traveling between Reardan and Wellpinit, between the little white town and the reservation, I always felt like a stranger. I was half Indian on one place and half white in the other” (Alexie 118). After being at Reardan for some time he comes to the realisation that the living conditions of the white people of that community is not so different from that of the Native Americans on the reservation, “And Indian boys weren't supposed to dream like that. And white girls from small towns weren't supposed to dream big either” (Alexie 112). The white community, however, has a much better economy and the education offered there enables a better economy for the inhabitants. In the end of the novel Arnold realises that all individuals are humans, “I used to think the world was broken down by tribes,” I said. “By black and white. By Indian and white. But I know that isn't true. The world is only broken into two tribes: The people who are assholes and the people who are not” (Alexie 176). He conquers the internalised norms.

In Love Medicine the internalisation and acculturation of the Native Americans divides the tribal community. They distance themselves from each other and look down upon their own heritage and all other Native Americans. In The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian the internalisation does, contrary to Love Medicine, unite the tribal community. The internalised norm of their lesser value contributes to a feeling of belonging amongst the members of the tribal community and the misery unites them.
Throughout the novels prejudice expressed from Native Americans directed towards other Native Americans is a reoccurring problem. In both novels some contributing factors to this prejudice are internalisation and acculturation. This prejudice is in both novels blamed on white people or on the government, for example in Love Medicine the character Lulu blames the government (Erdrich 283) and in The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian Arnold blames the intolerance within the tribal community on white people and Christianity (Alexie 155).

In Love Medicine the prejudice expressed by the characters is focalized on the families, and the worst insult is to disgrace a family (Erdrich 311). Marie is the character who suffers immensely from this because she was brought up by the Lazarre family, a family of the lowest status, and strives to establish herself and be approved by her tribal community. After Marie leaves the convent she runs into Nector Kashpaw, who sees that she has linen wrapped around her hand and directly assumes she had stolen it because of her last name, “Marie Lazarre is the youngest daughter of a family of horse-thieving drunks. Stealing sacred linen fits what I know of that blood, so I assume she is running off with the Sisters' pillowcase and other valuables. Who knows? I think a chalice might be hidden beneath her skirt” (Erdrich 62-3). It could be interpreted that his prejudice is caused by internalized norms of his community. Nector does however develop an attraction to Marie and chooses to marry her instead of his childhood love. In their marriage he is no longer prejudiced against her family and chooses to insult her by referring to her light skin, “All right, skinny white girl!” She had got Grandpa mad” (Erdrich 249). Marie who at this point is struggling with internalized norms, especially concerning her own family, struggles for the rest of her life to remove herself from her surname and does so by, among other things, marrying Nector Kashpaw. He belongs to a family which once were chiefs over the Chippewa nation and now are seen as a family with high status. Her mother-in-law, Rushes Bear, does not approve of this union and protests, “My son is marrying one of that lowlife family that insulted me. Those Lazarres breed fast and die young. I hope I'll outlive her tough bread and Nector Kashpaw will once again respect his mother” (Erdrich 72). Her prejudice directed towards the family 'Lazarre' is obvious. Rushes Bear is not kind to Marie even though she has birthed her grandchildren, taken care of her son and made him head chairman of the nation. Rushes Bear feels like life is coming to its end, she is feeling lonesome, and therefore goes to Marie and Nector in hope of being taken care of (Erdrich 98). After confessing she has nowhere to go Marie welcomes her in their home.
Marie is at the time in a late pregnancy and when the labour begins Nector is nowhere to be found so Rushes Bear decides to aid Marie. The labour almost costs Marie her life and Rushes Bear comes to the realisation that a name does not make a person and embraces Marie as a daughter, “I'm your son,” he said. “No more, I only have a daughter.” “Her?” he said, almost laughing. “But she's a Lazarre.” “You shame me,” Rushes Bear said. “You never heard any wail out of her, any complaint. You never would know this birth was hard enough for her to die” (Erdrich 104). Rushes Bear has confronted the internalized norm, which has caused her to repel Marie, and eradicated it by embracing Marie as a daughter. Nector, however, expresses the same internalized prejudice in the conversations which suggests that internalized prejudice must be confronted and consciously eradicated.

There are two low-status families in *Love Medicine* and when Nector passes away Marie develops a friendship with Lulu Lamartine, of the Morrissey family. The Lazzare family are thought to be thieves whereas the Morrisseys are seen as deserters, “Miss Indian America,” Grandpa called her. She had stayed pretty even when things got so bad with Gordie that she ran off alone, “like a no-good Morrissey,” people said, leaving her son King” (Erdrich 9). When Marie and Lulu's friendship falls out they develop an argument about which family is really the “worst”. They do so by arguing which family did a disgraceful action on a well respected Kashpaw family member, “A Lazarre stole old Rushes Bear and shaved her head! Who could forget that one?” “A Morrissey. It was a Morrissey” (Erdrich 311). This internalized prejudice does not merely relate to the living generations or actions done by several members of that family, for example Moses Pillager is judged for what his grandfather is said to have done, “Besides, he's windigo! His grandfather ate his own wife!” (Erdrich 75). On another occasion Gerry encounters his son after being betrayed by him, “I'm trusting,” Gerry said to me, shaking his head, blinking his mild eyes, “especially of all my Indian relations. I confided to him all my plans to escape once, never knowing he was an apple.” That is: red on the outside, white on the inside” (Erdrich 353). He uses the word 'apple' as an insult to indicate that his son has acculturated to white culture and is no longer a true Native American. The insult only occurs on one occasion in *Love Medicine* but is reoccurring in *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*.

In *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* the internalized prejudice is focalized on individuals' participation in white society:
some Indians think you have to act white to make your life better. Some Indians think you become white if you try to make your life better, if you become successful […] “the people at home,” I said. “A lot of them call me an apple.” “Do they think you're a fruit or something?” he asked. “No, no,” I said. “They call me an apple because they think I'm red on the outside and white on the inside.” “Ah, so they think you're a traitor” “Yep.” “Well, life is a constant struggle between being an individual and being a member of the community. (Alexie 131-2)

The community does not accept any deviations from their Native American culture, for they view this as treason to their heritage. Previous to Arnold's transfer of school he was not treated kindly by his community. The condition Arnold was born with, hydrocephalus, caused some disabilities, such as bad eyesight, fragility, and a stutter. He also received special education as a young child because the doctors thought he would also suffer mental disabilities. He received different forms of therapy, among other things physical therapy and speech therapy, which gave him a head start in school. The tribal community judges him harshly because of his deviation from the norm and he is daily the subject of abuse and harassment, “Everybody on the rez calls me a retard about twice a day. They call me retard when they are pantsing me or stuffing my head in the toilet or just smacking me upside the head” (Alexie 4). Arnold's mother is aware of how the tribal community is going to react if Arnold transfers to Reardan and warns Arnold, “You'll be the first one to ever leave the rez this way,” Mom said. “The Indians around here are going to be angry with you.” Shoot, I figure that my fellow tribal members are going to torture me” (Alexie 47). Arnold is, however, used to being abused and harassed by his fellow tribe members and cannot imagine the situation being much worse and jokingly imagines their next step of abuse would be torture. When he then transfers to Reardan he turns into a traitor. The only support he receives is from his parents and some anonymous individuals within the community, “A few folks, especially the grandmothers, thought I was a brave little dude for going to a white school. But there were a lot more people who just called me names and slammed the door in my face” (Alexie 79).

On the reservation Arnold only had one real friend, Rowdy. Rowdy protects and defends Arnold from bullies on several occasions. When Arnold informs Rowdy of his decision to transfer school Rowdy feels as if he has been betrayed by his friend, “Don't
touch me, you retarded fag!” he yelled. My heart broke into fourteen pieces, one for each year that Rowdy and I had been best friends” (Alexie 52). Arnold does not have a strong bond to his tribal community because of how he has been treated all his life. Rowdy on the other hand has developed a much stronger bond to his tribal community for he has never been bullied to the same extent and he is a great basketball player, a sport appreciated by the community. This bond to the community has also caused the norms of the community to internalize. Arnold was also a player in the basketball team but was not seen as a good player. When he transfers to Reardan he decides to try out and succeeds, “I suppose it had something to do with confidence. I mean, I'd always been the lowest Indian on the reservation totem pole – I wasn't expected to be good so I wasn't. But in Reardan, my coach and the other players wanted me to be good. They needed me to be good. They expected me to be good. And so I became good” (Alexie 180). Even though Arnold had not developed a strong bond to his community some of the negative norms within his community had internalized, but through the support of his coach and his team mates he confronts them and develops confidence in himself and discovers that he has great potential. The prejudice he met within his community held him back in his personal development and his athletic development. Later the two teams meet in a tournament. The match is set within the reservation and essentially the whole community is there:

As we got off the bus and walked toward the gym, I could hear the crowd going crazy inside. They were chanting something. I couldn't make it out. And then I could. The rez basketball fans were chanting, “Ar-nold sucks! Ar-nold sucks! Arnold sucks!” they weren't calling me by my rez name, Junior. Nope, they were calling me by my Reardan name. (Alexie 143)

They take away his tribal name to make a point that he is no longer a part of their community.

On some occasions prejudice towards other tribal communities occur. On one occasion Rowdy cuts off braids on men who bullied Arnold and blames it on another Native American nation, and without hesitation he is believed, “Rowdy started a rumor that it was a bunch of Makah Indians from the coast who did it. “You can't trust them whale hunters,” Rowdy said. “They'll do anything” (Alexie 22). He is aware of the tribe's prejudice and takes advantage of it. On another occasion the prejudice can be
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seen as positive, “Those Montana Indians were so tough that white people were scared of them” (Alexie 90). Being tough is a positive trait amongst the Native Americans in the novel but it is implied that this tribe is scary, so scary that even the scariest people they can imagine are scared.

The internalized prejudice in Love Medicine is an immense force dividing the community, but it does however unite the families, as long as they do not interact with families of lower status than their own. In The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian the internalized prejudice unites the community on the premises they do not partake in white society or white culture. Arnold is an exception in this unity because of his deviations but when he partakes in white society he is almost entirely excluded from the tribal community.

Prejudice from White People

Prejudice expressed from white people is rare in both novels. In Love Medicine the reason lies in the fact that there are very few white characters and none of those act as a narrator. In The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian the major reason for this is that the narrator is a homodiegetic one. He is a person telling his story from his own point of view.

In Love Medicine there are few instances where prejudice from white people is expressed and the following discussion will address two of these instances. The major event is when Nector pursues a career within the film industry. To begin with, Nector is excited about landing a big role but is immediately disappointed, “I got hired on for the biggest Indian part. But they didn't know I was a Kashpaw, because right off I had to die. “Clutch your chest. Fall off that horse,” they directed. That was it. Death was the extent of Indian acting in the movie theatre” (Erdrich 123). He comes to the realisation that the movie creators are only interested in the story of cowboys and Indians from the point of view of the cowboys, according to which they would always win. The image the movie creators have of Native Americans suggest internalized racism.

The other occasion where white people are prejudiced towards Native Americans is when Gerry and Albertine are sitting in the waiting area at the hospital, waiting for Dot to give birth. They are quietly sitting on their chairs but are still being objects of attention, “Nurses passed, settling like field gulls among reports and
prescriptions, eyeing us with reserved hostility” (Erdrich 208). On this occasion Gerry is on the run from the law. A few moments after being stared at police arrive and chase him. The reason for this reserved hostility by the nurses could be because they had contacted the police about Gerry's presence. The occasion therefore either suggests internalized prejudice from Gerry or internalized prejudice from the nurses.

The prejudice expressed by white people in *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* comes from Arnold, the secondary source. The narration is only from Arnold's point of view, so the prejudice and racism expressed in that novel is in some instances assumptions drawn by the character.

When Arnold first arrives at Reardan the other students stare audaciously at him (Alexie 56). Arnold informs the reader that he and the school's mascot are the only Native Americans in town and then draws the assumption that the whole town is racist. The reason for their behaviour is because he is different and new to them, and not necessarily because they hold racist sentiment against Native Americans. As Arnold's mother pointed out to him, as previously mentioned, Arnold is the first person to leave the reservation to attend this school. The school is also known for not including any other ethnicities than white European. He is therefore stared at because none of the students are accustomed to other ethnicities than their own.

At first when Arnold goes to Reardan he experiences occasions which could be interpreted as prejudice. When he informs the other students of his reservation name 'Junior' they laugh (Alexie 60). Arnold assumes this is because it is a silly name outside of the reservation and confesses that it is just a nickname. His real name is Arnold Spirit Jr.. The reason for their amusement could rather be that the name Junior is a suffix added to a name to distinguish between father and son with the same name and is not commonly used as a first name (Longman 950). He is however harassed by bullies at his new school, “None of those guys punched me or got violent. After all, I was a reservation Indian… I was still a potential killer. So mostly they called me names. Lots of names” (Alexie 63). This proves he was not treated kindly by all students at Reardan, but Arnold does make the assumption that they see him as a potential killer, he projects the internalized stereotype of what a Native American is.

The most prominent prejudice Arnold encounters is from his science teacher. It is during one of his lessons where the teacher rejects Arnold's answer and condemns the science taught at the reservation (Alexie 84-85). When the top student of the class then confirms Arnold's answer he is commended (86). The teachers behaviour could be
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interpreted as internalised prejudice as well as racism as the teacher is hostile towards Arnold without an obvious reason.

In both novels the prejudice the Native Americans encounter unites them as a tribal community because it is directed to their Native American heritage and their culture. In Love Medicine it drives Nector to return to his tribal community and in The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian the expectation of encountering prejudice draws them closer together.

Native American Prejudice Towards White People

The Native American characters are prejudiced towards white people on several occasions in both novels. In Love Medicine they call people 'white' in a way to insult each other, “She’s ugly. White as a fish!” (Erdrich 72). The character Zelda has been in a relationship with a white man whom later abandoned her when she was pregnant. This experience has caused her to develop a hostility towards all white people. She defends the fact that her own child is a "half-breed" by claiming that her upbringing made her a "full-blood":

That white girl,” Mama went on, “she's built like a truck-driver. She won't keep King long. . . . “Why can't you just leave it be? So she's white. What about the Swede? How do you think Albertine feels hearing you talk like that when her Dad was white?” . . . I was light, Clearly a breed. “My girl's an Indian,” Zelda emphasized. “I raised her an Indian, and that's what she is. (Erdrich 24)

Even though other women within Zelda's closest circuit have been abandoned, abused, and cheated on by Native American men she has no prejudice towards Native American men. She has, however, developed prejudice towards white men from one experience. The character Dot is also subjected to this prejudice even though she is at the point an undeveloped character, "On my right sat Dot Adare of the has-been, of the never-was, of the what's-in-front-of-me people" (Erdrich 194). She is a white woman in a relationship with the Native American Gerry and pregnant with their love child and is fiercely judged because of her skin colour.

The prejudice the Native Americans in Love Medicine have against white people
is also applied to doctors and people of other professions and they would rather not seek help at all than to be examined or taken care of by a white doctor, “There were no Indian doctors on the reservation, and my mom couldn't come around to trusting the old man, Moses Pillager . . . We were afraid that if we brought Henry to a regular hospital they would keep him” (Erdrich 187). This suspicion even goes so far that when they have received a diagnosis from a white doctor they oppose this:

I think he was called to second childhood like anybody else gets a call for the priesthood or the army or whatever. So I really did not listen too hard when the doctor said this was some kind of disease old people got eating too much sugar. You just can't tell me that a man who went to Washington and gave them bureaucrats what for could lose his mind from eating too much Milky Way. No, he put second childhood on himself. (Erdrich 232)

When Nector is reading a novel his mother, Rushes Bear, misunderstands the title, “The story of the great white whale.” She could not believe it. After a while, she said, “What do they got to wail about, those whites?” (Erdrich 125). She does not believe it is possible that white people could have anything to complain about nor does she believe they have the right to complain because of what has been done to Native Americans, and their situation cannot possibly be any worse than it is for any Native American. In The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian there is a similar issue where the Native Americans are finding it hard to establish a sense of hope and when Arnold speculates around the subject he asks his parents who possess the most hope, “Mom and dad looked at each other […] “white people,” my parents said at the same time” (Alexie 45). They experience a feeling of hopelessness and have a conception that all white people are privileged and judge them consequently. Through these conceptions they alienates themselves from white people. All of the above instances suggests the whole Native American community has internalized prejudice against white people.

When Arnold arrives at Reardan he observes the white students and is astonished. He describes the students and exaggerates their white skin in an insulting manner, “Those kids weren't just white. They were translucent. I could see the blue veins running through their skin like rivers” (Alexie 56). His statement suggest he has internalized prejudice against white people. On the same page he himself expresses through a drawing how he finds the schools Native American mascot insulting,
especially the bright red skin. Arnold's internalized prejudice against white people also induces him to assume the worst; for example he assumes that Roger, a friend of his girlfriend, is racist. “And Roger, being of kind heart and generous pocket, and a little bit racist, drive me home that night” (Alexie 129). He acknowledges the good attributes of the boy but makes the assumption, without indication, that he is racist. He also draws the conclusion that his girlfriend's father is racist but does in this instance have grounds for his assumption. The father says he will disown his daughter if they conceive "charcoal" children (Alexie 109). The hostility towards Arnold is mostly because he is racists but the father is also protective of his daughter and threatens Arnold not to have sexual intercourse with his daughter. Arnold's prejudice towards white people is apparent and all the more so when he is interviewed by a white journalist who is interested in the basketball game, “I was kind of suspicious that white people were really interested in seeing some Indians battle each other. I think it was sort of like watching dogfighting, you know?” (Alexie 184). The journalist is revealed to be genuinely interested in Arnold and his breakout of the tribal community, “Listen, kid,” the sports guy said. “I thought this was an important story. We thought this was a story about a kid striking out on his own, about a kid being courageous, and all you want to do is give us grief” (Alexie 185). Through this confrontation he is forced to acknowledge his own pre-assumptions and internalized prejudice and thereby enabling it to be eradicated. Arnold expressed the prejudice he expected to encounter from white people.

Arnold is also accused of being racist by his Reardan friend Gordie, “I think it means you're just a racist asshole like everybody else” (Alexie 116). The statement follows Arnold's announcement that he is in love with a white girl. He emphasizes the fact that he has fallen in love with a white girl but remains oblivious to his own prejudice.

The internalized prejudice the Native Americans have against white people most often unites them but in some instances divides them. In Love Medicine it unites them in the sense that they avoid white people and stick to their tribal community, but when they engage in relationships with white people there is a conflict that divides them. In The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian the prejudice draws Arnold closer to his tribal community, until he is forced to acknowledge that his pre-assumptions and prejudice were wrong all along.
Blaming

In both novels blaming somebody or something else for their own problems is a reoccurring problem. In most cases the government or white people are blamed for problems within the tribal communities. In some cases the blame is rightfully put on the government or on white people but in most cases not fully. An example of this can be seen in *Love Medicine* when the government is blamed for the eviction of Lulu, “That land had always belonged to the tribe, I was sorry to find, for now the tribal council had decided that Lulu's land was the one perfect place to locate a factory. Oh, I argued. I did as much as I could. But government money was dangling before their noses” (Erdrich 138). The tribal council is not held accountable for the eviction rather the government that made an offer to the tribal council. The government was interested in establishing a factory on Native American land but the decision to evict Lulu was the council's. Lulu secondly blames her lover Nector who is the head of the council.

In the novel alcoholism is also blamed on white people, “They sold you booze for furs and then told you not to drink” (Erdrich 326). Another example of blaming alcoholism on something abstract is when Lipsha, raised by Marie and Nector, is in denial of Nector's mental condition. He consults Nector's lover Lulu who believes Nector was a genius and his mind simply exploded. Lipsha thereafter glorifies Nector and his deterioration, “I know the feeling when your mental power builds up too far. I always used to say that's why the Indians got drunk. Even statistically we're the smartest people on the earth” (Erdrich 231). He excuses alcoholism on positive attributes and then proclaims a false statement. It is correct that white people introduced alcohol to Native Americans but their addiction cannot in the same sense be blamed on white people. The problems with alcohol dependencies can on the other hand be more common among Native Americans because of genetics. Research has found, as previously mentioned in the thesis background, found that a majority of Native Americans' lack an enzyme that minimizes the risk of developing alcohol dependency but it has not been proven that they possess an enzyme that increases the risk.

In *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* Arnold often excuses the bad treatment he receives from Native Americans by, among other things, blaming white people. He blames the lack of acceptance within the tribal community on the introduction of white culture:
Now, in the old days, Indians used to be forgiving of any kind of eccentricity. In fact, weird people were often celebrated. Epileptics were often shamans because people just assumed that God gave seizure-visions to the lucky ones. Gay people were seen as magical, too. I mean, like in many cultures, men were viewed as warriors and women were viewed as caregivers. But gay people, being both male and female, were seen as both warriors and caregivers. (Alexie 155)

He uses this excuse to forgive the harassment and abuse he faces within his community and he uses it to remind himself that he is no true Native American because of his choice to go to a school outside of the reservation, “They didn't beat me up too bad. I could tell they didn't want to put me in the hospital or anything. Mostly they just wanted to remind me that I was a traitor [...] Of course, ever since white people showed up and brought along their Christianity and their fears of eccentricity, Indians have gradually lost all of their tolerance” (Alexie 79). He knows that the individuals that beat him up are aware of his condition and his fragility but still pardons them because he, at this point, sees himself as a traitor to his own kind. He is perceived by his tribal community as assimilating to the culture of the oppressor and abandoning the culture of his forefathers when he in reality is going through changes while finding his own self.

In both novels some characters choose to blame something abstract instead of facing the real problem. In Love Medicine blaming white people or the government is done in an attempt to unite their community when other things, such as alcoholism or eviction, are dividing them. In The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian Arnold blames white people in an attempt to include himself in his community and excuse their exclusion and abuse of him. It could be interpreted that by blaming white people the Native Americans are opposing the former colonial power and attempting to re-establish their own culture and identity.

View on White Society

The Native Americans in both novels have strong opinions about the government and white society in general. Very few characters in either novel have experience of
partaking in white society, for the majority of the characters have hardly ever left the reservation. The opinions established within the societies are founded on how their Native American nation has been treated in the past.

In *Love Medicine* great focus is put upon the allotment of land when the tribal communities were allotted barren land, with few resources, “They gave you worthless land to start with and then they chopped it out from under your feet” (Erdrich 326). The whole tribal community is unanimous in the opinion of being deprived of their homeland, the land that is rightfully theirs. Throughout the novel emphasis it also put upon the fact that Native American culture has changed since the arrival of white people and later when their religions spread:

That makes problems, because to ask proper was an art that was lost to the Chippewas once the Catholics gained ground […] and farther back, to the old-time Indians who was swept away in the outright germ warfare and dirty-dog killing of the whites. In those times, us Indians was so much kindlier than now. We took them in. Oh yes, I'm bitter as an old cutworm just thinking of how they done to us and doing still. (Erdrich 237)

The Native Americans are also united in their distrust in the government and the legal system. Their reasons for this distrust are because of the unreliability of the government, which did for example violate its primary promises twice in the 20th century, and the unfair treatment Native Americans have received (Fiske-Rusciano & Cyrus 223). This betrayal is apparent throughout the novel, “Higher Power makes promises we all know they can't back up, but anybody ever go and slap an old malpractice suit on God? Or the U.S. government? No they don't” (Erdrich 245). There is, however, also rumours circulating amongst the Native Americans, “I would have to get on the government bus and go off to boarding school. Some children never did come home, I'd heard” (Erdrich 280). In the past, in the beginning of the 20th century, Native American children were sent to boarding school where they were forbidden to speak any other language than English (Fiske-Rusciano & Cyrus 221). The children lost their culture, their mother tongue and were partially assimilated into white society which definitely can be seen as them being lost. There were, however, cases where students lost their lives due to disease or malnutrition (“Boarding Schools”).

In *Love Medicine* the government is also portrayed as a conspirator to turn the
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Native Americans against each other, “Indian against Indian, that's how the government's money offer made us act. Here was the government Indians ordering their own people off the land of their forefathers to build a modern factory” (Erdrich 283). When the government makes offers to the Chippewa nation and the tribal council accepts the community presumes it is a conspiracy. The tribal council is not seen as the responsible party on any occasion. They are, however, seen as traitors, “The United States government throws crumbs on the floor, and you go down so far to lick up those dollars that you turn your own people off the land” (Erdrich 284). Money contributed by the government is a factor that divides the tribal community. They are in desperate need of money but the citizens are not willing to cooperate. The characters often complain of their economy and how they are not able to get a job and that they are not paid well. However, both Nector and Albertine are both paid very well when they are working (Erdrich 123, 198). Nector does not want to keep the well paid jobs partially because he thinks they are demeaning; for example he will not work as an actor for the characters he has previously been playing were killed (Erdrich 123). They are also unwilling to cooperate because they are not willing to participate in the colonizer's narrative or version of history. This will to fight back is often existing within colonized people and it is an important aspect of decolonization.

Their view on white society leaves the characters with expectations of the prejudice they are going to encounter, for example when the character Albertine runs away from home to the big city she enters the train station and expects to be thrown out, “How long would they let her sit? […] She had not foreseen the blind crowd” (Erdrich 168). She is surprised when nobody takes special notice of her or dismisses her from the place.

Rushes Bears' actions also speak for the Native Americans view on white society.
She hides one of her children to spare it from white schooling:

She had let the government put Nector in school, but hidden Eli, the one she couldn't part with, in the root cellar dug beneath her floor. In that way she gained a son on either side of the line. Nector came home from boarding school knowing white reading and writing, while Eli knew the woods. Now, these many years later, hard to tell why or how, my Great-uncle Eli was still sharp, while Grandpa's mind had left us, gone wary and wild. (Erdrich 19)
She fears the knowledge taught at the government school will “erase” the Native American within her children. When they are much older, Nector suffers from dementia and it is implied that white culture poisons the brain of Native Americans.

When members of the tribal community partake in white society they are to some extent condemned. An example of this is when Zelda's daughter Albertine leaves the reservation to study and pursue a career as a doctor. The relationship between the two has always been strained since the birth of Albertine put a stop to Zelda's ambition to become a nun, "She should have gone up the nun's hill to the convent, like she wanted, instead of having me. But she had married Swede Johnson from off-reservation, and I'd arrived premature" (Erdrich 10). Albertine was also a troubled teen and confesses, "I’d provided her with years of grinding grief. I had gone through a long phase of wickedness and run away. Yet now that I was on the straight and narrow, things were even worse between us" (Erdrich 11). Leaving the family puts more stress on the already strained relationship between the two, and a demonstration of this estrangement is when the family member June passes away and Zelda chose not to notify Albertine, “We knew you probably couldn't get away from your studies for the funeral,” said the letter, “so we never bothered to call and disturb you” (Erdrich 7). This prejudice is induced by the desire to keep the tribal community alive, which will eventually die out if its members leave the reservation (Lima 322).

In *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* there are several occasions where the tribal community ridicules or develop dislike towards white people. On one occasion a man who admires their culture is ridiculed by the whole community when he comes to a funeral to return a stolen item he was told belonged to the deceased (Alexie 164-167). Another example is the dislike of people who are there with good intentions, “I know it's weird, but the tribe actually houses all of the teachers in one-bedroom cottages and musty, old trailer houses behind the school. You can't teach at our school if you don't live in the compound. It was some kind of prison-work farm for our liberal, white, vegetarian do-gooders and conservative, white missionary saviours” (Alexie 29-30). The fact that these people view the Native Americans as people in need of saving is perceived as an insult.

What divides the community in *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* is when Arnold goes off to an off reservation school. Arnold has the option to go to another school on the reservation but still chooses to go to an off reservation school
(Alexie 45). He does this to receive a good education, which the reservation schools cannot give him. His community does not, however, believe in government education. He therefore becomes a traitor to his own people and his culture.

In both novels their negative and suspicious view of the white society unites the tribal communities. The reason behind this strained relation is the history of conflict between the Native American nation and the American government. When members of the Native American community choose to partake in white society they are condemned or in some way excluded from the community.

Family – Community – Individuality

To understand the dilemma of “breaking out on one's own” and still being a part of the tribal community it is important to understand Native Americans view on family, community, and individuality. Their view on family bonds is that kinships, such as spiritual, may in some circumstances be even closer than biological (Rainwater 15). Native Americans have for a long time striven to be identified as a group and not as singular individuals. The government, however, has not yet been willing to change the law of individual rights to accommodate the Native Americans (Alcoff & Mendieta 85). American law does not want to change the law for it could easily be misused (Lima 323-324).

In Love Medicine this view on family is the foundation of the whole novel. Erdrich tries prominently to stress the importance of family and how all lives are intertwined and none stand unaffected (Lima 316). Marie Lazarre/Kashpaw is a good example of this. As she was raised by the Lazarre family she is seen as one of them, even though they are not biologically related. Later she is embraced by Rushes Bear as her own daughter because she has proven her worth and in the same process Rushes Bear disowns her biological son because he proved unworthy. There are several similar examples throughout the novel.

In The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian this view on community is not as prominent, mainly because of Arnold' exclusion from the tribal community which makes it easier for him to leave the reservation. He is, however later haunted by his decisions: “I had cursed my family. I had left the tribe, and had broken something inside all of us, and I was now being punished for that” (Alexie 173). He is aware of his
deviation from this view group identity and when his grandmother passes away he believes he is being punished for this. At the death of Arnold's grandmother he is given a free pass by the tribal community:

I mean, I was still the kid who had betrayed the tribe. And that couldn't be forgiven. But I was also the kid who'd lost his grandmother. And everybody knew that losing my grandmother was horrible. So they all waved the white flag that day and let me grieve in peace. And after that, they stopped hassling me whenever they saw me on the rez [...] People had either ignored me or called me names or pushed me. But they stopped after my grandmother died. (Alexie 159-160)

The community comes to the realisation that he will always be a part of the community, because the community does not consist of single individuals but of families.

Later in the novel he comes to the realisation that a person can belong to several different communities, “I realized that, sure, I was a Spokane Indian. I belonged to that tribe. But I also belonged to the tribe of American immigrants. And to the basketball players. And to the tribe of bookworms” (Alexie 217). He deviates from the Native American view on community and individuality which made it possible for him to leave the reservation. He has, however, developed a strong bond to his family despite their problems and difficulties, “Yep, my daddy was an undependable drunk. But he'd never missed any of my organized games, concerts, plays, or picnics. He may not have loved me perfectly, but he loved me as well as he could” (Alexie 189). Despite his father's flaws he loves him unconditionally and he feels that he supports him.

In Love Medicine the view on community, family, and individuality is an immense force uniting them, but in The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian it does not affect Arnold to the same extent. His undeveloped bond to his community and his overdeveloped bond to his family confounds him and neither divides or unites him with his community.
Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to look upon if the Native American characters are prejudiced against the members of their own tribal community and to find out if the prejudice the fictional characters experience and express as Native Americans unites them as a community or not. It also aimed to investigate how the Native Americans view white society.

The Native Americans' view on white society has been presented in the discussion and it was found that the Native Americans in *Love Medicine* have a strong negative view of white society and the majority of the characters were suspicious of the government and its intentions. In *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* the tribal community ridicules and dislikes white people and they perceive aid from them as an insult.

To answer the main question of the thesis it was found that overall the communities stand united but when individuals deviate from the norms they are excluded. The tribal community in *Love Medicine* is not united to the same extent as the community in *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* for they have experienced internalization to a greater extent. In *Love Medicine* the internalised norms cause them to distance themselves from other Native Americans, for they are taught that they are allied with the devil. The Native Americans' view of family and community unites them but confounds the members when they are excluded for aspiring to be something more than a Chippewa or Spokan Native American. Through the prejudice they experience and express as Native Americans, they form a bond that keeps them together. In both novels experiencing, or the expectation of experiencing, prejudice drives the characters back to the tribal community. The Native American characters oppose the former colonial power and enforces the distance between white society and their tribal community by blaming their problems, such as alcoholism, on the government and on white people. In doing so a feeling of belonging is created. The conclusion drawn from the presented examples is that they are united on the premises that they conform to the Native American norms but any deviation from these norms has the potential to divide them.
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