The Disintegration of Native Identity in Zitkala-Sa's "Impressions of an Indian Childhood" (1921)

Zitkala-Sa'nın "Impressions of an Indian Childhood" (1921) Adlı Eserinde Yerli Kimliğin Çöküşü

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Abstract
The article at hand aims to investigate how Indian identity disintegrates due to White acculturation. Rather than concentrating on a positive construction of Indianness as a result of White culture, the emphasis will be on the dissolution and oppression of Indian values. Most often, the process of successfully containing values from two or more groups, in particular Indian and American ways of living, has been the central issue in scholarly works. However, there seems to be a lack of insight in the field of investigating the breakdown of Indianness. Through the use of Devon A. Mihesuah's adapted four life stages, it is the purpose of this paper to analyze Zitkala-Sa's short story "Impressions of an Indian Childhood" (1921). The following consequences of cultural imposition will also be explored, as they are crucial for understanding the themes of identity conflicts and resolutions prevalent in her autobiography.
Keywords: Indian Native Identity, Devon A. Mihesuah, "Impressions of an Indian Childhood", Zitkala-Sa

Introduction

Native American identity is often presented in both positive and negative images and most often on social platforms such as television, cartoons, books, and the like. Though many scholarly works attempted to shed light on the aftermaths of these effects on Native Indian self-image, there still seems to be a lack of insight when it comes to an in-depth analysis of the *(un)making* of Indian identity. Devon A. Mihesuah, the author of "Change, Destruction, and Renewal of Native American Cultures at the End of the Twentieth Century" (1999) states that most ethnic studies have primarily focused on African American issues where paradigms have been developed to understand identity conflicts they undergo. One example of such a paradigm is William Cross' "life stages" theory which was later developed by Thomas Parham and termed "Cycles of Nigrescence" (Mihesuah, p. 14). Furthermore, Parham states that there is no fixed racial identity as it is always subject to change, indeed, "a phenomenon that continues throughout the life span" (Parham, p. 223). The Indian identity under study should be viewed likewise. Even though Mihesuah establishes her model based on Cross and Parham's previous studies, one ought not to consider certain actions and beings as belonging under one fixed category/division. She further specifies this to concern Indian tribes and women in her analyses asserting that "there was and is no such thing as a monolithic, essential Indian woman. Nor has there ever been a unitary "worldview" among tribes and, especially, after contact and interaction with non-Indians" ("Commonality of Difference" p. 15). This part is particularly important as the present research offers an analysis of a young girl's inner struggles between American and Indian values both within and outside the tribe.

Mihesuah's source of inspiration, namely Cross, also emphasizes the danger of viewing identity matters in narrow terms, admitting that "oversimplification and primitive modes

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of analysis apply as well to the discourse on the psychology of the Black American" (Cross, p. ix). Cross seeks to complexify his study of Black Americans by going against conventional black studies. He utilizes a multitude of approaches to deconstruct black existence, such as distinguishing between personal and group identity as well as researching black identity development in literary/theoretical works made in different periods. Similarly, Frantz Fanon interprets psychoanalytic ways in which Black identity/psyche has been affected while protesting the stereotypical/fixed image Black identity appears in: "the reason is that the black man has to be portrayed in a certain way" (Fanon, p. 17). One last example of identity and the analytical models pertaining to existence can be given within the field of Orientalism, where Nabil Matar warns against generic frameworks and "conflated" templates in the historical context of Ottoman-European interactions (Matar, p. 6).

All of the above-mentioned examples have been developed as a consequence of earlier studies, e.g., Black and Oriental studies. However, there is a need for a more in-depth study of Indian existence when confronted with different lifestyles and/or thought patterns. As such, an extensive analysis in the field of Native Indian identity deconstruction is required, which this study aims to achieve. Mihesuah suggests Cross' model be implemented in the area of Indian identity to see how American dominant culture influences the ethnic minority group (Mihesuah, p. 14).

Considering the points made above, this article will concentrate on the Native Indian identity (*de)*formation within American white culture. It is rather the disintegration of Indian values that will be the leading factor to present how oppression, cultural imposition, and marginalization contribute to the dismemberment of Indian identity. To discuss the construction of Indian identity and the disintegration of it within the larger society, this study will utilize Devon A. Mihesuah's abovementioned article from the book *Contemporary Native American Cultural Issues* (1999). Mihesuah operates with Cross' model to explain Indian identity development while commenting on Indians' sense of belongingness within a culture "and a sense of their own uniqueness as a people" (p. 15). Current article will therefore make use of Mihesuah's adapted life stages, which are divided into four phases, namely "Pre-encounter", "Encounter", "Immersion-Emersion" and lastly "Internalization" (p. 15). These stages will be viewed within Zitkala-Sa's autobiographical short story "Impressions of an Indian Childhood" (1921) to examine the circumstances that contribute to shaping the Indian individual. The outline of "life stages" will thus lay the basis for which the construction of ethnic identity can be fully disentangled. It becomes crucial to operate with a literary work such as Zitkala-Sa's to bring forward the deeper cultural layers which to a great extent mold a person. The interest, in particular, lies in how a minority group, who has experienced and still encounters "racism, stereotypes, and oppression" (p. 14) reacts to choices they make in life as a consequence of living in early 20th-century America. The group dynamics in Indian communities, more specifically, the expectations, standards, and discrimination they are subjected to also play an important role in determining the Indians' lifestyle and ought not to be overlooked in the discussion of Indian identity-making. However, the focus of this paper is to highlight the cultural imposition of white hegemony upon Native Indians and the subsequent disintegration of their cultural values.

As this is the case, this article will center on the following research questions: How is the protagonist's life portrayed in Zitkala-Sa's short story "Impressions of an Indian Childhood" in terms of Mihesuah's adapted four life stages? What factors contribute to the gradual disintegration of the main character's cultural values and how are they presented in the story? What consequences follow as a result of this clash between two cultures? These questions are salient for the aim of fulfilling the task at hand. Furthermore, as culture is paramount when it comes to the process of building or dissolving an identity, it, therefore,

becomes essential to delve into the abovementioned questions. Mihesuah also underscores the influence of culture by citing Green, "a culture provides the individuals within that culture a way of life that is constitutive of what it means to be a human being" (p. 15). By separating an "external" culture into a further "internal" one, Green demonstrates that the former "consists of the economic, social, political, and technological styles of a people, and internal culture, which consists of the religious, philosophical artistic, and scientific styles of a people" (Green, p. 7). As it would oversimplify to analyze Indian identity through the lenses of one monolithic culture, it becomes inevitable not to view the disintegration of Indian identity within the scope of different cultural norms as well.

The first life stage that Mihesuah observes in the context of American Indianness is the "pre-encounter" phase. In this category, the Native Indians know that they are different in terms of skin tone, but they give little thought to race issues and are mostly not well-informed about their tribal history or culture (p. 17). These individuals often see themselves as inherently Indians who adhere to Indian culture, and traditions and attach importance to blood relations. They do not perceive themselves to be whites with the exceptions of some (p. 17). Although some may feel connected to "whiteness," there are Indians who, despite this affiliation, still "believe themselves to be inferior to whites" (p. 17).

Furthermore, the home environment plays a pivotal role in shaping a child's identity concerning their Indianness, as they first learn values from family members. Various public platforms, including literature, television, and social media, also influence a child's self-perception and their view of life both within and outside Indian society (p. 17). It is first during adolescent years that Indians are in pursuit of creating an identity on their own. As a result of how Indianness is reflected through public viewpoint, which is most often the way Americans perceive Indians, the child then romanticizes Indian culture according to the image(s) generated by the dominant culture. These representations are portrayed both negatively and positively in that former portrayals show Indians to be, inter alia, "warlike and ugly", whereas in the latter, they are associated with being "one with nature" (p. 25). Other portrayals of Indians closely associated with nature are also common. For instance, in Washington Irving's short story *Rip Van Winkle* (1819) where "the Indians considered them [the mountains] the abode of spirits, who influenced the weather, spreading sunshine or clouds over the landscape, and sending good or bad hunting seasons. They were ruled by an old squaw spirit" (p. 46). The pre-encounter and encounter stages also have this feature in common; namely the stereotyping that takes place in mainstream publicity. What is also crucial to accentuate is that some of these stereotypes, such as the connection to nature, are in fact circulated due to how Indians understand themselves in terms of identity. One of these examples can be found in the Ojibwe tribe, whose (super)natural spirit is understood through the concept of "manidoo" - an all-encompassing being that fills "all things and places" (White, p. 378). Furthermore, for the Ojibwe tribe, nature becomes "tangible and visible as well as invisible and immaterial" in which everything is "capable of metamorphosis" (Brehm, p. 679). Just as Indian children are influenced by their parents' understanding of Indianness, literary and academic stereotypes about Indian and white cultures have an equal effect on self-perception.

This is similarly true for the protagonist in Zitkala-Sa's short story. The young girl, whose upbringing parallels the author's own childhood, is raised on an exclusively Indian reservation by a mother who values Indianness and harbors deep-seated anger toward the "pale-faces", i.e., a white person (Zitkala-Sa, p. 11). The main character does not have any connection to other cultural groups besides her own. Only a few visits from missionaries draw her attention to what might await her on the "lands beyond [her] eastern horizon" (p. 10). Despite her mother's warnings about the white man's "bitter deeds" and the

discrimination she will encounter at the boarding school, the girl insists on going with them (p. 10). In the pre-encounter stage, Mihesuah describes how Indians regularly warn their peers about facing racist attitudes when they step outside the Indian environment (p. 19). Yet, Zitkala-Sa compares the "white" world to a "Wonderland" all according to what she has heard from her Indian friends (Zitkala-Sa, p. 9). The protagonist finds "desirable aspects of white culture and begins[s] to wonder about the usefulness of tribal culture" a phase that Mihesuah highlights as common among Indians in this stage (p. 19). Zitkala-Sa even makes use of the Latin expression "Veni, Vidi, Vici" in connection with the missionaries' presence on Indian reservation(s); "They came, they saw, and they conquered!" (p. 10). This is a strong message from Zitkala-Sa, and indeed an ironical one, that indicates a war-like situation between white and Indian culture where the former swiftly succeeds in defeating Indians on the political, cultural, and social fronts. It is plausible to state that the little girl, without being aware of the deeper meaning behind the phrase, only uses it because she has either read about it in juvenile literature or seen it being used on television or through another medium. Zitkala-Sa's curiosity about this "land," which she had heard so much about from friends, her mother, and public sources, contributes to forming a perspective on white society without ever being a part of it.

After romanticizing stories about white culture, Zitkala-Sa convinces her mother to send her to boarding school. However, it is only after encountering white teachers and authority that Zitkala-Sa becomes truly aware of the cultural differences and values she has to struggle with. Eyes that scrutinize her on the way to the boarding school early on make her aware of her dual status as "once a part of, yet apart from, American society," which is a common discriminatory experience among Indians, as Mihesuah notes (p. 19). Before attending the boarding school, Zitkala-Sa hadn't paid much attention to her appearance. However, she becomes overly conscious of her outfit and skin color to the extent that she is "constantly on the verge of tears" (Zitkala-Sa, p. 12). Mihesuah underscores the ensuing identity conflict that emerges after the Indian subject undergoes adverse incidents. This conflict, which steadily leads to the disintegration of Zitkala-Sa's identity, will be further elaborated on in the next section.

In the encounter phase, the protagonist, after experiencing an upheaval of her earlier life, is forced into re-evaluating her Indian background. Mihesuah asserts that Indians at this stage often "embark upon a quest to discover the truth" and divides this situation into three possible ways of adopting *or* discarding one's Indian identity (p. 20); One either sets out for a journey on "becoming an Indian," "becoming more Indian/rediscovering Indianness" or "becoming less Indian" (pp. 20-23). Zitkala-Sa can be said to fit into the second developmental step where she clings even more to her Indian values whenever white acculturation takes place. She regrets her decision to settle outside the Indian reservation, especially as she is continually reminded of how different and out of place she feels.

Zitkala-Sa makes use of metaphoric expressions to describe the uncomfortable situation that her younger self had to tolerate during her stay at the boarding school. For instance, she describes everything that has to do with white acculturation in mechanical terms, labeling the entire system to be the "white civilizing machine" (Zitkala-Sa, p. 16). Furthermore, Zitkala-Sa's perspective on life is shaped by a binary opposition that differentiates between nature and culture. More particularly, she makes a clear distinction between the Indian lifestyle and the white American way of being. Everything that resembles white civilization and authority is described as "cold," "loud," "chilly," "iron" and "icy" (p. 16) whose implementations considerably disturb Zitkala-Sa's existence. Not only is there a division between nature/culture, but also between being civilized/primitive as well as white/bronzed in the short story (p. 16). The little girl perceives the way rules are

forced upon them as an attack on her Indian values and principles; instead of adapting to what is expected at the school like the other Indian girls, she rejects them and embraces her Indianness even more. Her "civilizing process," so to speak, backfires and Zitkala-Sa is jolted into rediscovering her selfhood as a consequence of feeling a gradual disintegration of her Indian identity.

Mihesuah argues that in the second stage, Indians may encounter negative comments about their own culture which can motivate them to explore more about their heritage (p. 22). Some Indians also seek to learn more about their culture only after having moved away from their "tribal area" as they are provoked by the stereotypical and prejudiced views of Indianness to which they are subjected (p. 21). This is also the case with Zitkala-Sa, who deems it necessary not to submit herself to white authorities without putting up a fight. She had been stripped of her Indian values when she realized that attire, shoes, and hairstyle should be entirely changed for the sake of "education" and conduct rules. Her soft moccasins, blanket, and long braided hair stand in stark contrast to the mechanic way of being; wearing "hard noisy shoes", and "tight muslin dresses" and having "shingled hair" (pp. 12, 13, 18). For Zitkala-Sa, these instructions signify more than a mere change in appearance; she views them as crucial for preserving Indian values. It becomes a way for her to measure her Indianness. Mihesuah underscores how crucial appearance can be for Indians on the encounter stage to assert one's true self (pp. 21, 27). When her "thick braids" are cut against her will, Zitkala-Sa eventually feels that she has "lost her spirit" (Zitkala-Sa, p. 14). It becomes clear to the reader that Zitkala-Sa opposes white acculturation in the scenes where imposed values cause a slow destruction of her Indian existence. Cutting off her hair represents the most drastic change; metaphorically, it signifies a loss of her "spirit," leading her to feel that her Indian identity has been irreparably damaged under the harsh "iron routines" (p. 16). Before this episode, she also describes how the metallic noises from shoes, bells, and the "undercurrent of many voices murmuring an unknown tongue" lacerate her former "unlassoed freedom" and peace (pp. 13, 16). Again, Zitkala-Sa uses metaphors to express how these practices at the school contribute to the breakdown of Indian principles; noises that disturb Zitkala-Sa's "sensitive ears" symbolize white imposition (p. 13). Zitkala-Sa found comfort in knowing that her appearance defined her existence, yet she came to realize that resisting the system was futile. When her appearance was then stripped away, she felt utterly powerless, expressing her feelings as follows:

> Since the day I was taken from my mother I had suffered extreme indignities. People had stared at me. I had been tossed about in the air like a wooden puppet. And now my long hair was shingled like a coward's! In my anguish, I moaned for my mother, but no one came to comfort me. Not a soul reasoned quietly with me, as my own mother used to do; for now I was only one of many little animals driven by a herder. (p. 14)

Zitkala-Sa's marginalization is portrayed in this passage. Her isolated circumstances lead her to slowly adopt the American way of life, although she continues to harbor bitterness and resentment (p. 16). Yet, one can discuss how "Indian" Zitkala-Sa is, considering the Americanized terms that she uses throughout the short story. Not only does she make use of Julius Caesar's "Veni, Vidi, Vici" at the beginning of the story, but she also voices her desire to be independent of white authority through American phrases. When a white teacher playfully tosses Zitkala-Sa into the air, she wishes the woman to let her "stand on her own feet" (p. 12), which is a highly charged American idiom.

Apart from these phrases, the story is drenched with the theme of nature vs. culture, which again strengthens the "positive" stereotypes about Indian identity. Indianness is

continually linked with spiritual existence, natural phenomena, and wild nature/character as opposed to a more "civilized" lifestyle. The author may have used this binary relation to illustrate how Indian identity has consistently been stereotyped; this approach represents an inverted strategy where the message is not explicitly stated for the reader but rather implied. Nonetheless, it is also crucial to keep in mind that the author's aim could be to emphasize the link between Indianness and nature to show that they are indeed interrelated and that there should not be any distinctions separating them. According to Zitkala-Sa, being Indian implies a spiritual connection. Thus, analyzing this theme, one could argue that the author inadvertently reinforces the stereotype of Indians as environmentalists.

Regardless, the author succeeds in portraying how Indianness has been stripped of its core values. The reader can understand, through the use of Americanized expressions for instance, that the protagonist's viewpoint of Indianness has been influenced since her childhood; the disintegration of her Indian identity does not take place once she begins staying at the boarding school. From a very early age, Zitkala-Sa has been subjected to stereotypes as well as (romanticized) stories about what it means to be an Indian contrary to being white. It is only now that these patterns truly come forward. When Zitkala-Sa is caught between two cultures (Indian and White), she is unable to choose one, and attempts to contain values from both. Mihesuah assigns this state of being to be "Identification with two or more racial or cultural groups" (p. 24). In search of identity resolutions, the Indian looks for ways to create a meaningful existence without completely losing his/her Indian values. However, for a successful identification with two or more ethnic groups to occur, the groups must accept these individuals and make them "feel welcomed in both groups" (Mihesuah, p. 24).

This resolution can be applied to Zitkala-Sa's life to understand the disintegrative forces that shape her identity. Zitkala-Sa involves herself in learning more about white culture even though she does this unwillingly and on the grounds of "revenge" (Zitkala-Sa, p. 15). Learning English, pursuing an education, and assigning herself to an oratorical competition are all steps Zitkala-Sa takes toward conforming to the dominant culture. Although these are steps that she takes for the sake of her career, they make her engage with the cultural group. The more Zitkala-Sa involves herself in white culture, the less she feels affiliated with one specific ethnic/cultural group. When she returns home for summer vacation her mother expresses her dissatisfaction with Zitkala-Sa learning "the white man's ways" (p. 19). She wants Zitkala-Sa to stay home, but Zitkala-Sa in her adulthood chooses once again to spend her time "among strangers" (p. 19). Thus, it is in the encounter stage that Zitkala-Sa can choose her own path although she feels misplaced in both groups. It occurs to her that these two ways of living are irreconcilable which is partly why she feels the urge to change into her Indian outfit whenever she visits the residence. Her sense of displacement intensifies in her familiar surroundings, influencing her emotions and causing distress. Zitkala-Sa's frustration at not resolving her identity conflict, despite her efforts, reaches a climax when her mother offers her a missionary Bible in an attempt to alleviate her daughter's anguish. This backfires as she sees white acculturation as an unavoidable challenge that she simply must endure. It only exacerbates the situation that Zitkala-Sa is once again reminded by her own mother of the dominant culture's inevitable and enforcing lifestyle. Yet again, she is pushed towards that path and sees it as a necessary approach to build up a respectable life.

White dominant culture does not restrict its power to cultural, social, and political areas, but imposes authority upon the Indian way of life by making it evident that they also rule in the religious field. This must be the realization Zitkala-Sa makes when she breaks down

in tears: "I took it [the bible] from her hand, for her sake; but my enraged spirit felt more like burning the book" (p. 18). The white omnipotent power slowly closes in on Zitkala-Sa who ultimately revolts against her own destiny, "now my wrath against the fates consumed my tears before they reached my eyes" (p. 18). Her attempts at resolution are prevented by her mother's disapproval of Zitkala-Sa's decisions and the discrimination she faces at the school's oratorical contest. Mihesuah emphasizes the importance of Indians being regarded on equal footing to white people to feel a sense of belonging within their community. This is naturally aimed at Indians who seek to be a part of white culture (p. 24). However, in the example of Zitkala-Sa, the identification process dissolves, firstly with her mother's disapproval of her life choices and subsequently at the contest. Having experienced positive reactions after winning the oratorical contest, Zitkala-Sa had moved a step towards friendly feelings of recognition and acceptance. Yet, the episode was quickly overshadowed by prejudiced attitudes that only intensified her "hard feelings" towards white people (Zitkala-Sa, p. 19). Just as she had begun to progress in resolving her identity conflict, the incident sets her back significantly, forcing her to pursue the revenge-like mission of winning over "the white man's respect" (p. 19). The climax of this episode is when some students in an attempt to provoke Zitkala-Sa organize "a large white flag, with a drawing of a most forlorn Indian girl on it" with the word "squaw" written underneath (p. 19). This negative experience triggers Zitkala-Sa's previous feelings of being misplaced and ultimately results in augmenting her inner conflict. Usually, the use of stereotypical or prejudiced nicknames directed towards a minority either by way of movie or book titles enhances "feelings of inferiority among Indian girls" (Mihesuah, p. 25). Especially when they are at their developmental stage trying to establish a unique selfhood.

Towards the end of the story, Zitkala-Sa struggles to identify with either group despite her efforts to adopt and reconcile values from both White and Indian cultures. Due to the lack of recognition and approval from both groups, she ends up not belonging to any of them, expressing her hopeless condition as in the following: "Even nature seemed to have no place for me. I was neither a wee girl nor a tall one; neither a wild Indian nor a tame one. This deplorable situation was the effect of my brief course in the East, and the unsatisfactory 'teenth' in a girl's years" (Zitkala-Sa, p. 17). Before the oratorical contest, the author portrays how practices from the dominant culture, partly influenced by her mother's behavior, gradually break down Zitkala-Sa's identity. Not feeling a sense of belonging to any group, the protagonist then looks for other ways to construct an identity. This stage is labelled as "Immersion-Emersion" by Cros, and is the third life phase applied by Mihesuah within an Indian context (p. 28). At this stage, Indians often "engage in aggressive behaviour," where they participate and engage in political activities while displaying hostile behaviour towards white people (pp. 28-29). Their violent approach has a dividing effect, often drawing a sharp distinction between Indians and non-Indians.

Zitkala-Sa settles for this strategy after having felt discriminated against. In addition to this, white acculturation also makes her want to integrate Indian values into her life. She frequently judges the other Indians' quick acceptance of white "civilization" rules and measures her Indianness according to theirs. Considering herself more Indian for instance in terms of clothing and conduct, Zitkala-Sa reveals that she, without knowing, demonstrates a "redder than thou" attitude, which is commonly seen among Indians in the "Immersion-Emersion" phase (Mihesuah, p. 29). As mentioned, Indians also act violently in this developmental stage, protesting, demonstrating, and rebelling against the dominant white hegemony and other Indians, whose identities they question (p. 29). While Zitkala-Sa does not resort to physical violence, she still holds violent feelings such as revenge, bitterness, and hostility towards white people to prove her worth and gain the respect of

(white) people around her. She has turned her lifestyle into a mission where she simply has to accomplish victories to demonstrate her identity, both for herself and for the white majority. This is evident after Zitkala-Sa wins a prize for the oratorical contest, where she expresses her dissatisfaction with her success: "the little taste of victory did not satisfy a hunger in my heart" (Zitkala-Sa, p. 20). With this quotation, the author also shows how deeply involved and immersed her younger self was in proving the importance of her Indianness. Moreover, this could also be a strategy to hold on to one's Indian values after having realized that they are in danger of disappearing.

Cross' last life stage is termed "internalization"; here, the individual has come to peace with his/her identity, becoming "biculturally successful" (Mihesuah, p. 29). Here, the Indian is considered level-headed, meaning that s/he can discuss issues concerning race, ethnicity, and identity with their peers. Most Indians have processed their conflicts, although some have internalized their suffering while still struggling with identity issues (p. 29). Several of these unresolved conflicts are the consequences of "discrimination, rejection of one's identity choice by Indians and non-Indians, unfamiliarity with tribal culture and residence away from the tribe [...] and appearance" which are all elements intensifying the Indian's inner conflict in life (p. 29). This "internalized oppression", a phrase mentioned by Maria Root concerning the identity development of biracial individuals (p. 193), is also a prevalent theme in Zitkala-Sa's short story. The protagonist has struggled with identity issues throughout her childhood and adulthood. Zitkala-Sa finds herself in conflict with both her Indian heritage and white cultural influences, where she had once felt a sense of peaceful belonging to her ethnic group (Indianness). This also demonstrates that identities cannot be fixed into specific life stages or categories. Given the constant flux and phases in life that bring about changes in belongingness, it would be incorrect to suggest otherwise.

Zitkala-Sa's resolution of wishing to identify with both groups fails and her choices are rejected by both cultures; Zitkala-Sa's mother perceives her choice of wishing to return to the white way of living as reprehensible to their tradition. White culture in the form of the school environment also judges her choices of wishing to maintain Indian values. The discrimination she encounters from both sides results in an identity clash that leads to a gradual disintegration of her self-image, character, and lifestyle. As a result, Zitkala-Sa is not at peace with herself at this fourth life stage. However, since the story remains open-ended and the protagonist is still young, there remains a possibility that Zitkala-Sa may, at a later stage in life, find inner peace and belongingness. It can therefore be stated that her identity, as depicted in the story, is undergoing disintegration because she struggles to harmonize White and Indian values as she desires at that phase in her life.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the current article has delved into an analysis of Indian identity through Mihesuah's adapted version of the four life stages. Mihesuah was influenced by Cross and Parham's model for Black people and felt the need to extend it further by examining Indian lives. Just as these scholars' model unfolds the "process of becoming black" (Mihesuah, p. 14), present paper has aimed to explain Indian identity constructions, conflicts, and resolutions. While Mihesuah concentrates on both the negative and positive experiences that help shape the Indian individual, this article has solely focused on the negative ones that contribute to the disintegration of Indianness. Hence, instead of the process of *becoming* Indian in Zitkala-Sa's "Impressions of an Indian Childhood," it is rather the disintegration of Indian identity and the roads that lead to it which has been the focal point. Further research within the field of Indian identity can be conducted, investigating the formation or disintegration of Indian identity with different intersecting cultural and/or

religious factions, such as Native Indian Jews or Native tribes settling in different countries. Another research area could involve applying W. E. B DuBois' theory of "double consciousness" (p. 5) in order to explore the philosophical aspects of Indian identity or adopting an interdisciplinary approach by developing new models independent of Black or Oriental studies.

This paper finds that Zitkala-Sa does not achieve a definitive resolution to her identity conflict by the end of the autobiographical story. Zitkala-Sa counteracts the hegemonic White way of living but at the same time cannot live without some of the practices exerted by that culture. For her, it becomes "next to impossible to leave the iron routine after the civilizing machine had once begun its day's buzzing" (Zitkala-Sa, p. 16). Hence, the clash between Indianness and White acculturation becomes evident through a breakdown of Zitkala-Sa's identity. She struggles to reconcile her Indian and White American values, which leaves her with conflictual feelings toward both groups as she is unable to find her place in the world (for now).

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