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ORIGINAL PAPER

Assessing Cultural Life Skills of American Indian Youth

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Abstract While the global United States society emphasizes independence and emancipation from parents and families as appropriate transition tasks for adolescents in foster care, American Indian communities tend to stress interdependence and continuing youth, family, and community connections. The purpose of this naturalistic collective case study is to describe cultural life skills needed by American Indian youth to leave foster care and successfully transition into adulthood. Three Northern Plains Native reservations and two urban Indian communities participated. The research team partnered with the American Indian gatekeepers, elders, youth, and professional staff in efforts to embrace qualitative methods, considered the best way to legitimate and liberate Native ways of knowing. Findings take into account the subtleties of vast diversities among America's First Nations' people and support the importance of positive cultural influences in youth identity development.

Keywords American Indian youth · Cultural life skills · Foster care, Youth work · Youth development · Bicultural youth · Marginal culture · Native American youth · Community youth development · Participatory research

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Introduction

A breakdown in many of the North American tribal systems, families, and communities over the past 500 years is due to social, cultural, and economic devastation that has resulted in the highest rates of most social problems in the U.S. (Willeto & Goodluck, 2004). Colonization of American Indians has decimated Indian economies with the loss of an immense land base. The context of reservation and historical federal policy inform the lived experience. Historically, colonization strategies tried to assimilate Indians into mainstream society, leaving behind traditions, language, beliefs, and practices. Forced assimilation policy required attendance at federal boarding schools, actively discouraged traditional practices, and robbed reservation communities of their youth, thus leaving these communities bereft and with a strong sense of a skipped or missed generation (American Humane Association [AHA], 2001; Long, 1998).

That missing generation was raised in institutions that provided no means for learning the essentials of parenting but, rather, left that generation without positive sociocultural models and with a diminished connection with the traditional way of life, untutored in tribal practices and beliefs about child-rearing practices, language, and spirituality.

In the new millennium, economic deprivation and geographic isolation in the reservation communities have made it difficult for these communities to move beyond the poverty level. It is well-documented that jobs, housing, and educational opportunities are limited for contemporary native youth residing on the reservation[1]. For example, unemployment rates on Rosebud and Pine Ridge have exceeded 65% each year since 1980. Current higher education institutions include several tribal universities and colleges located in the center of the reservation or in neighboring cities, but they all offer limited coursework.

Social problems associated with poverty, high levels of alcoholism, and inconsistent parenting impact the well-being of children and families living on-reservation. Substance abuse levels are reported to be significantly higher for reservation communities. Inaccessibility of resources in these isolated communities is typical. Housing problems and affordability are equally problematic. Public transportation is largely non existent. It is common to find higher school dropout rates, childhood sexual abuse and domestic violence, and a lack of positive alternative resources for Native youth. Research has concluded that psychiatric disorders among Northern Plains Indian adolescents manifest significant psychiatric symptoms that warrant treatment; suicide rates are two to three times higher than children of other races (Healthy Nations, 1996). Yet there is a considerable lack of treatment resources available on or near the reservations.

One Community's Experience: Denver Urban Indian Lifeways

Providing an overview of America's First Nations people is complex given vastly diverse lifeways and social customs. In the Denver metropolitan area, there are over 14,000 American Indian residents from over 100 different tribes (DIFRC, 1999), and

[1] Contact author for references [See AHA (2001). Casey Native American needs assessment project (Rosebud & Pine Ridge) for statistical and descriptive information about Rosebud and Pine Ridge communities

one of the two major tribes represented is the Lakota. Some families have lived in Denver for several generations, and others travel back and forth many times a year. More than 40% of the Native children are living below the poverty level. Over the past 10 years, they have consistently had the highest dropout rate and lowest graduation rate in the city, and only 15% begin kindergarten with any prior exposure to preschool education (DIFRC, 1999). The American Indian community in Denver is much more diverse in terms of socioeconomic descriptors than any one tribal community. Many tribal identities are included, but also a broad range of income categories and levels of educational achievement are represented.

In Denver, the American Humane Association (2001) reports: There is a higher level of poverty compared to non-Indian populations; there are more family disruptions in terms of consistent parent–child relationships; there are higher levels of alcoholism, unemployment, health problems, homelessness, and unstable housing; and higher numbers of youth drop out of the formal education system before completing high school. The Native population in Denver includes those who have been dislocated both geographically and culturally from their traditional communities. Care is impacted by dislocation often due to out-of-home child care provided by extended families.

Added to the aforementioned challenges are the factors involved in making a life in a large metropolitan city, complicated by layers of bureaucracy. Poverty, alcoholism, geographic isolation, and higher numbers of children in each family have impacted the quality of care of Native children. Child abuse and neglect risk factors leading to the removal of Indian children into foster care are associated with a deeply rooted historical context.

Consequences: Foster Care

Compared to what existed prior to European contact, the intrusion of boarding schools and missions, adoption, and foster care practices only served to further separate children from their tribe and families. In 2001, there were over 565,000 children and youth placed in foster care, and approximately 10,994 (2%) of these were American Indian or Alaska Native youth (US Department of Health and Human Services [DHHS], 2002, p. 2). These data are deceptive, however, since there is tremendous variation by state in the percentages of American Indian youth living in foster care (Earle & Cross, 2001). For instance, in South Dakota, 67% of all fostered youth are American Indian. The overall small percentages of Indian youth in the system are often seen as a reason for focusing on groups with larger numbers or percentages of children. Yet the disproportionate numbers of Indian youth in out-of-home placement in some areas of the country are cause for both alarm and for the development of practice tools to better serve Indian youth and address the disparity.

Protective Factors

On the other hand, protective factors, such as the extensive involvement of family and community are more present in American Indian families, on- and off-reservation. The extended family, community, and tribal relationship takes precedence over all else. A strong sense of belonging relies on cultural ties and social relationships and a sacred sense of connection with one's ancestry and tribal history (Garrett & Garrett,

1994). Many Indians will describe some aspect of their family or tribal heritage and affiliation when asked to describe themselves.

The strategic health care plan (AHA, 2001) in Denver for urban Indian youth and families calls for a two-pronged approach: (a) comprehensive health center, substance abuse center, health evaluation, and planning programs; and, more importantly, (b) finding relevant ways for urban children, families, and youth to reconnect with their native cultural and spiritual traditions of identity, strength, and renewal.

Due to recent economic development, Northern Plains reservation communities are also eager to reinvest in youth and family programs framed in tribal tradition and lifestyle. Collaborative efforts with surrounding governmental agencies have provided health, education, and welfare community ventures that include language and cultural programs, parent education, early childhood education, youth mentoring, and elder services. Plans for youth services are couched in an informal, extended family system orientation that has persevered to maintain and preserve families and communities.

Emancipation

About 20,000 foster youth emancipate each year in the U.S. Numerous researchers have found that emancipating youth struggle on their own and encounter greater than average rates of homelessness, joblessness, drug and alcohol abuse, physical and mental health issues, and educational deficits (Buehler, Orme, Post, & Patterson, 2000; Nollan et al., 2000). The situation is more complex for Indian youth. It is important to be aware that due to educational and employment opportunities located off-reservation, reservation youth must relocate to unfamiliar urban areas for schooling and jobs. Although some move permanently to urban areas, others move back and forth between a variety of settings including reservation and urban communities. It is no surprise that relocating to the outside community, away from the reservation, affords obstacles to Native youth that include confronting racism and discrimination and blatant threats to personal integrity.

Two Worlds' Context

Although data are scarce, it appears that Indian youth have even worse outcomes than non-Indian youth upon exit from foster care. The risk factors found in these varying settings lead to different outcomes and suggest that American Indian youth should be prepared to live in two worlds, becoming culturally proficient about tribal traditions, cultural values, and belief systems on the one hand and also personally competent cross-culturally in the Euro-American world on the other (Clemens, 2000; Long & Curry, 1998).

Enculturation is concerned with the extent to which individuals identify and have a sense of pride in their own ethnic culture, yet integrate a second cultural lifestyle into their lives (Zimmerman, Ramirez, Washienko, Walter, & Dyer, 1995). It differs from the acculturation process that is more concerned with a linear model involving degrees of adaptation to the majority culture, thus leaving behind one's own ethnic identity. The challenges inherently found in entering adulthood successfully for Native youth appear to be bound in adapting elements of life skills from *both* one's tribal community and from the mainstream society. Enculturation does not require

giving up language, cultural and traditional life styles, and ultimately, one's tribal identity. The construct appears to be a meaningful protective factor and useful in understanding Native youth development (Long & Nelson, 1999). The focus becomes one of celebrating ethnicity, social norms, and values rather than on comparisons to mainstream society.

Youth Transition From Foster Care

In 1986, the federal government recognized that outcomes for fostered youth were poor and passed a law that requires that youth living in out-of-home care be assessed by age 16 for readiness to transition into adulthood by age 18. The notion was, and remains, that assessment heightens awareness of deficits and would, in turn, inform caregivers on where to focus instructional activity. Few life skills assessments have been offered to try to meet this public mandate. Unfortunately, none have offered adequate psychometric properties for use with youth in out-of-home care, all are fairly expensive, and none address the unique needs and concerns of American Indian communities.

A policy change leading to the research described here was passage of the Foster Care Independence Act (1999) and the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program in 1999 (US, DHHS, 2002). This act provides greater flexibility for states to carry out programs designed to help youth make the transition from foster care to self-sufficiency (US, DHHS, 2002). The legislation is important for Indian Child Welfare because the law requires that states consult Indian tribes and consider the needs of Indian children when developing state five year plans or programs to assist youth in transition out of foster care (Clemens, 2000).

In 1994, Casey Family Programs (CFP) began building a practice-based, youth-centered tool to meet the need for life skills assessment in the United States. Since that time, the Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment (ACLSA) has evolved into a robust and multilevel tool capable of gauging life skills behavior, knowledge, and performance from age 8 to young adulthood. It attends to life skills among seven domains: daily living skills, self-care, social development, work and study skills, money management, housing, and community resources. The ACLSA is self-administered and is Web-based. However, it was *not* especially designed to tap the unique or special needs or issues found in any particular cultural group or circumstance, including the life skills cited as desirable in American Indian communities.

While the global U.S. society emphasizes independence and emancipation from parents and families as appropriate transition tasks for adolescents, American Indian families tend to stress continuing connections and interdependence (McCormick, 1997; Red Horse et al., 2000). A major reason that youth transitional services have not been adopted by Indian communities is that the concept of independence is based on values of urban, Euro-American culture (Shafer & Rangasamy, 1995). Findings will address how themes compare and sometimes are contradictory.

Ethnic Identity Formation

The original ACLSA measure is based on a strengths framework of ethnic identity formation in a society of multiple cultures (adopted from work of Atkinson, Morten & Sue, 1998; Cross, 1971, 1991; Phinney, Chavira, & Tate, 1993). Cultural identity

formation involves knowing your place in the world. The ethnic identity model focuses on the importance of what is learned from culture, family, and community. The theoretical framework underscores the unique journey children of color take, as compared with their Euro-American counterparts, transitioning into adulthood. The missing element, however, is a focus on the context of the diversity among American Indian cultural lifeways. A scale designed to measure adolescent bicultural ethnic identity while also addressing cultural activities, language use, spiritual tradition, and cultural involvement admittedly is ''complicated due to multiple tribes, distinct cultural areas, different languages, degree of Indian blood lineage, intertribal and interracial marriage, and the experience of living in two worlds'' (Moran, Fleming, Somervell, & Manson, 1999, p. 419). Ethnic identity models do not adequately address American Indian identity formation related to tribal membership, acculturation processes or, more importantly, historical trauma factors (Braveheart & DeBruyn, 1998).

There is much work to be done in this complex area associated with tribal identity formation. There is a need for a kind of identity framework where one can literally have a different name, as well as a different perspective of time, nature, and the American way (Tajfel, 1982).

The balance of this paper presents: (a) a rationale for building the American Indian Supplement to the ACLSA, (b) the methodology used to build the supplement, (c) findings with discussion, and (d) lessons learned.

Rationale

In 2000, it was clear that usefulness of the ACLSA was considered by American Indian Casey programs to be culturally compromised. Workers and the Native community expressed a need to conduct a study with an intent to explore cultural factors to supplement the existing ACLSA—one that would be a positive influence on Native youth identity and, therefore, would honor and celebrate reservation and urban diversity, traditional and contemporary culture, spirituality, and lifeways. It is important to note that work with young people must shift from targeting difference as dysfunctional to a model of positive youth development facilitating well-being and resiliency in young people (Kelley, 2004). Caution against generalizing findings across tribes, urban communities, and reservation settings is recommended.

The following research questions were asked about transitioning from childhood into adulthood:

1. What does successful adulthood look like in your community? Who are the ''successful adults'' in your community? Probes were asked about traditional and present day leaders, tribal chairs, medicine people, artists and crafts people, chiefs, midwifes, athletes, and so on, including roles and ages or stages related to adulthood, responsibilities and so on.
2. Looking at the seven ACLSA domains (daily living, self-care, social life, work and study, money management, housing, and resources) what are the commonalities and/or major differences within your community? Probes were asked about resources, accessibility, tribal culture and tradition, religion and spirituality, and so on.

3. What cultural factors related to adulthood are important in your community? Are there other skills, knowledge, or attributes that are important in your community? Probes were asked about spirituality, healing ceremonies, wisdom, ceremonies related to coming of age or rites of passage, and so on. From this list, the research team was able to begin looking at theoretical constructs unique to these Native communities.

Methodology

This is a naturalistic collective case study conducted with American Indian youth, elders, and community practitioners. The study demonstrates the importance of interactively entering and giving a voice to the life world of the poor and disenfranchised, to set their voices in relationship to powerful organizational structures that impact their lives but that they so often have little control over (Sjoberg, Williams, Vaughan, & Sjoberg, 1991). Naturalistic inquiry is intensely subjective, interpersonal, idiographic, value laced, and interpretive, often taking on a narrative storytelling form (Saleeby, 1989). It was chosen because it encourages exploration of unique ways of life.

Participants constructed a glimpse into American Indian reality couched in snippets of interrelatedness, truths, and wisdom. The task can be difficult for non-Natives who are often unfamiliar with the life worlds of poor and disenfranchised American Indian communities. Yet the process allows outsiders to experience an insiders' exposure to the richness and depth of tribal stories about successful adulthood.

Purposive sampling was used to recruit Native youth, elders, and program staff ($N = 96$) from three reservation program service areas in the Northern Plains region ($n = 71$) and from two urban Indian youth and family service centers in Denver and Portland ($n = 25$). Three groups were interviewed from each of the four sites and were selected by the gatekeepers based on the following criteria:

Tribal-enrolled youth: Their ages coincided with the ACLSA instruments (range of 8-15 and 16-20) and, after a pilot study, included the age range 21-26 to enhance knowledge about the experience of transitioning out of childhood placement.
Traditional Elders included enrolled tribal members with self-reported expertise in spiritual or cultural matters and Native language.
Staff included family services employees, enrolled tribal members, or their families.

Our participant group included 26 youth under the age of 21 and 12 youth older than 21. The average age of the 27 Elders[2] was 59 years old. There were 31 staff participants. Of the 96 study participants, there were more female participants

[2] Traditional elders designation in the context of Indian country is most often reserved for those having profound expertise in some aspect of tribal culture and are usually spiritual leaders recognized for their wisdom by the community

(n = 58) than male (n = 38). Nearly 96% were enrolled tribal members, with diverse tribal affiliations and mixed ethnicities represented. Non-Indian staff were primarily those who had married into the tribe.

Focus group methodology was used as a time- and cost-efficient approach (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to gather rich data about the reality of Native youth and family life. Groups were held at each of the three reservation program sites and two urban centers. The translator/gatekeeper was considered critical for communicating, especially with the elders. A traditional meal and gratuity were provided. Meals were scheduled to enhance the dialogue among community and researchers. Nevertheless, researchers made it a point to be available to each group of participants. Gatekeepers became coauthors.

Investments of time, learning the cultures, testing for misinformation, and building truths (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) were considered by the research team to be the cornerstones of the study. Audiotapes were transcribed and inductively analyzed into salient categories (Patton, 1990). A constant comparative method was used to test emergent themes against the data until no new categories emerged (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Translated and transcribed data were triangulated with a northwestern urban Indian youth center staff (N = 5), with field notes, existing literature, transcriptions of follow-up phone interviews with original key informants, and from notes with external colleagues in order to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings.

Other Considerations

Tribal Human Subjects Review

In response to the recent literature about being culturally sensitive when conducting research in Indian country (Steuben, 2001; Weaver, 1997) notwithstanding basic protection through the Institutional Review Board process, there was a second layer of committee reviews required by tribal council approval from the three reservation tribal governments. The final layer of review was conducted by the regional Indian Health Services service unit. This was time-consuming but gives the three tribes final approval on ALL publications associated with the research conducted on their reservation.

Compensation: An Honor

Sharing cultural knowledge and stories with outsiders is usually discouraged. Yet should a Native community decide to participate it is considered appropriate to honor the community and the individuals, as a whole, for doing something considered valuable for the community, and in this case for Native youth. Traditional gifts, common in many tribal honoring ceremonies, included household items such as towels, dishes, food, or gift certificates.

Native Gatekeepers

An individual who is a member or has insider status with a cultural group is considered a gatekeeper (Creswell, 1998). Tribal gatekeepers in these diverse commu-

nities were all recognized traditional[3] speaking members of the tribe and were probably the most influential in gaining initial community contacts and participation. In their dual role as research coinvestigators, they also guided what was considered culturally appropriate and respectful, according to local tribal tradition. Reactivity, the distorting effects of the non-Native researcher's presence in the field (Creswell, 1998), was countered by partnering with in-house tribal gatekeepers and hiring a Native lead researcher experienced in conducting research with tribal communities.

Community gatekeepers were able to translate focus group questions into the Native language for elders and to the community. Careful planning went into training non-Native researchers about ways to respectfully conduct research that crossed a variety of cultural norms related to age, roles, and tribal affiliations. For example, the traditional tribal meal held together was another opportunity to become acquainted across cultures and disciplines and to begin to break down barriers.

Findings

According to preliminary reviews of the ACLSA-American Indian Supplement, held in 2003 among reservation and nonreservation communities, consensus has been positive with one major exception expressed by the Alaska Native community (A.C. Downs, personal communication, 2003). A unique supplement to Alaska Native cultural complexities is being considered.

The emergent themes centered around cultural values, beliefs, and skills needed and considered common in many tribal communities: (a) money, (b) resources, (c) spirituality, (d) interdependence versus independence, (e) intergenerational learning, (f) tribal identity, and (g) multiple lifeways [See ACLSA – American Indian Supplement on www.caseylifeskills.org].

Money

The concept of money is viewed uniquely in reservation communities. Respondents reported that the Euro-American capitalist system associated with success is contradictory. Bartering is considered an equitable exchange system often used on the reservation. A young person noted that, ''The concept of money did not exist in traditional Lakota culture; money is esoteric...it's European. Bartering among tribal members is consistent with the cultural code.'' For example, handicrafts are often bartered; a handcrafted item may be exchanged for a ride to the city. The ACLSA instrument identifies skills related to knowledge about ATM services, yet banking institutions are rarely available on-reservation, even in the new millennium.

Having said that, newly developed tribal enterprises and fluctuating economic development expansion programs such as tribal casinos and the entertainment industry, on-reservation, invite a different perspective towards investing in financial life skills. Job development in surrounding areas will enable young people to remain in their Native communities but will also require higher education skills levels.

[3] In this study, the term ''traditional'' was used to describe tribal community gatekeepers who gave ''outsiders'' an opportunity to gain a much broader, but richer perspective about the tribal community, culture and language by exposure to those recognized as the ''traditional'' elders and spiritual leaders.

A young Rosebud woman reported that, ''We need to know how to prepare youth for college and financial assistance.'' Surprisingly, a young Pine Ridge woman acknowledged a need to understand ''credit card management.'' Skills associated with banking, financial aid, savings, rental agreements, and credit ratings are considered by participants as critical for young people. As tribal communities become more affluent due to the employment opportunities afforded by new economic infrastructure on-reservation, there is a need to learn money management skills, but consistent with and honoring the lifeways of tribal tradition.

Resources

Resources on-reservation are sparse, inaccessible, and much more diverse than are available to other communities. For example, although isolated tribal communities are changing, accessibility to resources such as employment, education, housing, and hospital care are limited and commonly located miles away in surrounding urban areas. Resources are provided differently to Native people through federally sponsored programs. Housing primarily accommodates low-income, married, tribal families. Lengthy waiting lists often require months and even years of waiting for young, single Indian people. Other social services are provided under a federal or tribal umbrella agency. The major concern for Indian youth is not only developing skills about *how* to access diverse Native resources (the traditional medicine person or the location of the local Indian Health Services Clinic), but also learning *who* is considered trustworthy in the Native community. Protecting confidentiality within these systems of care is considered a major concern, both on- and off-reservation.

Spirituality

Spirituality is highly valued and essential to tribal belief systems. Surprisingly to the outsider, there has been an influx of ecumenicity in traditional reservation communities. Respondents chose not to separate aspects of spirituality from religion. Each reservation community considered the blending of traditional spiritual practices with ecumenical beliefs to be reciprocal, complementary, and requisite to building adult life skills.

Knowledge about spirituality is commonly transmitted intergenerationally through elders, spiritual advisors, and medicine people as well as through the Native American Church and other ecumenical teachings.

> Being successful adults ... one of the things that is important is a balance in lifestyle. I see nothing in here [ACLSA measure] about spirituality, and that's really an important factor; it's important to us. (Elder)
>
> Youth need to know who their spiritual advisors are; what kind of ceremonies can help them. It seems like there is a need to have a whole section on spiritual development. (Staff)

Groups across sites expressed concern for the loss of connection between young people and spiritual mentors. An elder indicated that ''The older ones know who the people are that pray and have the medicine.'' Yet there are few elders, healers, and medicine people left in the reservation communities. One elder stated, ''When an

Elder dies or leaves, they take the teachings with them. It has been said that the young people will bring back into the circle that which we've lost.'' Another Elder declared:

> I was born in 1937 and my generation is the last to keep language going; my children don't speak it. Speaking English was encouraged as a child and we had to learn English. It was forced on them and I think that's how we lost a lot of things.

Even so, there is a cultural resurgence emerging within each of the tribal communities to enhance language and cultural lifeways in the schools. For example, on the Fort Berthold Reservation, the Mandan language is being taught to children and they are learning about sweat lodge ceremonies.

Interdependence

A major consensus was that the critical focus of becoming a successful adult was found in enhancing interdependence within one's family and tribal community rather than by seeking independence from family and community. It emerged as a major theme across reservation and nonreservation communities. Participants discussed this concept extensively.

> I think it [ACLSA measure] emphasizes the nuclear family; but it is non-Lakota because ... if somebody comes and they need a place to stay, even if you don't have room, but you have a floor and blanket, they have a place to stay. (Elder)

> Cook one big huge pot of soup and everybody eats from that...taking care of your relatives is important; if you do that then all of you survive. (Elder)

Intergenerational Learning

There was extensive discussion about the valued connection of family and community and ways stories communicate intergenerationally about norms, values, and beliefs. Relatedness within family and community systems is considered to be a standard marker of ''Indianness''. Participants described one example of how the natural flow of communication between tribal members often begins by sharing how one is related to family member (mother or father) and by tribe in order to establish connections across and within groups.

Values such as respect, roles, humor, interdependence, and relationships with family, tribal community, and other cultures are learned intergenerationally. A young woman spoke of ''prominent'' Rosebud Elders: ''One that practices Lakota values, utilizes white society for education, but doesn't especially have money.'' There were several discussions about the values gained from others living a disciplined lifestyle:

> Well, I have to make sacrifices if I want this or that. I know I'm going to have to give up a lot of time; I see my friends not doing it but I know I have to if this is what I want. (Elder)

Identity

Group connection and affiliation is also commonly expressed through numerous aspects of teasing. Indian humor is a communication style common among tribal

groups and recognized as a way to build connectedness among indigenous groups while, at the same time, relieving group stress (Herring, 1994). Laughing and joking is a major way to respond to issues that are emotionally complex. Indian humor is an example of ways that Indians connect with each other through their own tribal identity.

Identity with one's culture is concerned with tribal affiliation and expressed as knowledge and participation with tribal heritage, history, traditions, activities, and ceremonies. For example, Fort Berthold Elders consider rites of passage or coming of age identity ceremonies concerned with ''celebrating levels of competencies for males and females.'' For young Lakota boys, their ''first fish'' caught is ceremoniously offered to grandparents or other elders in the community and is a significant rite of passage marker. The importance of instilling cultural identity is the foundation of self-esteem according to Elders.

> Others responded that:
> Being proud of being Native American and knowing our place among the world.
>
> It is important to feeling comfortable and equal with whoever I am around.
>
> Knowledge about ''who you are'' and ''where you come from'' is critical [information] before you can begin to figure out ''where you are going.''

Other Elders were concerned about the lack of tribal connection among elders and young people. ''Young people are becoming Indian—not Mandan, not Hidatsa, not Arikarac—they are becoming an amalgamation of all kinds of things—the traditional piece is missing.''

Contradictory Lifeways

Life skills necessary to fluidly transition, ''to move away and come back home'', were considered important. Many participants shared examples of conflicts associated with lacking non dominant membership. Most respondents had accomplished the task of leaving and coming back to the reservation for schooling and had experienced a state of dissonance while away and a feeling of contradiction with tribal beliefs, attitudes, and values (such as language and social skills). They acknowledged off-reservation prejudice and the need to know how to deal with it. They also discussed issues of hopelessness, lack of alternatives and feelings of abandonment ''It's easier to live out there (off-reservation) because there's two things to do here (on-reservation): drink or go to the casino; there's not a lot of alternatives.''

Obstacles were described as a lack of family and peer support and community assumptions that they had ''sold out'' and ''turned their backs on their own'' when they left home. A young woman reported that, ''When you are trying to be successful, trying to do something for yourself, others will try to pull you down. A lot of people, even those close to you, will try to do that.''

Young people on each of the reservations also expressed the need to learn to express themselves ''verbally and in writing and ways to self-advocate.'' Another said that, ''We don't stand up and say what we want to say; even grandmas lack self-confidence.'' One young woman added,

> The conflict is to brag about oneself; it's ingrained in us and counter to putting a resume together and then to brag about ourselves. We need skills in job interviews and to be able to compete and promote ourselves.

The understanding was that leaving and returning to the reservation is often fraught with problems. With so much credence given to the need to relocate off-reservation for job and educational opportunities, findings suggest that social skills were critically needed to attend to leaving, yet also returning to the reservation.

Discussion

A traditional meal shared with the tribal elders, youth, and staff became an occasion to inform and challenge researchers about our own assumptions about Native lifeways, to help us understand. Stories were not written down and yet had survived and had been passed down from generations past. We were honored to literally ''walk in their moccasins'' over the 18 months we spent working on this study with Native people from the urban and reservation communities of the Northern Plains and of the Northwest.

Clearly, findings suggest that ACLSA money management skills and community resource knowledge differ for Native respondents. They did not place much value on the excessiveness associated with a preoccupation with accumulated wealth. Most agreed, however, that Native youth need to become adept at money management skills if they are to survive in both worlds, with an understanding that each world is largely premised on contradictory value systems and philosophies about money and economic approaches. Accessibility to community resources within the constraints of reservation and urban Indian communities is couched in concerns about trust and protecting confidentiality. Thus, knowing ''where to go'' and ''who to talk with'' are important skills for Indian youth.

The core of one's being is more concerned with a deep spiritual belief system and knowledge about what elders referred to as the ''proper way to take care of your mind, body, and spirit and, also, to realize one's purpose here on earth.'' Due to the influx of religion on these reservations, the blending with traditional teachings seem concerned with learning about the sacred drum, singing, dancing, sweat lodge, ceremonials and prayer.

Interdependence is considered to be a more realistic goal than independence within the context of traditional tribal values and beliefs. Therefore, successful transitional skills for Indian youth are more relevant as they apply to abilities that enhance interdependence and connectedness among family and tribal community systems than abilities of individuality and independent lifeways. Vast amounts of knowledge are transmitted intergenerationally among tribal people who have survived the history of devastation of tribal culture. The richness in stories was captured in a variety of narratives about pain, destruction, joy, and hope.

There is an understanding that these tribal reservations were limited in educational and career opportunities and, therefore, require young people to temporarily relocate off-reservation. Participants voiced the realization about the necessity of learning cultural life skills to enhance living in both worlds—American Indian and the global Euro-American world. However, the reality of oppression, experiences with racism and discrimination lead to suspicion toward others not of one's own

group**.** Injustice and discrimination lead to an erosion of trust in others and also lead to a diminished belief in the fairness of the world (Calhoun & Cann, 1994).

Conflicts found between the clash of value systems influence adolescents' self-concept and sense of ethnic identity. For many young Native people leaving the reservation for vocational and educational opportunities, it may be the first time they have interacted with people different from themselves. Respondents perceived hostility and racism off-reservation. Tribes are only beginning to address multicultural issues by adopting models about human diversity and integrating cultural immersion programs to enhance multicultural learning.

Reservation communities (and even urban Indian communities) are isolated from other cultures. Cultural isolation makes it difficult to learn about other ethnicities and cultural groups. Life skills that teach about other cultures and about compassion towards others are essential. Self-advocacy skills are considered reasonable in order to survive in both worlds. Elements of Native youth development skills are associated culturally but further work is needed to explore how these cultural factors are related to tribal identity formation.

Basic to emergent themes, successful adulthood for both males and females are concentrated in the following attributes:

1. Prominence: practice traditional tribal values, utilizing outside education but not necessarily formally educated, and not necessarily related to financial status;
2. Soft spoken and listens well;
3. Strong faith and spiritual belief system;
4. Family-centered or tribal-centered values, in a context of humor and self-confidence, expressed as follows: generous, humble, respectful, non-judgmental, self-disciplined (alcohol and drug-free), and goal-oriented;
5. Speaks out and is assertive;
6. Lives a healthy lifestyle expressed within a mentoring, teaching, and role modeling context, couched in the ability to respect and honor both worlds.

Lessons Learned

The American Indian Supplement is premised on factors that may be involved in a tribal identity formation model. Achieving a secure ethnic identity and strong feelings of pride in one's own ethnic group may buffer the negative impact of discrimination on one's psychological well-being (Martinez & Dukes, 1997).

Identity formation (Cross, 1971, 1991; Phinney, Chavira, & Tate, 1993) appears to be a formidable theoretical framework to assess cultural life skills where group boundaries are perceived as impermeable. For Native youth, knowing ''who I am'' rests in part on knowing ''where I come from'' and a sense of one's roots, as well as the ability to live in two worlds (Moran et al., 1999). Ethnic identity achievement, affirmation, and belonging may also provide a cognitive and affective framework for understanding and responding to racist events that are inherently demeaning and degrading to self (Wright & Littleford, 2002, p. 4). Identity models are only recently beginning to address American Indian identity formation within a bicultural or multicultural framework.

There were several important practice implications. Considerable thought must be given to creating identity models that address the uniqueness of tribal diversity and that allow for cultural nuances and strengths, yet take into account extensive cultural loss and acculturation experiences. American Indian youth are at risk for physical and mental health problems encountered from negative racial attitudes and treatment. Results also suggest that tribal self-identification among Native youth may be influential in providing inner resources for coping with prejudice and discrimination.

Our findings warrant further exploration about tribal identity formation models and strategies for coping with racial discrimination. Tribal identity formation enhances feelings of belonging and self-affirmation and is a practical concern for planning future culturally proficient interventions with Indian youth and their families. This shift to a model of positive youth development can enhance our understanding about how Native children and adolescents become self-motivated, socially competent, compassionate, and psychologically vigorous adults.

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