



Fostering Resilience

Avis Garcia, PhD November 11, 2020

The background features a repeating pattern of stylized, colorful feathers in shades of pink, yellow, and green, interspersed with strings of beads in various colors (orange, pink, grey, teal) and small star and swirl motifs.

Understanding the needs of Native Youth

- This presentation offers a comprehensive overview for understanding Native Youth for educators and practitioners base on current research
- Strengths and protective factors are discussed.
- Contextual influences are explored in terms of relationship between history and healing form intergenerational trauma and grief, the influence of acculturation, as well as current social, economic, and political issues that affect Native youth.
- Overview of common presenting issues and recommendations for working with Native youth.



Introduction

- To better understand Native youth, it is important to hear and understand their voices, stories and experiences as they experience it.
- Examination of internalizing and externalizing Native youth experiences and difficulties.
- The population of Native Americans represents only 1% of the US population.
- More than 566 federally recognized tribes.
- 324 federally-recognized reservations.

Demographics continued

- Largest tribes: Navajo, Cherokee, Choctaw, Sioux, Chippewa, Apache, Blackfeet, Iroquois, and Pueblo.
- 33.9% of the population are under the age of 18, next largest group is 30.9% between the age of 25 and 44, 5.6% are over the age of 65.
- 8% of Native American grandchildren live with their grandparents.
- More than half grandparents raise grandchildren for longer than 5 years.





Native American Challenges

- At a greater risk than peers of other ethnicities for a variety of adverse outcomes, including maltreatment, substance abuse, suicide, accidental death, violence and mental health problems.
- Communities of high rates of unemployment, poverty, physical and mental health disparities, violence, and lower levels of educational attainment.
- Researchers continue to identify links between historical trauma and feeling of anxiety, depression, anger, and avoidance.

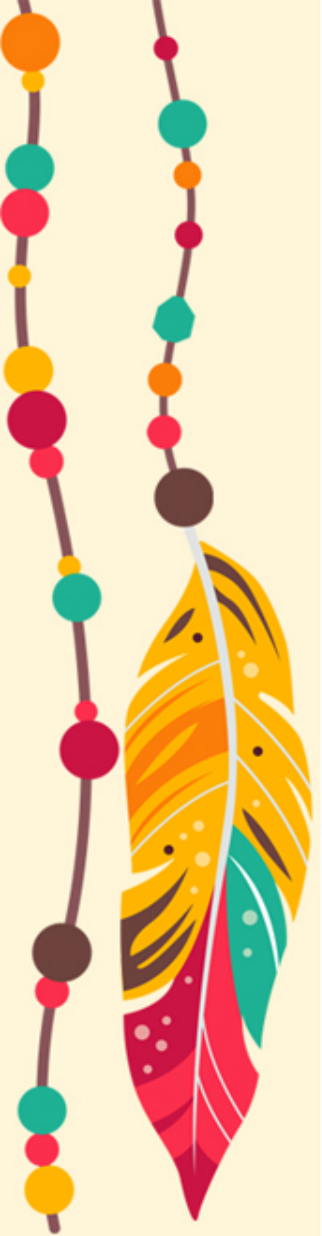
John vs. Mike Native 17-year-olds

- His father left the family with John was four and now he, his mother, and his younger sister live in poverty, struggling to make ends meet. Despite the stresses in John's life, he is on track to receive his high school diploma and at the end of the school year plans to attend college in the fall.
- Mike is from the same reservation with a similar family structure, but unlike John, Mike struggles to make it through each day. He has a criminal record, frequently experiments with drugs, and dropped out of school after the 8th grade. He appears unable to break the at-risk cycle.



Why is one resilient and the another vulnerable?

- One-half and two-thirds of youth faced with adversity are capable of transforming their lives and becoming successful, productive adults.



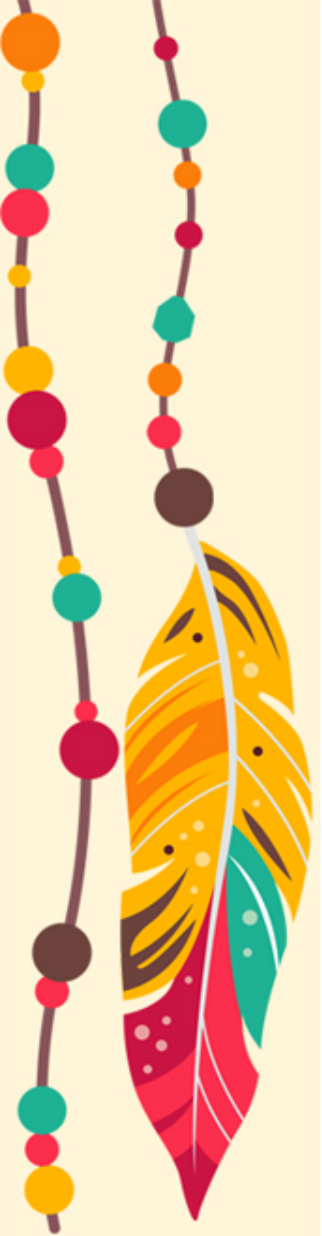
Embracing cultural practices

- Focus efforts towards renewal through cultural and community-based intervention models.
- Wellness centers based on healing concepts, as well as culture- and Language-immersion schools.
- At the heart of these efforts is the ongoing cultural belief that children are sacred.
- Surrounded by strong extended kin networks, participate in traditional ceremonies, that contribute to a sense of belonging and identity learning wisdom from elders.



Native Strengths in Context

- Meta-analysis focused on identifying strengths
- Specific strengths combined into three categories:
 - Extended family
 - Spirituality
 - Social connections



Strengths and Protective Factors

- Possess many strengths have helped to survive racism, forced relocation, and genocide (Braveheart and DeBruyn, 1988).
- No longer just surviving but thriving in many areas.
- Nearly 55% own their own home
- 70% age H.S. graduation rate
- 11.3% have a bachelor's degree
- 3.9% have earned a graduate degree



Strengths-based perspective

- Native people have always believed in and encouraged the potential of their people and have embraced the concept of resiliency long before it was named resilience. (Heavy Runner and Morris, 1997)
- Collection of principles, ideas and techniques that are involving.
- Honors the power of the self to heal and right itself with the help of the environment, the need for healthy alliances, and hope that life can get better.
- Need to identify strengths and resources of Native Americans



Resilience Defined

- The ability to cope with stress; a positive capacity of an individual to respond under pressure.
- Most studies suggest it is a dynamic process that enables the individual to respond or adapt under adverse conditions.
- These conditions could include social, emotional, economic, or personal aspects.
- Research tends to associate resiliency with positive outcomes independent of at-risk status, competent responses under adverse conditions, and recovery after trauma.
- Resilient youth successfully adapt to school environment in spite of poverty, family factors, and/or social issues.





Heavy Runner and Morris (1997)

- “Cultural resilience is a relatively new term, but it is a concept that predates the so-called ‘discovery’ of our people. The elders teach us that our children are gifts from the Creator, and it is the family, community, school and Tribe’s responsibility to nurture, protect, and guide them. Thus resilience is not new in our people: it is a concept that has been taught for centuries. The word is new, but the meaning is old” (p.28).

Indigenous Ways of Knowing

- Prevailing sense of indigeneity or “Indianness” based on common worldview and common history binds Native Americans together as a people of many peoples (Garrett and Portman, 2011).
- Indigenous knowledge forms have allowed tribal groups to maintain their existences in specific geographic locations over time.



Cultural Identity and Tribal Nation

- Cultural identity is rooted in tribal membership, community, and culture rather than personal achievements, social or financial status, or acquired possessions.
- Most Native youth the extended family (three generations) and tribal group take precedence over all other affiliations.
- The tribe is an interdependent system of people who perceive themselves to be connected members of the greater whole, rather than individual parts.
- For Native Americans, “Who you are is where you come from.”
- Traditional natives believe “If you know my family, clan, or tribe, then you know me.”





Family

- Non-natives often ask, “What do you do?”
- Native people may ask “Where do you come from? Who is your family? To whom do you belong? Who are your people?”
- Family may or may not consist of blood relatives.
- Common Indian way, to claim a non-blood-related person as a relative, welcoming him or her as a legitimate family member.
- Family can be a matter of both blood and spirit.
- Not unusual to be raised in several households over time.
- Grandparents, aunts, uncles and other members take raising of children very responsibly.

Wisdom Keepers

- Native elders are the keepers of sacred ways.
- Protectors, mentors, teachers, and support-givers.
- Native communities honor their elders.
- Recognizing their lifetime's worth of knowledge and experience.
- Function as role of parent, teacher, community leader and spiritual guide. (Garrett and Garrett, 1997).
- Refer to elders as Grandmother or Grandfather, is to refer to a very special relationship, characterized by deep respect and admiration.
- Special relationship based on mutual respect and caring between elders and children.

Spiritual Ways

1. Single higher power known as Creator, Great Spirit, or Grandfather.
2. Plants, animals, and inanimate beings such as rocks, like humans are also part of the spirit world. The spirit intermingles with the physical world.
3. Human beings have mind, body, soul and spirit.
4. Wellness is indicated through experience of balance and harmony at the physical (body), mental (Mind), soul (emotional), and spiritual levels of human existence.
5. Natural unwellness cause by the violation of sacred law.
6. Unnatural unwellness is caused by conjuring witchcraft, from those with destructive intentions.
7. Each of us are responsible for our own wellness.



Historical Trauma Healing

- Practices promote improved parenting skills and parent-child relationships.
- Improved relationships across generations may further serve as protection against substance abuse and the transfer of HTR to children (Gone, 2009).
- Native ceremonies require discipline and commitment, delaying gratification, and provide Native youth with healthy role models.
- Historical Trauma and Unresolved Grief (HTUG) addresses risk and protective factors for substance abuse through psychoeducational interventions that seek to restore attachment to traditional values.



HTUG model preliminary research

- Intervention goals are congruent with PTSD treatment where sense of mastery and control are taught.
- Within a traditional retreat-like setting that provides a safe, and affective containing space.
- Exposed to content, through audiovisual material.
- Provides cognitive integrations of trauma as well as affective cathartic work, necessary for healing.
- Traditional prayer and ceremonies, incorporated throughout, afford emotional containment and increased connection to indigenous values and a pre-traumatic tribal past.





HTUG model outcomes

- Integration into parenting sessions shows:
 - a) Preliminary trauma and grief resolution, decrease in hopelessness as well as increase in joy.
 - b) Increase in positive tribal identity.
 - c) Increase in protective factors and decrease in risk factors for substance abuse
 - d) Perceived improvement in parental relationships with children and family relationships across generations.
 - e) Perceived improvement in parenting skills, family connections and sensitivity to one's children.

Communication Style

- Emphasizes nonverbal communication over verbal.
- Moderation in speech and avoidance of direct eye contact are nonverbal communicators of respect for the listener.
- Careful listening and observation are exercised
- Storytelling is commonly used to express feelings, beliefs, and the importance of experience.
- Listeners are expected to be silent, patient, and reflective.
- Direct confrontation is avoided.
- Asking questions, interrupting, speaking for others, telling others what to do, or arguing are common in mainstream society, but contradict what traditional Native people have been taught as respectful and appropriate ways of interacting with others.



Native Humor

- Alive and well, serves a critical function in daily interactional style of Native youth, equipping youth to survive a great deal of adversity.
- Humor is a critical part of culture, esp. mealtimes.
- Family members often laugh, tease each other and share stories.
- Oral traditions communicate important life lessons with subtle humor expressed in stories.
- Often arrogant, manipulative, vain clown-like figure of rabbit, possum, Coyote teach hard lessons of humility.
- Laughter relieves stress and creates an atmosphere of sharing and connectedness.



5 Support Mechanisms

1. Strong intergenerational bonds
2. Expectation of productive roles in work and leadership opportunities
3. Positive engagement in church, school, and community life.
4. Close ties with grandparents and involvement with extended family.
5. Strong family connections with the community.

Schools can promote each of these five.

Resiliency of Native Teenagers

- None watch TV on a regular basis even if available
- Many chose a role model: 44% from nuclear family
- 89% chose something they excelled in many more than one skill.
- Over half 51% believed they were good at sports
- 92% very strongly believed education is important
- 87% valued having a job
- 75% engaged in sports and exercise
- Students believed their parent values were similar to theirs
- 100% parents valued education

Characteristics Identified

- Stable, peer relationships
- Problem solving skills
- Realistic future plans
- A positive sense of ability to achieve and effectively deal with tasks.
- Successful experiences
- An ability to communicate effectively
- Strong attachment with at least one adult
- Being accountable for themselves and their actions.





Family and school support

- External support systems
- Schools are critical to influencing resiliency because academic achievement can impact and serve as a predictor of resilience.
- Schools important social, cultural, and environmental sites for the development of student resiliency.
- Research findings revealed female students were more resilient and had higher GPAs than male students.
- Females scored significantly higher on all resiliency measures.
- Highlights need to provide more supportive structures specifically for male AI students.



4 Protective Processes

1. Alter the risks or child's exposure to the risk.
2. Break the cycle that follows exposure to risks.
3. Develop positive self-esteem and self-efficacy.
4. Create positive opportunities.

Activities for schools

- Increased opportunities for youth leadership.
- Meaningful involvement of parents in school.
- Appropriate professional development.
- View children with strengths rather than with deficits/risks
- Nurtures protective processes so they can succeed.
- Staff knowledge and skills can be developed.
- Schools must develop a positive attitude toward resiliency
- All stakeholders must understand that the school as a unit can foster resiliency.
- Make information about development of resiliency readily available.
- Teachers need to understand that they make a real difference in student's ability to acquire resiliency skills.



Recommendations for educators

- 1) Include goal setting, and in particular career education, as an integral part of the curriculum.
- 2) Encourage participation in extra-curricular activities.
- 3) Ensure that teacher preparation supports and meets students' emotional and social needs.
- 4) Establish a curriculum in concern with the Native American culture to build pride and self-respect.

Stakeholders

- School, family, and community.
- Without proper support, research shows at-risk students become overwhelmed, lose motivation, and ultimately give up on school.
- Resiliency should be promoted through school, family or community efforts and should not be independent of each other.
- Resiliency should be promoted through all avenues.



Current Conditions and Efforts

- Mental health providers and researchers often lack recognition of special needs of ethnic minorities.
- Cultural ignorance on the part of the service provider is the main reason for high treatment dropout rates and underutilization of help-seeking behaviors among Natives.
- Native youth are likely to seek help from family members than health professionals.
- Boys seek outside resources (school staff)
- Girls seek help from parents, friend, no one, or teacher.
- Many seek help either through traditional healing practices and indigenous ceremonies rather than mental health professionals.

Common Presenting Issues for Children

- Failure to develop a strong ethnic identity and self identity.
- Adverse effects or misperceptions about Native people
- Adverse effects of discrimination and hatred toward Native people, both generally and specifically.
- Distrust of European American school and helping professionals based on historical negative interactions.
- Nonverbal communication style conflicting with European Americans verbal expectation.
- Lower academic achievements after the 4th grade.
- Inability to reconcile Native cultural values and mainstream values.



Presenting Issues for Adolescents

- Failure to develop a positive self-and ethnic identity
- Reactions to stereotypical misperceptions of native peoples
- Communication conflicts preference for nonverbal communication
- Conflicts between family loyalty and peer pressures
- Effects of misunderstandings and misperceptions of school personnel
- Poor academic achievement
- Substance use and abuse
- Adverse effects of discrimination and bias
- Generations conflicts resulting from varying degrees of acculturation.

Specific Recommendations

- Address openly the issue of dissimilar ethnic relationships rather than pretending that no difference exist.
- Evaluate degree of acculturation of the client.
- Schedule appointments to allow for flexibility in ending the session as needed, or starting late.
- Be open to allowing the extended family participate
- Allow time for trust to develop before focus on problem
- Use strategies that elicit practical solutions to problems, and focus on positives/ strengths as a rule.
- Respect use of silence.
- Explore ethnic identity issues as needed.
- Maintain the highest level of confidentiality.
- Listen with your heart and your mind.

Practical Tribally-Specific Interventions

- Foster cultural connections
- Encourage physical health
- Examine/teach the historical context
- Promote positive cultural identity
- Reduce isolation/enhance social connections
- Reduce generational splits
- Enhance coping mechanisms
- Work with the noninterference principle
- Network therapy has been effective; family and community members are incorporated into the counseling process.
- Native youth are the future of our communities and honored as sacred gifts to be nurtured and protected.



Social Justice and Client/Community Advocacy Perspective

- Oppression occurs on many levels: (ethnic backgrounds, gender, worldviews, national origins, social economic statuses).
- Helping professionals must advocate at the individual, community, and national levels.
- Three main levels: Client and student Advocacy; school and community advocacy; and public arena advocacy.



Client and Student Advocacy

- The helping professional implements direct counseling strategies based on understanding the social, political, economic, and cultural contexts in which clients live.
- Example: the helping professional might join an organization offering counseling services to returning Native American veterans and their families as a way of impacting positive youth development.
- May directly address external barriers that impede the client's development that the client is unable to address due to lack of resources, access, or power.
- A school counselor might intervene directly with a health education teacher who has failed a student for turning in a paper on indigenous healing methods.

School and Community Advocacy

- Helping professional might get involved in assisting community organizations that are working for change, such as developing cultural sensitivity training program for volunteers at a food bank, or helping with a mentoring program to connect elders with youth in need.
- Helping professionals might get involved by going to a larger stage to maintain direction for change that will impact on macro levels of access and resources.
- Example: May be to join in ongoing lobbying efforts to maintain funding and services for Native American-based ex-offender employment and rehabilitation programs.





Public Arena Advocacy

- Helping professionals might get involved in disseminating information widely to raise social consciousness that assists in deepening understanding.
- Helping professionals might write an article for the local newspaper on systemic influences on mental health concerns for Native American youth, sensitizing public awareness of ongoing discrimination.
- Helping professionals might get involved with working on large scales issues that will then indirectly impact the experience of Native American youth.

Cautionary Note

- Non-tribally affiliated service providers maintain an awareness of long history of mistrust that has developed between agency affiliated persons and tribal people.
- There is an underlying mistrust for non-Native people in their service to Native people and their communities has been fostered in the types and levels of services and resources that have been provided or promised to Native People and their communities throughout history.
- Numerous government and church agencies have historically misused and abused the relationships that were established with the intention of “helping”





Circles within circles

- Anyone who has ever had the opportunity to experience the colors, movement, sounds, tastes, and smells of the powwow understand the feeling that passes through you.
- It is different for every person, but if you really experience the feeling, you know that it is connection.
- seeing old friends and making new ones.
- the image of the dancers moving in seemingly infinite poses of unity to every pound of the drum.
- laughter and exchange of words and gestures.
- silent inner prayer giving thanks for life.
- the delicious taste of your piping hot fry-bread, or stew.
- Sound of children playing, families and friends talking and laughing together.



Ha Hou!

- Thank you for your valuable time to listen in today.
- It shows you care about your people and desire to make a difference in your tribal community wherever you may be.