Indigenous Paths to Rez-iliency
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ATTC
My standpoint

• Arapaho Professional Counselor Educator
• Focused on making profession responsive to needs of Indigenous peoples.
• Approach both as scholar and community member.
• My dual perspective as a scholar and my experiences as an Arapaho person who lived most of my life on the Wind River Reservation, Wyoming
Charles Eastman

• “my desire is to use all that I had learned for my people’s benefit”

• Shapeshifters: a continuous transformation of bridging their traditional cultures to that of mainstream society.

• Bridging evidenced in ever increasing NA’s acquiring mainstream college degrees.
Trauma Exposure

• Does not lead to psychological distress
• Remarkable ability to recovery
• Flourish after exposure
• New strengths, coping mechanisms and insight (Goodman, 2013)
• Enhance appreciation for life.
• More thoughtful about life choices
Psychosocial Factors

- Optimism
- Cognitive flexibility
- Active coping skills
- Strong support network - coworkers
- Attentive to physical wellbeing
- Possess personal moral compass (Iacoviello & Charney, 2014)
Cultural Resilience Theory

• Peacock (2003) definition: the incorporation of traditional practices and ways of thinking as a means to overcome oppression and other negative obstacles faced by NA’s.

• Strengths perspective: all people have positive attributes.

• Appropriate choice as a means to survive.
Cultural resilience factors

- Spirituality
- Family strengths/support/belonging
- Elders
- Ceremonial Rituals
- Oral traditions
- Tribal Identity: pride
- Support networks
Prayer

- Spirituality is demonstrated through prayer.
- Maintaining humbleness
- Praying about stress factors
- Gratitude for both good and bad
- Perseverance, focus, stress reduction, courage and decision making.
Cultural Connectedness

• Tribes have incredible resilience in the face of genocide, colonization, and forced relocation.
• Destruction of families though boarding schools, and aggressive removal by child welfare agencies.
• Prohibition of spiritual practices. Indian Religious Crimes Act of 1883
• American Indian Religious Freedoms Act 1978
Spirituality

- Core of survival
- Cultural teachings honor traditional values and strengthen Indigenous worldviews (Runner and Morris, 1997)
- Greater identification lower drug use and alcohol cessation.
- General well-being and positive mental health (Roman, Jervis, & Manson, 2012)
Thriving

- 55% own their own home
- 75% have a high school diploma
- 14% bachelors’ degree
Native Humor

• Alive and well
• Critical function in daily interaction (Garrett et al. 2005)
• Critical part of culture at mealtimes.
• Come together around food – laugh and tease
• Laughter relieves stress and creates a sense of connectedness.
Existing in a non-Native world

• “We have to dress a certain way, go by clock time, always serious at work, a place where money is all that counts with how much we earn and how we earn it...I walk a fine line and keep one foot in each world.” – Mary Black Bonnet, Osage
Tribal Identity

- According to Russell (2004) 98% of Native population is tribally-mixed
- 75% racially mixed
- Indigenous speakers are valuable resources
- Arapaho language is endangered
- Native American Indigenous Languages Act of 1990
Economic Development

• Of 565 federally recognized tribes
• 40% operate casinos
• 1% of Native Americans own and operate a business (Garrett and Garrett, 2012).
• Many continue to struggle economically
Cultural Preservation

- Increased control of cultural resources preservation and maintenance.
- Programs inside and outside of schools
- Traditional arts and crafts
- Language
- Songs and chants, as well as dance
- Preservation of tribal traditions
Native Challenges

• Lowest graduation rates: Colorado (52%), Nevada (52%), Oregon (52%), Alaska (51%), Wyoming (51%), South Dakota (49%), and Minnesota (42%).

• Income: average medium $35,192, compared to $50,502 for entire nation

• Poverty: 30%, compared to 26% of US
Important Characteristics

- Stable peer relationships
- Problem solving skills
- Realistic future plans
- Positive sense of ability to achieve and deal with tasks
- Ability to communicate effectively
- Strong attachment to at least one adult
- Accountable for self and actions
Risk Factors Within American Indian Communities

- Intergenerational/Historical trauma associated with colonization (Manifest Destiny, Treaties, Forced Removal, Genocide, Contemporary Policy)
- Boarding school experience
- Federal state/policy
- Oppression
  - Discrimination
Protective Factors (cont’d)

• Ceremonies and Tradition
  – “...that greater engagement in the traditional culture may lead to more positive outcomes for the children” (Gonzales, Knight, Birman, & Sirolli, 2003).

• Community-centric
  – “Being a Lumbee accords members a self-reliant, interdependent identity whereby individuals care for and are cared for by one another” (Angell & Jones, 2003).

• Humor
Trauma-informed care

- “What happened to you?” not “What’s wrong with you?”
- Programs must be based on tribal, not external norms.
- Draw on our ancestors’ resilience and survival skills.
Mental Health

• Individuals with some college education or a college degree are less likely to be depressed than those with less education.

• Native elders maintain a positive outlook even through significant adversity.

• Elders as role models.

• Storytelling is traditional resiliency. Often includes stories of personal challenges.
Health and Balance

- 80% Native adults aged 20-74 are overweight.
- Significant implications for a variety of health issues, including diabetes, high blood pressure, respiratory problems, and cancer.
- Psychological distress and lack of familial support linked to excess weight.
- Culturally based spirituality associated with lower weight in a weight-loss program (Dill et al., 2015)
Interventions needed

• Native Americans have high rates of recreational tobacco use, obesity, and inactivity.

• Low fruit and vegetable consumption, cancer screening, seat belt compliance, along with high-fat, low-fiber diets (Cobb, Espey & King, 2014).

• High need to improve physical health.
Strengths-based approaches

- Acknowledges successful outcomes and the majority who do not have substance use problems.
- Build on individual, and cultural strengths.
- Traditional healing is effective and empowering, culturally grounded.
- Traditional cultural practices and spirituality buffer against substance misuse and mental health issues promoting prosocial behaviors.
Cultural elements

• Sense of belonging can reduce shame
• Smudging, sweat-lodge ceremonies, and prayer, talking circles.
• Culture promotes healing and wellness, and buffers against stress.
• Reflect on strength and resilience associated with survival, counteracts depression (Tucker et al., 2016).
Hope and Resilience

- Recover traditions and celebrating survival. Braveheart cautions against dismissing trauma. Can cause people to shut down.
- Reclaiming traditions does not mean acting as if it's still 1800.
- Learn some language even if not to the point of fluency, can be empowering.
- Language is power, a form of resistance and survival that counteracts cultural genocide.
Screen time

• Adults as well as youth- spend looking at screens (e.g., tv, computers, smartphones and tablets) exceeds 3.5 hours a day.
• Health concern for obesity and other health risks
• More than white people. Highest among males and overweight individuals.
• TV watching most popular, youth similar playing video games.
Substance Misuse

• Identity is often shaped through racism, impacts impact individual’s sense of self and belonging.
• Numbing against cumulative stress.
• Studies show substance use is lower in native communities, but those that do drink often with a pattern of heavy episodic drinking.
• Not all NA’s misuse alcohol. Unusually high abstinence rate from alcohol use.
Self-Determination & Sovereignty

• “Inclusion of traditional beliefs and cultural practices within a western institution of health equals improved health status of Indigenous Populations” (Hirch, 2011).
  – Example: **Nuku System of Care, South Central Foundation, Alaska.**
Self-care for helpers

• Cultivate sense of balance and nurture own needs for wellness.
• Develop own plan that makes sense & use it.
• Artistic expression can be effective to promote healing. (Herman, 2010)
• Consistent self-care is important.
• Learn to listen without taking on burden.
• Avoid compassion fatigue.
Wellness and resilience

• Balance with counter-narrative of resilience (Grayshield et al., 2015)
• Positive aspects can be passed down intergenerationally, not just trauma.
• Language, ceremonies, positive parenting, culture, and a strong sense of identity and belonging.
• Promoting return to traditional practices.
Where do we go from here?

• We still have a lot to learn from our elders.
• They are well versed in needs and strengths of the community as to what has succeeded or failed in the past.
• Helping professionals like you have the ability to make a difference.
• Narratives of continuity and resilience in the face of adversity, can help us determine where we go from here.
Remember our ancestors

• Indigenous people have always had ways of helping and restoring balance.

• Western helping professionals employ different methods but also cultivate wellness.

• Today we can benefit from both.

• Our ancestors survived many challenges while attending to the wellbeing of future generations.
Conclusions

• Defining resiliency too narrowly may result in imprecise conceptualizations and delivery approaches.
• The role humor plays in resiliency is not identified in the literature reviewed.
• The legacy of colonization in American Indian communities has implicit effects on the resiliency of individuals and communities (historical trauma).
• Implementing and improving research practices that explore community-based factors of resilience must be a priority.
Circles within Circles

• Colors, movement, sounds, tastes and smells of the powwow understands the feeling that passes through you.
• Feeling of connection, seeing old friends and making new ones
• Laughter
• Piping hot fry-bread, stew, or Indian corn soup
• Coming together in a circle
Indigenous Resiliency Model
Joseph & Hamill, 2014

Protective Factors
- Spirituality (Metaphysical Connections)
- Tribal Identity
- Elders
- Ceremonies and Tradition
- Community-centric
- Humor

Risk Factors (Historical Trauma)
- Intergenerational/Historical trauma associated with colonization
- (Manifest Destiny, Treaties, Forced Removal/Genocide)
- Boarding school experience
- Federal state/policy
- Oppression
- Discrimination

Community
- Local
- Institutional
- Youth
- Parent
- Family

Reciprocity
- Self-Determination
- Sovereignty
- Responsibility

Ideally, the individual is doing the work of negotiating these domains, thus demonstrating resiliency.
Trauma and Resilience in the Lives of Contemporary Native Americans
Reclaiming our Balance, Restoring our Wellbeing

HILARY N. WEAVER


