



National American Indian & Alaska Native

**ATTC**

Addiction Technology Transfer Center Network  
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

# Indigenous Paths to Rez-iliency

Avis Garcia, PhD

September 30, 2020

ATTC

**TTC**

Technology Transfer Centers


Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

**SAMHSA**

Substance Abuse and Mental Health  
Services Administration

# 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 through 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 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 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” (Hirsch, 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





# Trauma and Resilience in the Lives of Contemporary Native Americans

Reclaiming our Balance, Restoring our Wellbeing



HILARY N. WEAVER



# Bibliography

- Arrington, E. G., & Wilson, M. N. (2000). A re-examination of risk and resilience during adolescence: Incorporating culture and diversity. *Journal of Child & Family Studies, 9*(2), 221-230.
- Brokenleg, M. (2010). The resilience revolution: Our original collaboration. *Reclaiming Children & Youth, 18*(4), 8-11.
- Brokenleg, M. (2012). Transforming cultural trauma into resilience. *Reclaiming Children & Youth, 21*(3), 9-13.
- Brokenleg, M., & Van Bockern, S. (2003). The science of raising courageous kids. *Reclaiming Children & Youth, 12*(1), 22-26.
- Drywater-Whitekiller, V. (2010). Cultural resilience: Voices of Native American students in college retention. *Canadian Journal of Native Studies, 30*(1), 1-19.
- Feinstein, S., Driving-Hawk, C., & Baartman, J. (2009). Resiliency and Native American teenagers. *Reclaiming Children & Youth, 18*(2), 12-17.
- Goodkind, J., LaNoue, M., Lee, C., Freeland, L., & Freund, R. (2012). Involving parents in a community-based, culturally grounded mental health intervention for American Indian youth: Parent perspectives, challenges, and results. *Journal of Community Psychology, 40*(4), 468-478. doi:10.1002/jcop.21480
- Grandbois, D. M., & Sanders, G. F. (2009). The resilience of Native American elders. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing, 30*(9), 569-580. doi:10.1080/01612840902916151
- Grandbois, D. M., & Sanders, G. F. (2012). Resilience and stereotyping: The experiences of Native American elders. *Journal of Transcultural Nursing, 23*(4), 389-396. doi:10.1177/1043659612451614
- Gross, E. R. (2003). Native American family continuity as resistance: The Indian child welfare act as legitimation for an effective social work practice. *Journal of Social Work, 3*(1), 31-44.
- Jew, C., & Green, K. (1995, April). *Resiliency and coping*. A paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, CA.

# Bibliography

- Joseph, J. (1994). *The resilient child*. New York: Plenum Press.
- Joseph, D.H. & Windchief, S.(2013, InReview) Nahongvita: A conceptual model to support rural American Indian youth in pursuit of higher education. *Journal of American Indian Education*.
- LaFromboise, T. D., Hoyt, D. R., Oliver, L., & Whitbeck, L. B. (2006). Family, community, and school influences on resilience among American Indian adolescents in the upper midwest. *Journal of Community Psychology*, 34(2), 193-209. doi:10.1002/jcop.20090 .
- Rutter, M. (1990). Psychological resilience and protective mechanisms. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 57(3), 316-331.
- Strand, J. A., & Peacock, R. (2003). RESOURCE GUIDE: Cultural resilience. *Tribal College Journal*, 14(4), 28.
- Stumblingbear-Riddle, G., & Romans, J. S. C. (2012). Resilience among urban American Indian adolescents: Exploration into the role of culture, self-esteem, subjective well-being, and social support. *American Indian & Alaska Native Mental Health Research: The Journal of the National Center*, 19(2), 1-19.
- Thornton, B., Collins, M., & Daugherty, R. (2006). A study of resiliency of American Indian high school students. *Journal of American Indian Education*, 45(1), 4-16.
- Thornton, B., & Sanchez, J. E. (2010). Promoting resiliency among Native American students to prevent dropouts. *Education*, 131(2), 455-464.
- Waller, M. A., Okamoto, S. K., Hankerson, A. A., Hibbeler, T., Hibbeler, P., McIntyre, P., & McAllen-Walker, R. (2002). The hoop of learning: A holistic, multisystemic model for facilitating educational resilience among indigenous students. *Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*, 29(1), 97.
- Wexler, L., & Burke, T. K. (2011). Cultural identity, multicultural competence and resilience: A pilot study of Alaska Native students' experience at university. *Journal of American Indian Education*, 50(2), 44-64.