Bimaadiziwin: A Healthy Way of Life
Finding Balance in the Midst of Intergenerational Trauma
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American Indian Council RUHS
Native Curriculum Building
A Story

The Further You Get From Indian...
Gwaayahkooshkawin: Balance

Finding Balance in the Midst of Intergenerational Trauma

Wellness Model is found in the Four Directions

East
Trauma Informed Care
3 Things

1. Safety and Stability

2. Processing the Story:
   Making it manageable
   Normalizing Experience and Emotions

3. Reconnecting and Reintegrating
Loss of Life

The Native Californian population went from 133,000 to 25,000 at the end of the 19th century, this represents a more than 80% decrease.

Using Cook's revised figure, it constitutes a decline of more than 90%.
### Historical Trauma

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gold Rush</strong></td>
<td>Native children sold as slaves to settlers -- $60 per boy and $200 per girl.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>The 1950 - Relocation</strong></td>
<td>American Indians were moved to cities where they experienced poverty, alcohol, violence, and loss of tribal identity and family, leaving many urban American Indians today with a loss of connection to their greater extended families, cultural identity, and ceremonies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>In 1853</strong></td>
<td>The State Legislature passed an <em>Act for the Government and Protection of Indians</em>. In legalizing the peonage system of the Mexican period as well as establishing a system of indentureship of American Indian children to any white citizen. It legalized slavery in what was ostensibly a slave-free state.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1/3rd of the California Indians</strong></td>
<td>Died as a result of the missions.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>In 1851</strong></td>
<td>The Governor of California, Peter Burnett, declared a war of extermination on Indians. The government paid 25 cents a scalp and $5 per decapitated head for dead Indians.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Association on Indian Affairs (1970’s)</strong></td>
<td>Between 25% and 35% of all American Indian children had been separated from their families and forcibly adopted into white homes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 90% of indigenous people on this continent died as a result of first contact.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Of the people that remained, their relationship to the land and animals was destroyed, restricted, cut off.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Then the children were taken as slaves, abused in boarding schools, and forced into adoption.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Spirituality was outlawed until 1978.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Survival = Kill the Indian, Save the Man</td>
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<tr>
<td>Living in a World not of our making; being something we are not.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
“We still have sorrows that are passed to us from early generations, those to handle besides our own, and cruelties lodged where we cannot forget. We have the need to forget. I don’t know if we stopped the fever of forgetting yet. We are always walking on oblivion’s edge.”
1.2% of the U.S. population identifies as Native American or Alaskan Native. Of those, over 21% had a diagnosable mental illness in the past year.

That is over 830 thousand people.

Enough to fill every major league baseball stadium on the East Coast twice.

Sources:
Suicide

- Suicide can also be explained as a result of internalized oppression (Duran & Duran, 1995).
- A factor leading to the higher suicide rates for American Indian youth is their loss of culture or the destruction of culture that would have sustained them (Duran & Duran, 1995).
- Dinges and Duong-Tran (1993) in a survey of 124 boarding school youth found loss of cultural supports was associated with depression, suicide ideation, and suicide attempts.
Stigma

Processing the Story

– Making it manageable
– Normalizing Experience and Emotions
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Expand the Story</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When we don’t understand history and colonization, mental health issues become stigmatizing and unmanageable. We think the something that’s wrong is us</td>
<td>1. Expand the view of trauma informed care to historical and global trauma and oppression, and past and current colonization trauma.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When we understand history and colonization, we see that we (indigenous people) are amazing to be here today and that we are part of something much bigger.</td>
<td>2. Connect the relationship/manifestation of historical trauma and colonization to individual trauma.</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>3. Connect trauma to a common humanity among the indigenous community.</td>
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Historical Trauma
Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, Ph.D.

• “A constellation of characteristics associated with massive cumulative group trauma across generations.”

• Children of survivors can experience symptoms similar to their parents despite the fact that they were not directly exposed to the trauma.
• Trauma experienced by earlier generations can influence the structure of our genes, making them more likely to switch on negative responses to stress and trauma.

• Our Neuroendocrine System (helps nervous and hormonal systems work together to produce substances such as adrenaline) is strongly influenced by experience. *Academy of Pediatrics*
TRAUMA, EPIGENETICS, And the NERVOUS SYSTEM

Dr. Lee Bitsoi, Ph.D. Navajo, 
Research Associate in Genetics at Harvard University

- EPIGENETICS is beginning to uncover scientific proof that INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA IS REAL.

- HISTORICAL TRAUMA can be seen as a contributing cause in the development of illnesses like PTSD, Depression, and Type II Diabetes.
Many present day health disparities can be traced back through epigenetics to a colonial health deficit: the result of colonization and its aftermath.

Symptoms: High rates of addiction, suicide, mental illness, sexual violence and other ills among native people are influenced by historical trauma.
Why is it Unhealthy for AIs to Live Today in this Nation?

• American Indians (AIs) live in a nation governed by a system that, for hundreds of years, not only wielded the power to define all social constructs (e.g., justice) as well as the parameters of institutional and policy formation around these constructs but also the privilege to not have to know that these parameters exist; they are just “truth” (19).

• We have heard too many times, “That was a long time ago; I’m not responsible for it”. Yet, there is no recognition that deep within our nation’s structure, “it” still remains and contributes to systemic bias and disparities today. U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. (2004). Native American health care disparities briefing: Executive Summary. Office of the General Counsel
Health Impact of Oppression

• From the beginning, AIs were deemed “lesser than human” to substantiate the genocide and attempts at cultural elimination that were a part of America’s nation building.

• As this “lesser than human” worldview was ripping apart AI families and communities, the dominant culture was solidifying systems of power that were deemed right and good for the dominant people of the nation.

• Recent research suggests that being deemed “lesser” or “other”, in relation to the dominant culture, can have a detrimental impact on the health of non-dominant culture peoples in this nation.
Telomere Research

• Telomere length is a marker scientists use to evaluate biological aging – shorter telomere length is associated with increased risk of premature death and chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, stroke and dementia.

• "We found that the African American men who experienced greater racial discrimination and who displayed a stronger bias against their own racial group had the shortest telomeres of those studied," says Dr. David H. Chae, assistant professor of epidemiology at UMD's School of Public Health
"Much of the testimony that I received referenced the historical trauma that deeply affects indigenous individuals every day. This trauma cumulated as a result of the largely discriminatory policies of the government towards Indian tribes and individuals since first contact and today still results in distrust of government initiatives and poor health outcomes for Indian individuals."
Liberation Psychology

- Genesis of the problem: Living in a world taken over by an imposed mythology that has caused and continues to cause massive suffering.
- Not accept euro concentric view of the problem.
- My healing comes from learning how I fit in with my cosmology—Relational Worldview
“We Already Knew That!”
Relational Worldview

• There is a general Native American worldview that encompasses the notions of connectedness, reciprocity, balance and completeness that frames views of health and well-being.

• Worldview- Relational: sees life as harmonious relationships where health is achieved by maintaining balance between the many interrelating factors in one’s circle of life. (Terry Cross)
1. Etiology:
   Cause: Historical Trauma, Continued Colonization, and Oppression.
   Effect: Broken Relations

2. Symptom Manifestation and Diagnosis:
   Western versus Indigenous View

3. Treatment Intervention
   Restoring Connection
   (Remembering) Utilizing and Revitalizing what we have always known: Reindigenizing
MENTAL HEALTH SYMPTOMS: Native View
All My Relations Problem

1. Self: Nervous System out of balance (trauma)
   • Numbing: Substance Abuse
   • Fight: Violence
   • Freeze: Depression and Forgetting
   • Flight: Anxiety

2. Other: Relationships (trauma)
   • Connection Disruptions: Relationship Issues: Child Neglect, Domestic Violence, Lateral
     Oppression (extended family and community), Land

3. False Story Problem: Not to feel, not to know, not to see.
False Story/Loss of Story

• Once we lose our ability to construct narrative, we lose ourselves. This loss of self has been experienced in many Native communities through the process of historical trauma; as such, it is critical that storytelling and narrative be revitalized in communities in order to restore self-identity as well as communal/tribal identity. 

  Young and Saver
Community Member

If you use the metaphor of water therapy is only one river. History and culture are an ocean.
To Be Well in a Colonized World is Illness

• Martin Luther King Jr. 1964 “There some things in my own nation there’s some things in the world of which I’m proud to be maladjusted. I CALL UPON ALL MEN of good will TO BECOME MALADJUSTED until the good society is realized. I must honestly say to you that I never intend to become adjusted to segregation, discrimination, colonialism and these particular forces.” He called for a society of Creative Maladjustment.
Healing Intervention

Reintegration Reconnection
Leslie Marmon Silko

“For Tayo, survival is contingent on his ability to keep telling the story, to continue the circulation of narrations and words that make up the past, present and future of Native American culture. The Army doctors are stifling this flow, severing the links that comprise the chain of time that sustains his people. White people’s medicine is poison for Tayo.”
Storytelling

• We have stopped relying on our intuitive ways of knowing, and stopped practicing our most fundamental human ways of communicating with one another.

• Storytelling is fundamentally human, and narrative is a basic frame of being human (Young and Saver 2001).

• Young and Saver note that once we lose our ability to construct narrative, we lose ourselves. This loss of self has been experienced in many Native communities through the process of historical trauma; as such, it is critical that storytelling and narrative be revitalized in communities in order to restore self-identity as well as communal/tribal identity.
Real story

- WHO
- Artificial Environments
- Imagination
Imagine

We are what we imagine. Our very existence consists in our imagination of ourselves. Our best destiny is to imagine, at least, completely, who and what, and that we are. The greatest tragedy that can befall us is to go unimagined.

—N. Scott Momaday
# Liberation Psychology

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Recovery of historical memory. If focused on basic needs here and now can’t learn from experience or find roots in identity which is needed to interpret the present and get glimpses of what’s possible alternatives.</th>
<th>Discover selectively through collective memory elements of the past which have proven useful in defense of interests of exploited classes which may be applied to present struggles.</th>
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<td>Recover identity, pride in belonging, reliance on tradition and culture and resave those aspects of identity which served yesterday and will serve today for liberation.</td>
<td>Reindigenization</td>
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<tr>
<td>Utilize people’s virtues</td>
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</table>
Ignacio Martin Baro

- Psychology to transform lives and rehumanize the world.

- We must acquire a consciousness to permit us to go beyond the limits imposed on us by our socialization and the boundaries of our profession.
Political psychologists studying trauma acknowledge that it is not enough to cure politically-induced trauma, such as historical trauma for example, with psychotherapy and psychiatric drugs, but that systemic social and political solutions must be used as well (De Angelis, 2013). In fact, this is what Native American activists have been doing for decades.
Cultural strengthening through re-indigenization is healing for American Indian people.

Both the *Native Vision: A Focus on Improving Behavioral Health Wellness for California Native Americans and the California Reducing Disparities Project Strategic Plan to Reduce Mental Health Disparities* conclude that AI communities should be supported in efforts to revive or sustain cultural traditions/practices, languages, and ceremonies to address the loss of culture and improve wellness.
UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People

• Concerned that indigenous peoples have suffered from historic injustices as a result of their colonization and dispossession of their lands, territories and resources, thus preventing them from exercising, in particular, their right to development in accordance with their own needs and interests,

• Article 11 Indigenous peoples have the right to practice and revitalize their cultural traditions and customs. This includes the right to maintain, protect and develop the past, present and future manifestations of their cultures, such as archaeological and historical sites, artefacts, designs, ceremonies, technologies and visual and performing arts and literature.
Medicine for the people

- Love Letters to God Nahko
  - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E-QGkYNc0Ls
Chief O’waxalagalaś
Kwagu’ł Nation

• “We will dance when our laws command us to dance, and we will feast when our hearts desire to feast. Do we ask the white man, ‘Do as the Indian does?’ It is a strict law that bids us dance. It is a strict law that bids us distribute our property among our friends and neighbors. It is a good law. Let the white man observe his law; we shall observe ours. And now, if you come to forbid us dance, be gone. If not, you will be welcome to us.”
The closer I get to Indian