Culture and Resilience

Griselda Villalobos, Ph.D., LCSW
Director of Behavioral Health

Anna Silvas
Tribal Empowerment Director
Ysleta del Sur Pueblo
objectives

- 1) Define culture in a broad sense
- 2) Define cultural resilience
- 3) Identify Native American predominant cultural characteristics
- 4) Describe research on culture as resilience
- 5) Reconceptualize culture as resilience in the Ysleta del Sur Pueblo
“Culture, I believe, functions like an anchor on a ship. It provides stability during turbulent seas, or provides a sense of security because it is readily available if needed. Culture as represented through values and beliefs, as a result, is as much a part of life as an anchor is part of a boat’s equipment. No experienced sailor would think twice about casting off without an anchor, no human being can expect to navigate his or her way through life without a firm embrace of culture in all its manifestations.”

Melvin Delgado, 2007
Definition of culture in Culturally Grounded Social Work

The study of culture has evolved from the basic idea that culture involves beliefs, values, customs to the understanding that culture can only be defined as the intersectionality of ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, social class, religion and ability status.

(Marsiglia & Kulis, 2009)
What is culture?

• The concept of culture is mostly presented as an abstract intangible construct. One of the dangers in doing this is that when conducting research, culture can sometimes become a variable of intervention rather than a descriptor (Kao et al, 2004).
What is culture?

• Max Weber described culture as values that motivated people to ideal and material interests (Weber, 1946).

• Swidler’s framework (1986) includes three elements. The first involves looking at “culture as a ‘tool kit’ of symbols, stories, rituals, and world-views, which people may use in varying configurations to solve different kinds of problems”.

So why talk about culture?

• When we don’t attend to culture, a number of things happen:
  • 1) we don’t adapt our system to respond to the diversity that is out there. We expect diverse communities to respond to us.
  • 2) we limit our ability to engage families in a meaningful way.
  • 3) we enforce our own views of the world and do not respect or respond to the cultural worldview represented by a community or a set of individuals.
So why talk about culture?

- 4) we make harmful decisions
- 5) we don’t understand what’s normative in the context of this culture, or what’s unacceptable in the context of the culture
- 6) we don’t build on the strengths of families, we don’t build on the strengths of communities, we don’t even look for these strengths, and then we blame the victims for their failure
  - (Williams, 1997)
When considering culture remember to distinguish between ....

- Ethnic culture
- Family culture
- Individual personality traits
- Always look at culture as a descriptor and not as a variable for intervention!
Similarly......

• Remember when considering interventions:
  • There are universal principals that apply to all people
  • Group adaptations which involve similarity among groups of people
  • Individual applications
What is Cultural Resilience?

Many human cultures have come and gone, others have survived; the longer surviving cultures can be said to be resilient. Cultural resilience refers to a culture's capacity to maintain and develop cultural identity and critical cultural knowledge and practices. Despite challenges and difficulties, a resilient culture is capable of maintaining and developing itself. A resilient culture engages with other challenges such as natural disasters and encounters with other cultures, and manages to continue.
Examples

• The Jewish culture proved to be resilient to the challenges of World War II.

• Native Americans have survived years of oppression.

• African Americans survived slavery.

• Mexican Americans survived a history of conquests, repatriation, oppression, and discrimination.
Cultural Resilience

- Strand & Peacock (2003) define cultural resilience for Native Americans as the incorporation of traditional practices and ways of thinking as a means to overcome oppression and other negative obstacles faced by this population.
Cultural Resilience

• HeavyRunner & Morris (1997) - Contemporary researchers, educators, and social service providers call it resilience, for Native Americans the idea of family and community as protection is an old concept.

“Thus resilience is not a new word in our people; it is a concept that has been taught for centuries. The word is new but the meaning is old.”
The Resiliency Wheel (Ryback, Leary, & Marui, 2001)
The Resiliency Wheel

• Provides a way for helping professionals to link individual client strengths while drawing from factors related to person, family, community, spirit and culture.

• Culture acts as the hub of The Resiliency Wheel. The context for each of the other aspects is mediated through culture.
Native American Cultural Characteristics
(Adapted from Garrett and Pichette 2000)

Traditional Native American
• Harmony with nature
• Cooperation
• Group needs
• Reliance on extended family
• Emotional relationships
• Things happen on their own time
• Present goals considered
• Speak softly
• Interjects less

Mainstream America
• Power over nature
• Competition
• Personal goals
• Reliance on experts
• Concerned with facts
• Clock-watching
• Plan for future
• Speak louder and faster
• Interrupts frequently
Native American Cultural Characteristics

- The hoop dance – importance of balance and motion (Garrett et al., 2014) struggle for balance and harmony in dealing with challenging life circumstances and generational histories.
- For youth the hoop dance symbolizes balancing multiple identities, pressures, and expectations.
- Strengths and resilience in cultural identity, family, roles of the wisdom keepers, and communication styles.
Research on Cultural Resilience for Native Americans

• Academic achievement (Garcia, 2000) and cultural identity


• Torres Stone, et al. (2006) alcohol cessation and enculturation
Cultural Adaptations to Trauma Interventions

• As such, any trauma intervention used with Native Americans should incorporate an assessment of acculturation and enculturation levels.
• Interventions should be tailored to the needs of the individual based on a cultural assessment.
• Cultural humility should be used.
Definitions

• Acculturation is defined as “an adaptation process occurring when individuals from one culture are in contact with a host culture. By this process, individuals adopt characteristics of the mainstream culture and retain or relinquish traits of their traditional background”
  • (Salabarria-Pena, et al., 2001, p. 662)
Enculturation

• The process by which individuals learn their home culture......

• Whiteback, et al. (2001) equate enculturation with traditional culture which includes:
  • Involvement in traditional activities
  • Cultural identity of person
  • Traditional spirituality
Cultural Humility

• The concept of “cultural humility” suggests that we engage in an ongoing process of self-awareness and self-reflection to recognize, understand, and respect different beliefs, values, and practices. It suggests being open and flexible to accept the cultural differences, to learn from others about their cultures, and to build relationships on similarities.
Components of Healing

Gone 2009 – exploratory research on NA Historical Trauma

- Professionals understood there was pain
- Professionals believed pain had to purged
- Professionals conveyed expression of pain began a lifelong habit of introspection and self-improvement
- Healing journey included reclamation of indigenous heritage, identity, spirituality

Bridging evidence-based interventions and culturally-sensitive treatment paradigms is key
Recommendations
(Garrett et al., 2014)

• Ask yourself, “What can I do to create and maintain trust with a Native client?” (Discuss oppression)
• Ask about tribal affiliation and family.
• Ask about experiences across generations.
• Prevention and treatment should focus on addressing consequences of historical trauma response and re-attachment to traditional Native values.
Historical Trauma and Unresolved Grief Intervention (HTUG) (Brave Heart, 2003)

- Participants are exposed to content that stimulate historically traumatic memories so that cognitive integration of trauma and affective catharsis can take place. (similar to mainstream interventions for PTSD)
- Traditional prayer and ceremonies
- Group processing assists with tolerance and regulation of emotions, mastering trauma, and decrease in historical trauma response
- Preliminary research shows positive outcomes related to hope, joy, tribal identity, increase in protective factors, improved family relationships
Circle of Courage
Model of Positive Youth Development
(Brendtro, 1990)

- Belonging
- Mastery
- Independence
- Generosity
  - Raising and treating Native American children by promoting development in these four domains.
Honoring Children, Mending the Circle
(Dolores Bigfoot, 2010)

• This model combines trauma-sensitive interventions with elements of cognitive behavioral therapy into a treatment designed to address the unique needs of children with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and other problems related to traumatic life experiences.

• Appropriate for most types of trauma and for children up to the age of 18.
Honoring Children, Making Relatives - Cultural adaptation of Parent Child Interaction Therapy

• Honoring Children, Making Relatives incorporates American Indian and Alaskan Native philosophies into the basic concepts of Parent-Child Interaction Therapy.

• Treatment is appropriate for children between the ages of 3 to 7 years of age.
This therapy is appropriate for children between the ages of 3-12 years of age who have experienced traumas of sexual abuse, physical abuse, and violence in the family.
Honoring Children, Honoring the Future

- American Indian Life Skills Development Curriculum, a suicide prevention curriculum for middle and high school students. It was the only evidence-based suicide prevention program in Indian Country that has been recognized by the Department of Health and Human Services in 2005 as a SAMHSA program of excellence.

ICCT.ORG
• Located in a “checker board” reservation on the Lower Valley of El Paso County.
• 1680 Revolt brought a group of Pueblo Indians from South of Albuquerque, NM and settled where they are today
• Lost their land through the years and have been buying it back
Form of Government
Sense of Belonging

Traditional Ceremonies
Connecting Us Back to Our Ancestors
Gathering for Bread Baking
True Testament of Resiliency

Symbolism of our drum