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AMERICAN INDIAN VIEWS ABOUT FAMILY COHESION AND FLEXIBILITY

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This study is dedicated to my wife, Jennifer Beach, and my daughters, Rosalyn Beach and Olive Beach, the three of whom are everything I could ask for in a family.

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Abstract

This qualitative study examined the views American Indian people hold regarding family structure. American Indians who identified as members of traditional southeastern tribes regarding family views and the impact of traditional practices, with members of the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, Seminole, and Yuchi tribes being represented. After conducting interviews with participants, data was analyzed for themes reflecting attitudes toward family. The study identified "Ritual and Family" as a primary connecting theme, with five sub-themes tied together by this over-arching theme through the use of both individual and family interviews.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The question of what a normal family looks like is one generally answered with Caucasian/Euro-American families in mind, and as such does not take into consideration differences between typical family values held by American Indian people (Robbins, 1991). In this study researcher examine the American Indian family cohesiveness, or connections within the family, and flexibility. For American Indians in general, individual identity is uniquely tied to family and community. Individualistic values, as they are often extolled by many people in the United States, especially in the business arena, are abhorrent to many traditional American Indians. Conceptions about families, couples, and individuals derived from norms of psychological ideology may not be applicable to American Indians.

Unique American Indian beliefs and experiences also account for outcome differences between American Indians and the larger population on a variety of assessments such as the MMPI, SASSI, and WAIS (Davis, Hoffman, & Nelson, 1990). Conflicting epistemological assumptions on the aforementioned instruments have been cited as contributing to differences on psychological assessment scores such as the Marital Satisfaction Inventory-Revised (Robbins, Stoltenberg, Robbins, & Ross, 2002) and the MMPI-2 (Pace, Robbins, Hill, & Choney, 2006). Janet Helms (2007) has been especially critical of the psychological assessments that have not sufficiently included representative numbers all minorities.

This study begins with questions about what the beliefs, values, attitudes and viewpoints of American Indians are about the nature of family interaction. What are their views and feelings concerning structure and interactions in their families? Will

American Indians describe their family interactions in ways that might be viewed as chaotic or unstructured? The researchers in this study will attempt to make interpretations that take into account American Indian historical experiences and traditional perspectives that may or may not impact American Indian prospectives.

Significance of the Study

This study proposes to consider American Indians' views concerning interactions among their family members. Contributions from American Indian participants may provide differing points of view regarding what is normal for a family's cohesiveness and flexibility. Up to this point, as the literature review will later attest, the vast majority of data collected regarding family interaction has been collected primarily from middle class suburban Caucasian participants. Only a small proportion of any study about families has included any American Indian participants and in most cases there have been no American Indian participants represented, though there has been a considerable amount of research conducted in this area with other minorities.

It is the expectation of the researcher that American Indians' perspectives toward family connections and flexibility can expand current perspectives about families and offer greater awareness of cultural differences, and can inform future research. The study also offers information that can guide the creation of future assessments. Studies have already indicated that there are significant differences between American Indian families and the greater population in the United States with individuals on the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory, Second Edition (Pace, et al., 2006) and with couples (Robbins, Stoltenberg, Robbins, & Ross, 2002).

Also, research with Latino (Baer & Schmitz, 2007; Lichter & Landale, 1995) and

Asian (Leu, Schroth, Obradovic, & Cruz, 2012; Walton & Takeuchi, 2010)

populations has shown differences in family structure. An awareness of difference

would impact the manner in which treatment is provided. These studies demonstrate

how experiences in different cultures play a significant role in how emotion and the

presentation of emotions are susceptible to misinterpretation and culturally biased

assumptions (van Hemert, Baerveldt, & Vermande, 2001)

Research Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of the research project is to understand the views and beliefs

American Indian have regarding cohesion. Cohesion in families has been associated

with togetherness, support, independence, family connectedness and flexibility.

Research questions are as follows:

- What are American Indian participants' views of family connections?
- How do participants think culture influences their views and interpretations of their families' interactions?

By asking American Indian participants to answer questions crafted to elicit

responses congruent with the above aims of the study, it is hoped their perspectives

concerning family connections and flexibilities will become apparent or will

illuminate perspectives of those working in the field of psychology about the

uniqueness of American Indian families.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Historical Trauma

The present chapter reviews the literature that addresses flexibility and cohesion as related to family structure in American Indians. Interconnected with the primary focus are traditional ways and acculturation. Researchers consider both as well as resilient factors imbedded in American Indian life as they are relevant.

Brief history of American Indian family life

When looking at American Indian families it is not uncommon to include extended family members that include grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins; however, it is not uncommon for American Indian people to identify their entire community as family (Evans-Campbell, 2008). Traditional American Indian families exist within complex and intimate transactions embedded in a community milieu. Many American Indian tribes' members practice traditional ways in a variety of aspects of life, may practice these traditional activities at various levels of assimilation while attempting to keep some traditions, and have responsibilities in their communities to perform a wide array of roles and duties in rituals and in community functions (Heinrich, Corbine, & Thomas, 1990). Specific families are designated as those who oversee sacred artifacts through caring for or producing them, and carry out tasks for the entire community handing these duties down from one generation to the next, while other families pass down traditions as singers, dancers, or drummers in the same. Keeping this in mind, when researchers examine American Indian attitudes related to family or family practices, one must look at the American Indian community as a totality (Deacon, Pendley, Hinson & Hinson, 2011; Wyrostok & Paulson,

2000;). Though many see social disorder in American Indian communities, complex organized associations exist. American Indian families do try to help one another. These helping systems should be explored and identified in order to establish a point of departure before professional programs and helpers begin working with American Indian families. Therapists should engage in treatment only when they have knowledge of specific cultural ideas and ways.

Spiritual Loss

American Indian identity is often tied to cultural spirituality, and depending on level of assimilation with the individual or the community, can impact American Indian people in a variety of ways and in turn have an impact on the manner in which counseling is received (Olson, 2003). Though a great many people who identify as American Indian still retain significant aspects of their spiritual culture, outside influences continue to encroach upon the ideas of spirituality guided specifically by a tribe, clan, or family as designated by historical inheritance. Much of what American Indian people learn as children about their ancestry comes from schools that teach aspects of American Indian spiritual history from the standpoint of archeology as lost myths rather than teaching with the specific cultures of the individual in mind, which is a relatively new concept to American Indian cultures that arose from the boarding school (Bombay, Matheson, & Anisman, 2014; Martinez, 2006).

Ritual

Rituals have long been a major part of family life (Imber-Black, 2008), and are particularly important in the process of internal negotiations of beliefs among families (Imber-Black, 2012). Individuals within the family begin and maintain ritual practices

to mark events, celebrate, and practice and exhibit spiritual beliefs. Whiting writes that within a family culture symbolic actions and structured practices require specific spaces or times (2003). Such occurrences are typically seen across cultures in weddings or funerals that take place in churches or places of honor, and within American Indian cultures, considered in this paper, can be seen in rituals such as stomp dances or honor ceremonies executed at traditional ceremonial grounds.

Families and communities hold specific connections with rituals (Manoogian, Walker, & Richards, 2007). It is typical in Western culture for diversity of ritual and spiritual practice to exist within a single family; however, this is not commonplace among traditionally oriented American Indian families (Swanson, 1997). For example, common is the tradition of passing songs used in ceremony from parents to children with the expectation that this practice be carried on to propagate the culture and tribe as a whole. In traditional songs, culture, ritual, and spiritual practice are intermingled, as they are often seen as the center of the community (Gilliard & Moore, 2007).

Cohesion and flexibility in general: Non-Natives and structure

Olson's (2011) review of family research studies revealed that the majority of the studies focus upon white families. There have been few studies about American Indian families. To gain understanding of the uniqueness of the cohesion and flexibility of American Indian family structure, it may be helpful to gain a minimum of a general understanding of the typical perceptions of cohesion and flexibility in the United States though it is primarily from a non-American Indian point of view.

Manzi, Vignoles, Regalia and Scabini (2006) describe family cohesion as "tolerance for intimacy, closeness-caregiving, involvement, connectedness, and

communion" (pp. 673-674). They further indicate this is not to be confused with enmeshment, which is identified primarily as a lack of tolerance for individuality, lack of separateness, intrusiveness, psychological control, and dependency. Their study focused on family structure in two European cultures. They indicate that most scholars do view these areas as not entirely separate but rather as different levels of one dimension, and should be viewed as such when identifying themes of connection within a family. They identify a perceived need for assertion of independence, which has been noted on occasions as contrary to typical American Indian views of the goal of family connection (Hughes & Forbes, 2005). From the beginning of this study, researchers are urged to consider that traditional American Indians define their lives in terms of their relations to their family, clan, and tribe.

Impacts on individual behavior

Writing about families in general, Sherer et al. (2012) writes that cohesion among family members plays a significant role in the perceptions of the individual family attitudes about acceptable and unacceptable behaviors and their impact on individual behavior. Family cohesion functions as a resource to reduce individual values as a buffer agreement in times of divisiveness. They found that family members lacking cohesion in their immediate family relationships are less likely to exhibit attitudes of forgiveness with those who misuse or abuse alcohol. They also found that lower levels of trust exist between those who identify little or no cohesion. These findings are reported by the researchers as an indication that cohesiveness in a family structure is positively correlated with positive family functionality.

There is some evidence that family cohesion also contributes to non-white individualized affirmation. Family support and familial relationships are purported as playing a significant role in the development of the identity of individuals (Shin & Kelly, 2013). Shin and Kelly found both American and Korean students living in cohesive families develop individuality and intrinsic motivation.

There has been a limited amount of research with African American, Latino, and Asian American families (Ahn, A. J., Kim, B. S., & Park, Y. S.,2009; Auslander, Thompson, Dreitzer, White & Santiago, 1997;Lorenzo, Pakiz, Reinherz, & Frost, 1995; Miranda, Estrada, & Firpo-Jimenez, 2000; Rivera, et al., 2008;). It is repeatedly emphasized that a different lens than that of the majority in the United States should be used when making inquiry about family cohesion and flexibility with diverse cultures (Harris & Molock, 2000). Lee, Choe, Kim, and Ngo (2000) have gone as far as developing a distinct conflict scale specifically for Asian American families.

Cohesion and Flexibility in Structure Among American Indians

Resilience

Resilience has been identified as a vital quality that might be included when considering American Indian families. In recent history there has been a link shown between making positive improvements in mental and physical health among American Indian people (Schure, Odden, & Goins, 2013). Identifying resilience as the ability to adapt in the face of adversity, Schure, Odden, and Goins identify various psychosocial factors as playing significant roles in attaining and maintaining positive health through aging. Resilience has also been identified as valuable in recovery from intergenerational trauma or historical trauma. In fact, American Indian families

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promote resilience in the next generation's well being by teaching adaptation strategies and by utilizing traditional practices (Brokenleg, 2012).

One way that American Indians promote family cohesion and resilience is by principles based on honoring relationships (Bigfoot & Funderburk, 2011). Rather than standing alone as independent entities with goals rooted in self-fulfillment or self-actualization, the majority of Native America cultures identify themselves through identification as a part of a larger community or family. In many tribal communities on reservations, children's behavior is expected to be regulated by non-relative members of the clan to which the child belongs (MacPhee, Fritz, & Miller-Heyl, 1996). The idea of family extends beyond the notion of primary family being comprised of the nuclear family. The notion of family from an American Indian perspective begins as kinship with the elements and spans across time and space, and typically includes the notion of having a relationship with the spiritual world (Robbins, Hong, & Jennings, 2012). Also crucial are degrees of assimilation as it pertains to the individual's receptiveness and views of therapeutic approach (Gray & Rose, 2012; Listug-Lunde, Vogeltanz-Holm, & Collins, 2013; Trimble, 2010;).

When counselors or other professionals in the helping fields work with members of the American Indian population, it is of the utmost importance they display a respect for those belonging to the American Indian community. Spirituality is the sinew that holds American Indian families and communities together.

Generosity is an important part of many American Indian's spirituality. It is typical to see practices identified as "giveaways." During specific times gifts such as blankets, items of significance to the individual or family, or money are presented to

honor individuals. Dances themselves are also performed as a means of honoring the tribe, past, present, and future, among most American Indian tribes. Dances include tribe specific dances, stomp dances, Sundances, scratchings, and piercings. Many tribes participate in sweats to purify and to pray, and honor the spirits. Hibbard stated, "Native American spiritual practices have incorporated sweating as a form of spiritual expression, which often involves preparatory ritual or prayer and used for rites of passage from the time of birth through the time after death" (as cited in Robbins, Robbins, 2013, p. 199). Clans within each tribe practice specific protocols for their own rituals.

Extended Family Relationships

Extended family members play an integral role in the lives of American Indian cultures living in the United States (Morrison, Fox, Cross, & Roger, 2010). In American Indian families, grandparents play a particularly integral role, as they are often identified as the leaders of families. They are respected for acquired knowledge and recognized as holders of tribal traditions (Benally, 1999). Grandmothers are often primary caretakers who pass on their tribal wisdom to the younger generations (Mutchler, Baker, & Lee, 2007; Schweitzer, 1999). Strong spiritual values have been passed on so that the present and future generations of American Indian families can experience healthy living (Gone, 2012). For many generations American Indians have developed unique spiritual ways to cope with extreme external threats (Schure, Odden, & Goins, 2013).

Grandparenting

The idea of reciprocal respect between children and their elders is a basic value in traditional American Indian households (Robbins, Robbins, & Stennerson, 2013). In the majority of American Indian tribal cultures parents and grandparents respect their children and expect that this sense of respect and its associated practices be reciprocated. The, hope is that this respect will also be extended to others outside the individual's family and clan. These collateral relationships, in contrast to individualistic, offer a long-standing stability to American Indian extended family systems (Thompson, Cameron, & Fuller-Thomson, 2013). These family relationships and attitudes are not limited to father-mother-child organization. It is not unusual for American Indian Indian homes to contain three generations of interrelated persons. Many families are often separated by great distances from both family members and traditional ceremonial grounds, but come together during times of ceremony or other tribal gatherings (Freedman, 2007). Honoring ceremonies are frequent and allow youth and elders to demonstrate their appreciation for each other.

Traditionally, tribal membership was more than just living within a group or geographic region. American Indian individuals belong to a family, clan or band, community, and tribe (Garroutte, 2001). From time immemorial, responsibility for the wellbeing of other tribal members has been paramount. Parents never raised children alone; grandparents, aunts, uncles, other elders and adults, and siblings participate in the parenting process, transmitting information, knowledge, support, encouragement, and advice. American Indian people have long relied on extended families to nurture, train, and educate their children (Chavez, Ke, & Herrera, 2012). If a child could not

live with parents, a relative was always present to take the child, and treat him as if he were her own. In turn, every vulnerable elder or tribal member was cared for by younger members. Elders lived with and were cared for by family members. The community expected both children and elders to be treated with love and the greatest of care. Individual and collective identities were forged in the caring circles of extended families.

Grandparents and their grandparenting roles are key in the promotion and survival of families and family values, symbols, history, practices, and language for American Indian people (Robbins, Robbins, & Stennerson, 2013; Thompson, Cameron, & Fuller-Thomson, 2013). Shomaker (1989) states that during times of urban relocation parents would elect to send a child to live with grandparents for extended periods of time as a means of ensuring care for the child as well as a strategy to provide support and assistance to aging grandparents. American Indian grandparents are also often utilized as safety nets for parents who are having difficulties (Letiecq, Bailey, & Kurtz, 2008). Grandparents may take on full responsibility of grandchildren when parents are imprisoned, neglectful, substance abusers, disabled, or deceased, though this is not a phenomenon strictly associated with American Indian people (Fuller-Thomson & Minkler, 2005; Fuller-Thompson, Minkler, & Driver, 1997; Pebley & Rudkin, 1999).

In their study, Robbins, Scherman, Holeman, and Wilson (2005) carried out a study of grandparents who identified as American Indian in an effort to identify specific activities in which they attempted to promote traditional American Indian practices meant to promote traditional responsibilities. What emerged were practices

such as storytelling and providing support through encouragement of their grandchildren to participate in traditional tribal ceremonies and teaching of tribal values. Thompson, et al. (2013) argue that grandparents have a unique ability to utilize their own experiences of having reared children within a culturally centered home. They also had their own cultural experiences to reinvest in the cultural health and well-being of their grandchildren. This is often described among American Indian people as "walking the red road" which involves continuing American Indian individuals' responsibility to provide wisdom and protection to the future generations. Protecting such traditions leads to rejuvenated traditional practices and increased grandparent involvement in the greater cultural community.

Though American Indian grandparents feel a sense of fulfillment through taking on significant roles in the rearing of their grandchildren, such as opportunities to transmit tribal wisdoms, it is oftentimes the case that these they report financial strain that comes with these assuming roles. Mutchler et al. (2007) reported that many American Indian grandparents do not receive services for which they and their grandchildren may be eligible.

Many American Indian people identify connections within family as defining existence their individual identities, which is a belief and practice that has been associated with psychological well-being (Kenyon & Carter, 2011). "Individual family members feel close and binding connections with a broad network of relatives" (Diller, 2011, p. 199). In such circumstances individuality is seen as substantial when it is presented in a manner that clearly represents the larger community (Red Horse, 1997). When discussing this individuality Red Horse et al state, "responsibility

actually is a bilateral phenomenon in that it is adopted by and binding across generations" (2000, p. 18).

In American Indian communities, clans, and tribes, extended families are typically connected through first and second cousins, however, individuals belonging to these tribal communities are aware of blood relations beyond this level and find such connections throughout life practices (Chavez, Fedelina, Fengfeng, & Herrera, 2012). Parents and grandparents make certain their children are aware of blood and clanship relations, and regularly encourage children to uphold customs, obligations, and connections of various manners. It is also important the avoidance of kinship marriages is kept in adherence, which includes marriage within the clan. Grandparents, aunts, and uncles are also more likely to assume primary care taking responsibilities for relatives' children. In many American Indian communities and families parenting duties are the responsibilities and tasks of the entire community, with the mantle particularly held the extended family (Sue & Sue, 2008). It is not out of the norm for children to live in various households of the extended family while growing up in tribal communities. They also indicate that the survival of a healthy tribal community is a passion for many American Indians who are willing to take on extra childcare responsibilities.

Red Horse et al. (2000) have indicated that these relationships are generally observed from the outside as tightly knit within a large family unit, one that can include others outside the traditional American view of nuclear family unit and would include various aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins, or any number of other non-kinship persons who are identified as relevant to the family unit. Diller (2011) wrote

about the nature of individuals who identify as American Indian in connection to families of origin. He wrote that individual family members among American Indian people frequently identify themselves as a part of a greater family unit rather than solely as individuals, and are defined by the ties that exist in each family unit.

Historical Challenges Faced by American Indian Families

Prior to addressing the tribulations that many American Indian families face currently, it is important for one to consider that these issues should be studied as possible results of colonialization and the continuing impact of historical trauma rather than as failures of American Indians (Myhra, 2011). Major methods of eradication of Native culture through assimilation that have been impactful in moving toward the alteration of American Indian families and their cultural lives include boarding schools and removal and relocation away from traditional homelands, and the practice of cross-cultural adoption.

Boarding Schools.

American Indian people began what is often referred to as the boarding school era in 1879 with the Carlisle Indian School, although the U.S. Congress first made provisions for American Indian education in 1819 (Szasz, 1994). Following the establishment of Carlisle Indian School the government billed boarding schools as ways of promoting the idea of instilling western thought in the students (Gere, 2005). American Indian children were frequently taken from their relatively new homelands only a few generations after their tribes had been removed from their ancestral homelands (Black, 2009). Again they were sent away from their homes, but this time from parents as well, and were placed in residential schools that were systematically

designed to destroy tribal language and any memories of traditional family life (Black, 2009; Brave Heart & De Bruyn, 1998). Approximately 65 percent of all American Indian adults were products of these schools by 1899 (Gere, 2005). Many American Indians who attended boarding schools identified with strict disciplinary teachers and residential overseers, who they viewed as influential, powerful, and as potential caregiving nurturers. These students typically began to conform after suffering abuse in the forms of beatings, verbal abuse, and sexual abuse. They reported internalizing white values as a means of protection and self-preservation. (Colmant et al, 2004; Robbins et al, 2006).

Boarding schools had an impact on traditional ways of life and to American Indian familial cohesion. With these instances in which American Indian children were removed from their families and tribal surroundings and placed in boarding schools, they were separated from their grandparents, parents, extended family, and the entire community upon which identity as a part of those larger unites had been based (Almeida, 1997; Lopenzina, 2003). These education institutions in which they were forcibly placed were cruel environments that perpetuated a culture of punishment for expressing the only culture these children knew (Lopenzina, 2003). After being reared in these places they would return home as adults who brought with them many psychological issues. Multiple generations of these experiences continue to impact their descendants through the loss of cultural practices that formerly tied communities and clans together.

The American government has presented their interventions it enacted with American Indians as altruistic endeavors meant to better American Indian people.

Indian boarding schools would help give American Indians equal opportunities in the

market economy. American Indians could leave their homes on reservations to be re-

located, arriving in what they thought would result in prosperity only to find their new

home placements to be incommodious and inadequate. Native children could be

adopted into Euro-American homes in order to give the children a better life (Haynes,

2010). Such occurrences have had significant impacts on American Indian family

structures. Some Native people have decided not to teach their children about their

tribal culture, language, or tradition because they do not want their children to

experience degradation and rejection from the outside world (Vernon, 2012).

Relocation.

Relocation has been a forced way of life for American Indian people

throughout their histories of interaction with the United States government (Bell &

Lim, 2005; Black, 2009; Shepard, 2008). The Relocation Act, which began by the

United States government in the late 1940s, continued through the 1960s. It was

presented as an effort made by the government to encourage American Indians to

leave reservations and move to urban areas where better lives could be led. This was

promoted as an intention to support American Indian employment, positioning them in

major cities where they could work at jobs that might help them become more of a

part of the American mainstream (Shepherd, 2008). This undertaking, however, also

resulted in the loss of family connections that tied many American Indians to

traditional roles and cultural traditions. The removal resulted in homelessness and a

loss of identity (Bell & Lim, 2005). The American government historically has shown

a lack of understanding that many rural American Indian people did not exhibit either

a desire to assimilate in urban environments, or a wish to forgo values they held as a part of a larger family. They were often met with discrimination and rejection upon relocation away from their families and Native communities (Les Whitbeck, Chen, Hoyt, & Adams, 2004). Family members would often tend to move between cities/urban environments and the reservation which would lead to animosities and conflicts between urban American Indians who were willing to assimilate and reservation-based American Indians. On the other side of this conflict, urban American Indians, whether successful or unsuccessful in their urban environments, were often viewed as having turned their backs on family and on Native practices when they returned for ceremony and exhibited awkwardness and lack of understanding (Deyhle & Swisher, 1997).

Urban relocation had a devastating impact on Native families (Whitbeck, Adams, Hoyt, & Chen, 2004). Children who grew up and were educated in an urban area often came to see themselves not as tribal people having inherited unique rituals, customs, or ways, but as urban Indians who did not know their language and rarely if ever practiced their spiritual ways. At the same time they were still objects of racist sentiment. Some of the American Indians who came to cities during relocation describe what the government represented as a humanitarian gesture as an instrument of assimilation (Whitbeck, Adams, Hoyt, & Chen, 2004).

American Indian Youth

Throughout the last century there have been a number of disparities when examining American Indian and Euro-American psychological and physical health side by side (Stumbling Bear-Riddle & Romans, 2012). American Indian youth and

adolescents report experiences with drug use and substance abuse at some of the highest rates of any demographic in the United States (Kulis, Dustman, Brown, & Martinez, 2013). Greenfield and Smith (1999) describe violent crime rate among American Indian adolescents through adulthood as roughly two and a half times higher than the national amount. Major risk factors identified by White (2006) include family disintegration and lack of community support, loss of language and culture, racism, lack of teacher support and peer pressure at school, lack of discipline from parents, uncles, and elders and availability of drugs and alcohol as reported by Moncher, Holden, and Trimble (1990). Risk factors such as these are often tied to the impacts of historical trauma and the subsequent lasting wounds of colonialism and perpetuation of marginalization and disempowerment on American Indian youth (Jacob, 2012).

Synopsis of the review of the Literature

As a result of the American Indian legacy of forced relocation both due to Western expansion and in the relocation programs of the twentieth century, acculturation, societal prejudice, systematic genocide, oppressive boarding school conditions, much of the continuity that would have promoted healthy relationships between American Indian couples and parents and children has been destroyed. This appears to particularly apply in terms of the persistence of Indigenous knowledge and propagation of place, and geographical continuity and the layers of meaning that frame American Indian identities from generation to generation in the family context (Shepherd, 2008). Considering these historical events, and more specifically the

impact of colonialization on Native cultures in regard to family and structure,

Shepherd wrote that little consideration has been used in researching the relationship

between American Indian parents' individual and relational experiences and their

children's experiences. Complex internal dynamics and traumatization transmitted by

oppressed American Indian parents and grandparents transmit to their children and to

each other are often overlooked. Christensen and Manson (2001) argued that the losses

American Indians have experienced due to forced assimilation and education in

boarding schools and placement of American Indian children in foster care and

adoptive families throughout much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries may have

set in motion an intergenerational transmission of trauma and negative attachment

status in many American Indian families. They argue that the legacy of many past

generations of lost parenting is likely to have impacted contemporary adult

couples/parents in their attachments with each other and with their children. On the

other hand, strong traditional beliefs and practices in American Indian Indian families

are associated with resilience against rick factors such as violence rates (Greenfield &

Smith, 1999), suicide (Olson & Wahab, 2006) and substance abuse (SAMHS, 2010).

Gaps in the Literature

In attempting to gather information regarding family connections among

American Indian people, there was remarkably little information presented by way of

published literature in counseling publications, particularly in peer reviewed

publications. When conducting a search for literature related to the topic of American

Indian families or some variation with no additional parameters, results yielded fewer

than 50 peer reviewed publications between the years of 1980 and 2014.

Chapter 3: Methods

Methods

Theoretical Framework

The study is based in a phenomenological epistemological theoretical

framework Crotty (1998). It assumes "truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and

out of our engagement with the realities of our world" (p. 8). One's disposition as

created by one's own mind and the perceptions therein constructs meaning from its

surroundings with the idea that "there is no meaning without the mind" (Crotty, 1998,

pp. 8-9). It is assumed that every individual views the world in a unique manner based

on the culmination of personal experiences that no two people can share, as each

person's view is influenced not only by their individual experiences, but also in the

way these experiences, even when shared, impact each individual in a different

manner. Meaning it is not for the researcher to attempt to find what one would

describe as an absolute reality. Participants discuss their perspectives about their lived

experiences and what they perceive subjectively. Subjective meanings emerge.

Phenomenological approaches focus on the unique conceptualizations held by the

participants. In the case of this study family cohesion is bracketed, meaning that it is to

be examined in a manner intended to remove biased judgment.

In this study, the researcher will attempt to respect participants' subjective

expressions, pay heed to his own subjective impressions, attempting to analyze the

data in as objective a fashion as possible. The outlook might be described as

"subjective-objectivity." This study is also in part heuristic, as it includes a

component tied to the personal experience of the researcher. Heuristic inquiry

becomes relevant here through the shared experience with other participants, namely those reared in American Indian families, which in turn provides for an intense interest in the experiences associated with the phenomenon (Ponterotto, 2009).

One of the potential hazards of phenomenological research is a lack of focus that can result from participants' divergent views. The researcher must find both relevant and appropriate similarities and contrasts between participants' ideas and feelings. In order to do this effectively, researchers must comb the data carefully for themes and subthemes, and then triangulate coding with another person and participants, allowing for greater objectivity. In an effort to promote fairness among the groups, within group similarities will be the focus prior to making non-judgmental comparisons between the two groups (Helms, 2007).

Creswell contends that phenomenological qualitative studies proceed from three philosophical assumptions. Firstly, it is assumed that the relevant phenomena will be consciously perceived and experienced by participants (van Manen, 1999). Secondly, it is assumed that those experienced essences of the relevant phenomena will then be described and interpreted rather than analyzed and explained (Moustakas, 1994). Thirdly, it is assumed that each participant will uniquely construe their own realities and experiences, which will formulate and foster an interpretivist-constructivistic paradigm. Finally, it is assumed that it is through their efforts to understand and describe the lived experiences of participants that researchers create its complex and meaningful data (Creswell, 2007).

Indigenous Methodology Framework

Qualitative research involving a combination of Western practices and Indigenous practices poses some challenges that can impact the integrity of both (Lavallée, 2009). In this study, the use of Indigenous Methodology (IM) in the collection of and interpretation of data is of the utmost importance, and as such should be detailed with the idea that it will be a significantly utilized methodology of the research in an effort to compensate for some of the potential challenges that arise when attempting to use the aforementioned practices. Evans, Hole, Berg, Hutchinson, and Sookraj (2009) describe a need for fusion of Indigenous Methodologies, Participatory Action Research, and White studies as the practice most appropriate when working with American Indian Populations. For the purposes of the present research, it is necessary to describe Indigenous Methodology in detail. In their estimation Evans et al. portray IM as a type of research executed by indigenous people and intended for people belonging to these cultures (2009). These practices are intended to draw from Native people's traditions and the knowledge these people. This type of research is done with an intent to ensure research is carried out in a way that displays cultural sensitivity, taking an Indigenous perspective. It is important to note that type of research is not intended to stand against Western research prospectives and traditional notions of psychology, but rather confronts Western psychology with queries posed by what we learn from indigenous knowledges.

Gergen, Josselson, and Freeman (2015) write about the importance of communicating with the culture in general, stating that issues related to justice and oppression are often the primary focus of the qualitative researcher. They indicate

favorability and emphasize the importance in direct communication from participants to audiences that is captured through data conveyance in qualitative research and presentation.

Research Design

This research is a qualitative study. Qualitative research uses interpretive techniques through the process of describing, coding, translating and identifying themes described by individual interviewees to identify and examine the meanings of naturally occurring phenomena in the social world. This does not place importance on themes based on frequency of exact experiences globally identified, but rather shared reactions to stimuli as seen in these themes. Qualitative research assumes knowledge and reality are constructed by the individual based on interactions between human beings and their perceptions of the world around them. As such, meaning is constructed by human beings through these interactions and how individuals uniquely experience and interpret the world around them.

The study involves the collection, organization, and analysis of the collected data using a general qualitative design. The qualitative design in this study can be concisely identified through the use of the following steps: 1) The researchers identify a problem after exploring the literature concerning a topic, 2) In reviewing the literature the researchers identify a gap and justify why the study is important, offering rationale for the study, 3) Researchers specifies a purpose for the study, considering the how, what and why questions regarding the topic, 4) In considering participants, a small number are identified who might offer information related to the study, 5) In analyzing and interpreting the data, researchers attempted to objectively consider

interviewee ideas and knowledge as it emerged, without imposing given meanings upon it. Descriptions and interpretation are taken from an examination of all interviewees' data provided in the form of interpretations of the information presented in the interviews as well as tentative interpretations of the researchers. For instance, interviewee interpretive language will be utilized, and 6) In writing up the report and providing an evaluation of the work, researchers engages in reflexivity in order to counter natural biases (Crotty, 1998).

Data collected from participant interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed, after which an analysis of that data was conducted. Data was coded with themes to identify statements of significance as related to that interviewee's beliefs as related to the topic of structure in a family setting marked. Coded data was grouped into larger categories based on common elements with these categories creating the basis from which the results of this study are to be organized and presented.

Data Sources

Data was collected from interviews consisting of both individuals and groups who identified as families. Five interviews were conducted with a total of nine participants. Participant ages ranged from 28 to 79, and identified as either male or female. Various family roles were represented, including those of son, mother, father, grandmother, and grandfather. All participants identified as American Indian or American Indian and as belonging to traditionally southeastern tribes, meaning tribes who' ancestral homelands are in the southeast United States.

Though there was no geographic exclusion criteria for these participants, all participants were reared in the state of Oklahoma. Also represented were levels of education that spanned from high school to graduate school across participants.

Participants in this study were identified through the use of snowball sampling to obtain the necessary number of participants. Interviewees were encouraged to identify others belonging to American Indian families who identify primarily with traditionally southeastern tribes to obtain the sample needed to reach saturation of the information. Saturation was determined by the researchers as the information presented by the participants largely ceases to present new information. All individuals who chose to participate in this study were given a consent form, which was reviewed with the interviewees and subsequently signed prior to beginning the interviews.

Participants

It should be noted that in an effort to maintain anonymity the primary family role and a letter identify each participant. Each letter indicates the family with whom the participant identifies, as several participants took part in group interviews with other family members. While not all participants took part in family setting interviews, each interviewee identified as a part of a family and as such has a family letter assigned.

Father A. Father A is a 55-year-old man who is a member of the Cherokee Nation. He was reared in Eastern Oklahoma where he participated in traditional Cherokee rituals, and has, along with his wife, begun to participate in inter-tribal Sundances.

Mother A. Mother A is a 56-year-old woman who is a member of the Choctaw Nation. She is a retired schoolteacher who was reared in eastern Oklahoma, where she learned to practice traditional Choctaw songs and has participated in stomp dances of traditional southeastern tribal cultures. She currently participates inter-tribal Sundance, which is a practice she introduced to her family.

Son A. Son A is a 28-year-old man of Choctaw and Cherokee descent, though he primarily identifies as Choctaw. He learned traditional practices of both his parents' respective tribes, as well as inter-tribal Sundances. Son A. lives in Colorado where he works as an oil field worker.

Mother B. Mother B. is a 49-year-old woman of Creek and Cherokee descent, though she primarily identifies as Creek. She was reared in eastern Oklahoma among both Cherokee and Creek people, as well as other members of traditional southeastern tribes. Here grandparents and parents practiced traditional practices of the Creek and Cherokee people, including speaking the native languages of their tribes, along with English, in the home. Mother B. currently lives in central Oklahoma and works as a social worker.

Father C. Father C. is a 35-year-old man of Creek and Seminole descent who primarily identifies as Creek. He grew up in an urban setting, though the community in which he was reared consisted largely of other American Indian people. Father C. works as a minister in an American Indian Methodist church.

Mother D. Mother D. is a 36-year-old Yuchi and Creek woman who identifies equally with both tribes. She was reared in eastern Oklahoma, but currently resides in central Oklahoma where she is a homemaker and mother of two adolescent boys. She

participates in traditional Yuchi ceremonies as well as practices traditional Chickasaw ways with her husband.

Father D. Father D. is a 38-year-old man of Chickasaw and Choctaw descent. He identifies strongly with both tribes, which are tribes with a shared history and ancestry, and speak closely related languages. He was reared in a primarily American Indian community in central southern Oklahoma. He works as a cultural coordinator with the Chickasaw Nation and practices stomp dances as a member of a tribal dance troupe. He also participates in some traditional Yuchi practices with his wife.

Grandmother E. Grandmother E. is a 60-year-old Cherokee woman who was reared in and still lives in eastern Oklahoma in a large Cherokee community. She identifies having had minimal exposure to traditional Cherokee ways as a child in spite of her father and maternal grandmother speaking the language. She attends traditional ceremonies in the present, which is a practice she began as an adult. She is a homemaker.

Grandfather E. Grandfather E. is a 79-year-old Cherokee man who was reared in eastern Oklahoma in a Cherokee community. He reports having grown up in a traditional Cherokee home, and has as an adult begun to practice the ways of other southeastern tribes as a means of learning about the tribes closely related to his own. He is retired from the Cherokee Nation where he worked for many years as a drug and alcohol counselor, primarily with adolescents, and worked with members of a large number of tribes including his own.

Southeastern Tribes

The tribes represented in this study are all identified as Southeastern tribes, which means that they identify their traditional homelands as being in the southeastern United States. The tribes identified by participants as those to which they belong are Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, Seminole, and Yuchi (Gallay, 2002). The aforementioned identified tribes are all large tribes, each containing more than 20,000 members with the exception of the Yuchi (Milligan, D., Bland, A., & Oklahoma State Dept. of Education, O. S. 1985). The Yuchi tribe does, however, identify largely with the Creek and Seminole Nations, with a large number of members holding membership under one of these two tribal nations (Martin, 2011).

Each of the tribes represented in this study are linked in several ways. All practice many similar rituals and are historically matriarchal tribes. They share a similar history dating back to the mid-19th century, each partaking in what has been called the "Trail of Tears" during which they were herded from their southeastern homelands to the eastern parts of Oklahoma. They also share many rituals and forms of social interactions. For instance, they all play stickball, a game very similar to field hockey and lacrosse, except the sticks used by the players do not have nets on their ends but instead small basketlike bowls to catch and throw a small ball. Native football (similar to American football) and participate in summer softball in large numbers. All speak a similar language (Muscogee dialect) except the Cherokee who speak an Algonquin dialect. They have also inter-married frequently since the 1880's. They are similar in many other ways in their histories regarding the taking of their lands and forced democratic/capitalist governments.

Researchers

As an invested member of both the general population of the United States and an active member of the American Indian community, it is of the utmost importance to present an explanation of the researchers. The primary researcher is an American Indian counselor and doctoral student, as well as an active member of the Chickasaw Nation, having worked with that tribe for three years as a counselor who's focus has been primarily with couples and families. This researcher's cultural ties can also place him in an invested role, which could result in a more subjective view of the data gathered from other American Indian people than that of a non-American Indian person.

The second primary researcher is member of the Cherokee Nation who identifies as a Cherokee/Choctaw man, and is a professor in psychology. He has been an active participant in tribal ceremonies among his own and other tribes throughout his lifetime. The researcher's experiences include having worked in tribal settings and appears phenotypically Cherokee. He has been a part of a large number of research projects involving American Indian cultures throughout his career. This researcher's cultural ties can also place him in an invested role when working in such research, which may allow him to hold a more subjective view of the data gathered from other American Indian people than that of a non-American Indian person.

As these dispositions can pose the threat of interfering with the interpretation of the data, the researchers will use bracketing to address such potential interference. Bracketing will consist of consultation between researchers as the process is intended to identify qualities assigned to the data by the researcher as a part of that researcher's

own persona rather than those learned through the collection of the data. This process is intended to avoid interjecting the qualities belonging to the researcher and seen out of a desired inference rather than due to an objective identification of the phenomena (Tufford & Newman, 2010).

Interviews

Each participant was administered a 45-90 minute, semi-structured interview, which was conducted in person by the researchers. Interview protocols were used and interview questions solicited participants' thoughts, experiences and feelings regarding experiences of family interactions as they related to various forms of structure and experiences during childhood in their own households. Interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed. In order to protect the confidentiality of the participants, pseudonyms were used and data has been stored in a password-protected computer. Interviewee information will be deleted after the completion of this study.

Data garnered from qualitative interviewing is aimed at uncovering a particular type of data, and as such it is important to note that the intent and purpose of the qualitative interview is to provide depth and understanding context in a manner different than information obtained through quantitative data. Interview goals are to gather highly descriptive material with as much detail as possible as related to the research topic. This type of research is carried out through the use of open-ended questions in an effort to allow participants to consider the experiences of which they speak. Experiences are explored through the use of semi-structured interviews, allowing the interviewer to seek out clarifying information through additional questions as the need for these questions presents during the interviews following

these initial open-ended questions. This was done carefully in an effort to avoid leading questions by the interviewer, and as such was executed with a presentation more akin to conversational interaction.

This approach is intended to answer questions in which researchers strive to identify "how" as related to individual experience. In doing this, the researcher attempts to garner information that will shed light on a topic through the provision of context and depth, rather than seeking out responses that provide "why" data, and as such attempt to avoid "why" questions. This approach is intended to examine specific experiences of participants and in turn identify themes within groups of experiences across participants. These themes provide a representative description of the phenomenon.

Questions included "How would you describe your idea of family environment?" "What does being in a family mean?" "How flexible was your family around making life choices?" "What did authority look like in your family?" "What were/are the roles of others in your family?" and "How has culture influenced family values and your role in your family?" The aforementioned questions were asked semi-structured manner, with probing questions such as: could you say more about that" or "Could you tell me what you mean by…". Interviewees were also afforded the opportunity to volunteer additional information if they wished.

To ensure informed consent, the interviewees were informed that the principal researcher was attempting to understand 1) how they view family connections and structure and that the researcher will analyze how American Indians participants identify cohesion and structure, 2) if the meanings of cohesion and flexibility between

American Indian differs from that of the majority population, and 3) how has culture

influenced participants' views.

Chapter 4: Results

After analysis of the transcriptions from all participants the researchers agreed upon six themes. The most outstanding theme that appeared to be central to the other three subthemes was identified as primary, and appeared as an umbrella over the other three themes. The primary theme the researchers identified was that of Ritual and Family. The five subthemes identified were Extended Family Structure, Grandparents as the Center of American Indian Families, Guidance, Hierarchy in Families, and Involvement in Sports.

It should be noted that while some information regarding the impacts of ritual are not specifically identified in each quote, all participants referred to cultural ritual and routines when discussing many aspects of family life. These references do appear in transcriptions, but not all references were included in the themes below due to their locations in the interviews and need for continuity in each theme within that theme.

Primary Theme: Ritual and Family

As suggested in the literature review, participants described family interactions frequently revolving around grandparents. More specifically, children and grandchildren either co-habit with grandparents or spend weekends and sometimes summer with them. Grandmothers often cook and clean to support their extended families, but as above quote suggests, children and grandchildren "join in" in the work. Participants especially emphasized their grandmothers as much as their own parents were at the center of the family circle. Great respect and love is repeatedly expressed about grandmothers. Their role as nurturer is seen as the natural way of interacting with family members but it is a role much revered and respected. In fact,

for grandchildren and children not to help with the work, to expect allowances, is viewed irresponsible and disrespectful.

Repeated by several participants was the idea that American Indian and family ways have "deep roots." Some participants put their relationship with their grandparents in the context of poverty, others in terms of traditional American Indian knowledges and wisdom. The quote above, suggests that the participant thought that their grandparents, having a more historical view of family interactions and ways, would be helpful in their understanding his or her own experiences with family members and traditional tribal roles.

Father C: Um, a close, kind of a close knit, I don't know if we encountered a lot of the non-Native American community in many of our interactions other than going to public schools. That might have been the only thing. Um, but, it was um, it was one that I enjoyed. I spent a lot of time with my, my grandparents, in particular my two grandmas who, whether it was spring break, summer breaks, whatever it might have been, that was the first place I went when I was in need of staying with someone. That's who took care of me.

Mother B: I think....considered....which I didn't know until after I was older, I thought everyone was like that, so it included aunts, uncles....well, grandparents I would say were at the center and then aunts, uncles, cousins, and as far as, I'm going to say roles or structure, the grandparents had a lot of input, provided a lot of structure... my grandmother, before she died, she had wrote this kind of letter...and she had wrote that she had raised almost all of her grandkids, and I guess it was true, you know, pretty much true....she did physically but then also family environment was also on

weekends, everybody went there....home was there, everybody lived in Oklahoma

City...different towns...but home was where they were...now, I hear people now say

they get allowances and stuff like that, but it was like, I never heard about stuff like

that...you just did that stuff because it needed to be done...she had ,at one time, she

had eight grandkids living with her, and then we would go there on weekends...us and

then some of my mom's sisters and that's....I started thinking about it....she didn't

work but to feed that many people three times a day....you know, it took....she was

good....she canned during the winter, but during the summer, we would walk down to

the garden. It was like, pick the potatoes, shell the peas, picking all that....picking the

corn....we just did it, you know....we all joined in, and so for me, family environment

there was a lot of people.

Grandmother E: I kind of look at being a grandparent as more important than being

a parent in some aspects. They'll (grandchildren) come and ask us, 'well, why does

mom do this?' and 'why does dad to that', and 'why would they say that, why would

they do that?' you know, and it's like…you can explain to them circumstances that

went on in their parents' lives that influence their decisions and why they do things the

way they do, how that fits in to the way the see…in their friends' homes or their

friends' families…grandparents, in general, are the final word in any subject.

Ritual and Family Interaction.

For several families, much of their lives revolved around tribal rituals.

Throughout the year entire families are involved in making clothes, ceremonial

objects, and behavioral preparations for yearly ceremonies. Persons in the family

typically know the role different family members play in the ceremonies. Consequently they can give each other both physical and emotional support.

Participants contend that involvement in the yearly ceremonies give them not only feelings of cultural unity but promote individual cultural and moral identity. They said that they know that what they do for ceremonies is different than what most folks engage in. The distinctions help them to recognize their racial-ethnic identities. Further, participation in the rituals is associated with leading certain moral lifestyles, such as showing respect to others and not drinking alcohol. Participation also helps them be mindful of the world community and their responsibility to it.

The participants also suggested that the symbols and the depth of experience the ceremonies provide transcends space and time. One participant had not lived with his parents who are heavily involved in the ceremonies for years and yet through his preparations and his eventual participation in the ceremonies is able to stay connected with his parents year around.

Son A: What you have to understand is that it is more than just things we do or used to do together when I lived with them. It is an attitude and value we all shared. Dad was a pipe carrier from long as I knew. This meant no liquor in our house and no drinking period. When you have a pipe carrier who takes it serious like dad, it changes things. Everybody in the lodge knows it. It made it like everybody … you are supposed to show respect to each other. I carry a pipe now and I remember what that meant in our family. Show respect in the way you talk to each other.

Son A: We were a real close Family. Our values are similar. We are still close. I come down every time I can. We always spend the week at sundance together. We stay in a trailer house since three years ago.

Mother A: It is really months of work. You have prayer ties, that takes months. You have to give each other space but you must be around to support each other. I mean even the basic physical preparations are family. We have to clean the tents and finally set them up. There is all the cooking that we always did together and the cutting of the wood and my son husband and sun went to get the stones several times. It is a year long thing.

Son A: It really gave me an identity. I mean I knew Indians who did not have ceremony and I wondered how they really felt about not really doing anything Indian spiritually. I live in Denver now and I think I if I didn't have sundance I wouldn't think I really had an Indian place.

Father: It is a good way. You can help each other grow this way. It is like this way is the most important thing in our lives and we all feel that way together. And it is not easy. It is a hard way which pulls us together. I am even not sure how everything else would mean something if we didn't put our lives around Indian ceremony.

Son: A Gosh so different. Growing up they couldn't understand why I couldn't and did not want to do stuff on Saturday night. I think everyone thought we were a really serious family but when they got to know us we were funny. But I think we were closer because we really took our rituals really seriously.

Father A: Our way is hard. You can't do it if you don't think it is serious and you put you spirit into it. The things you do are painful and time consuming. But it is worth it.

White people have their own ways and I respect them. But I think we think of ourselves

less as on a lonely journey.

Mother A: Yes. It is important not to show off even when we sing. And when we do

these rituals we do them for the community, our family and for the entire world not for

ourselves. Personal stuff if anything is just is an offshoot.

Father D: Well, as far as every day, it's always, um, it's always...you think about...as

far as uh, as you see your elders, and um...kids, life, family, that sort of stuff, that sort

of thing. Because, um...because what I saw there was everybody did everything as a

community. Not one person did one thing. A group of us get together. All the men get

together and we have, we have our responsibilities. All the women get together, they

have their responsibilities. So it's just kind of how it works. Um...So, I look at that,

well, it's just kind of family, it's how we do our thing. Our family's different than

somebody else's. We try to pass on our songs, um, everything we teach our children.

My wife's Creek and Yuchi, and we try to pass on those songs, to our kids. And my

Choctaw, Chickasaw songs too...to try and get our kids to do the same thing. Um, just

so that we can, um, have that, with them and they can have that we they go on. With

their families.

Guidance

Many participants claimed that parents and grandparents for the most part were

not stringent in their control of children's' lives. But there were tribal traditions and

taboos that children must be aware of and respect, else there were consequences.

These tribal ways were taught to the above participant by his uncle, which historically

occurred in tribes which were matriarchal, such as those which participants in this

study belong. But just as important has the set protocol based on traditional ways were the casual or as he said "flexible" times. Interestingly enough, the above participant argues that it is in unrestricted times, or play times, that people really learn about life.

Mother B: I'm going to say....uh.....you know, they were more flexible than I realized at the time....I mean....especially as teenager I didn't think they were, but I'm going to say there was a lot of tradition involved. I think it was more tradition that got me...that wasn't flexible....It kind of got me in trouble....if you stepped out or went outside of tradition, but otherwise in making choices, life choices, I had input and guidance, not only from my parents but my grandparents, and um....usually an uncle....I have an uncle I looked up to, but overall, it was....if you made a choice, you felt supported in it.

Father C: ...in some situations it, it...it wasn't real open and flexible in terms of that. But one thing that was a part of that was that they always kept the door open for, um, traditional practice. You know, our family comes from a particular ceremonial ground, and, while it wasn't always encouraged (by others) to go and do it fully, we always kept the door open to go and attend that, and at least keep it in our lives, which...in some communities, some families in our communities where that's not the case at all. So, there was a little bit of flexibility, but, not, not a whole lot.

Now, in terms of other life experiences I feel like there were, there were a lot more, um, opportunities to be flexible, you know, whether it be playing activities, playing sports, whether it be, um, choosing a university to go to, um, things of that nature. I think that was, um, I was allowed to get that opportunity, and to, to, I guess you could say figure out, figure out life. So they allowed, they allowed for that.

(parents) They were kind of strict in the way they did chores and did things. Very regimented that way. Um, I think a little of that fit with their... Um, now when it comes, in my, older days, with major life decisions, um, I think they have supported me whole-heartedly with major decisions. Putting me through uh my undergraduate work um paying for that and at the last minute when I changed my major and said I wasn't going to law school um most parents would freak out after spending tens of thousands of dollars to educate your child uh, to go through that to say that I'm going to go to seminary and be a clergy person. Um, where most people would be upset, they supported that. So I think as time goes on, as time went on, we um our maturity, our understanding of the ability to make those type of life decisions, you know, got a little bit easier.

Hierarchy in Families

There are those who assume that American Indian communal culture is necessarily based on equality. But the participants in this study describe a distinct hierarchy in which elders, or grandparents possess knowledge and wisdom due to their experience that naturally places them in positions of greater prestige and power. In one of the examples above, a grandfather restricts the child's verbal expression in given situations. He contends that the internalization of this value reticence in the presence of elders impacted contradicted expectations of persons in other situations.

Further, the above quotations reflect difference between males and females. One of the quotes relates that males are to speak first in the Creek Church, which is probably a reflection of Christian colonialization. There is also the idea of the female receiving the protection of male family members which probably has a long history in

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tribal cultures and persists today as the researchers in this paper have heard this idea expressed many times among American Indian males.

The last participant quoted above indicates some rupture of traditional hierarchy. While grandparents are still engaging in much childrearing in her family, she, unlike her mother before her acted promptly without questioning her mother's authority, feels free to not only disagree with her mother but to act in opposition to her mother.

Mother C: I'm going to say tradition, that was like....um....I'm going to say like at church.....there were things that I didn't understand, and at Creek churches, there are still a lot of traditions. And so I would ask questions and I would just ask....I would ask my grandpa and he was kind of the leader, and they have women leaders and some things they would tell me, you just need to do it....and young people are getting to where they question everything, and you just need to do it, and I didn't.....I felt like they were getting on to me, but still I wanted to know and I wasn't getting answers so....and there's some things like, you don't sit here at Creek churches and so that's a big deal if you do.....um....certain things you need to let the males speak first or go first and for me if I didn't or spoke up first, then usually, my grandpa would let me know. And, so you found out, but then I still....but I found out, when I started moving to other areas, I would stay away from those areas where if I am going to play sports or if I'm going to do something like that, I need to speak up and be first or go first and so I had to learn that difference.

…it's like two worlds....yeah...it's two worlds....it's like when you go to your teacher, you go ahead and question her....and soon as you've got a question, that's

what she wants, but over here in this setting, when we are around....I guess most of it's when we are around our elders, don't treat them like that.

Father B: I can remember sitting with my dad and I had to use one of the cars, they had some cars, some vehicles, and if I had to use one of them, I had to go to class and do something, I would use the one that was on the verge of breaking down because I was the male. 'If anything's going to happen, it's going to happen to you and we'll give the good car to, to your sister or your mom, um, you know, that kind of environment. I was expected to, you know, take care of it. I was expected to be able to take care of...flat tires, or dead batteries. All the little things like that, to be able to change it. Um, so, with that it was, it was pretty, uh, I won't say rough, but it was, um...I think there was a high expectation there.

Mother C: My parents have taken on the role....I mean, they're raising grandkids so they're pretty busy, so that's a big part of it. Um....and then all of the activities that go on now. So we do a lot of the...I mean, I do, I still talk to my mom and to my sister, um.....and I'll listen to my mom's input, but it's not always like, if I don't do it that way it's wrong....the way she always did what her mother told her to do and that's what she did right then.

Extended family structure

Participants believed their connections to their extended American Indian families are different than those of other racial-ethnic groups. They define it as feeling great responsibility to spend time with and to support distant blood relations and even persons who they have connected with in a deep way. Acknowledging these

connections is equivalent to extending one's sense of self into something larger than who they are as individuals.

As valued as the extended family is, several participants perceive great changes in extended family connections due to our mobile modern society and to crisis' within American Indian communities. Some of the participants who are no longer able to live within close knit American Indian communities find themselves testing the waters to see if the responsible interdependence can be replicated in their new communities or find themselves having to travel great distances to go home to get such nourishment. The problem of alcohol abuse and extreme poverty and the other problems associated with them has also resulted in some Natives to contract into their own nuclear families where they feel more safe.

Father C: I think it is, um, just looking at it, it is one that is close, but, when I say extended, meaning that there is a tremendous number. The family that I consider myself to be a part of is something that will be, of course, like your average citizen of our country, last name, family related, cousins, aunts and uncles. And usually within the native context that can be tremendous and I'm one of those statistics where I have several aunts and uncles.

But it's also something greater than that, you know, I have two siblings of my own and my own family where I have three children and one on the way. But it's also something greater than that, is that, within the context of my family itself and in our particular tribe that we are a part of we consider our ceremonial family relatives, included as cousins, aunts and uncles, and we refer to each other as that when we see us. So that can be kind of ambiguous to folks from outside the community when they're

looking in. The biggest thing that people say is 'oh, you have a big family,' well,

everybody does.

Mother B: For me, it is....I mean, that it just a big part of life, that's who I am...almost

even a part of survival....a lot of my friends...I've noticed a lot of my friends now, and

growing up, are family.....they might be like distant cousins or something, but most of

them are family.

Father D: Having a system of support to help us through moments of indecision.

Moments of trial, um…I think that's one of the things that, um, that we often find

ourselves in crisis because, we're not in an immediate community like we once were

as Native Americans, as Native American people. It's that there was a time and age

when we were all, you could walk to another home of another person, and that

structure was there, you know, to have a conversation with an elder, that you could

have a conversation with a grandmother or grandfather, whereas now, in our

community, sometimes they're hours away, sometimes you have to jump on an

airplane to get in to that community, that circle.

Grandmother E: Well, you're always going to depend on, outside sources, you know?

You're always gonna have this little inner circle that…if you need something, you

need something done, you go to them first. You don't look to, like, the Cherokee

Nation to provide for you. It's a kind of a reliance upon those that are the closest to

you, rather than…And I fully, I fully realize that agencies and things like that, they're

there to provide services that, you might not be able to…to get anywhere else, but you

still need this…this circle, just because they do know how you want things done, or

how you…They're familiar with you. You don't have to do a lot of explaining. You just

say, 'hey, I need you to come over and do this…' And I do that quite frequently, with

my sons, you know, rather than higher someone to clean out the gutters, I just call my

son to come clean out the gutters…and he does. So, yeah, just to known that there is

that there to fall back on first without hunting up somebody else or some thing first.

Grandfather E: To be able to, you know, not just talk…I got a chip the other day from

an organization I belong to, and my son-in-law gave it to me. My daughter usually

does, but she wasn't, she got her dates mixed up and he had to work. And he said that,

you know, I never looked like…him and I got into an argument one time, a long long

time ago, and he kind of hung on to that for a while. But he said, '(You) never pushed

me to do anything, he'd just walk through that situation and show me.' And I think

that, in that safety, of the family, you know, I think that is a very important component,

that teaching in family.

Sports

Several participants reported the importance of involvement in sports. As one

of the participants described it, such participation is jovial or in some sense of the

word casual, which does not mean that they are not competitive. Typically they are

described as safe and filled with good humor. Women and girls typically participate

with the men. It is the time of family and community. Often, as mentioned above

parents offer children much support. Participation, rather than passive observation is

the rule, including grandparents and aunts and uncles.

Participants also spoke of how mainstream sports which take up much time

and ritual events must sometimes be scheduled around them. This was a recurring

theme throughout the interviews. Mainstream events are not set up in ways that accord

with American Indian traditional life schedules. The conflicts may undermine traditional American Indian life styles.

Father C: I think it was, it was more, um, kind of a jovial setting. Um, never did I ever see alcohol or drugs in my vision. Um, it was one of a just, almost just, like, a social gathering, you know. I remember a lot of stories being told, I remember a lot of jokes and making fun of each other, things to that effect. Um, the environment was, it was pretty safe. I know the team members that played on both teams, playing basketball were my aunts as well, so I had a lot of cousins around with me, and we often found ourselves, you know, getting in to our own trouble running around and like turning off lights when we shouldn't have, and just, stuff like that.

Mother D: F: Part of it's schedule too, I guess. Part of it's scheduling. Um, as part of being, part of being part of the grounds there's certain activities that we do leading up to our Green Corn ceremony throughout the whole year. Um, starting off with Easter.

We have (Native American) football games and we have where we start dancing and we go to those. And also once you start dancing you, um, go on a fast, so, as far as scheduling and eating, that to be, I guess, its not part of every day life, but it's constantly there, 'what do we have coming up?' You know, is there a soccer tournament, is there this, that? Because, you know, we gotta schedule around our time that we have to be up there at the grounds.

Father D: We all run together as a family too, these days. I'm not very competitive, but my wife and our oldest are. It's usually me in the back. I just do what I can, but I'm not as fast as them. You know, I got bad knees sometimes. But we all four do it together.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This study set out to explore perceptions American Indian people who belong to traditionally southeastern tribes view family connections and examine the impact Native identity has on these connections. The study shows a clear need for practitioners to better understand the nuances of American Indian families. Described were the unique contexts of American Indian families dealing with historic trauma, the complex intricacies of their extended families' vital and unique roles of grandparents in the family system and the complex and integral interactions entailed in participants' involvement in tribal rituals and social gatherings. It was made clear that the gifts associated with the American Indian extended family must be seen as assets and utilized to ensure culturally appropriate and effective care of American Indian clients.

Clinical implications

The study provided information that may contribute to treatment approaches that are more reflective of American Indian beliefs about family and healing. Expanding the state of knowledge about American Indian families may lead to the helping professions to combat the tendency of many helpers to devalue American Indian ways and interactions that may in fact lead to more culturally relevant treatment approaches.

More specifically, this study offered several elements of American Indian family interactions that might be especially valuable to explore in counseling sessions. For instance, some of the participants argued that tribal rituals were crucial to their everyday lives throughout the year. In many instances where families have been separated, therapists may help clients consider how they might use the common ritual

practices to connect with each other across space. When appropriate, therapists may help these clients to consider the meaningfulness of the rituals to combat loneliness, depression or other stressors. On a larger scale, therapists may help clients connect their participation in traditional rituals to clients' contribution to the ongoing vitality of their tribal cultures. In other words, discussions about both individual and tribal identities may be worthwhile subjects. Also, conversations that involve discussion of what it feels like to live both in traditional American Indian culture and mainstream culture may be beneficial.

A therapist's respect for family tradition and understanding of differences in family dynamics from that of the majority culture are important aspects of adapting treatment with an intention of building on strengths that align with community values. Cultural-based practices have been shown to promote improved mental and behavioral health among American Indian youth (Schweigman, Soto, Wright, & Unger, 2011). For behavioral health programs directed toward American Indian families one must be culturally aware in order to provide services that are meaningful to those who hold significant cultural ties (Dickerson & Johnson, 2011). Credibility among individual families in regard to the tribe is typically identified as a concern for therapists providing services to American Indian individuals. Development of credibility can be time consuming, as American Indian people often report feeling that it takes time for a family to build trust with non- American Indian therapists working with American Indian people or therapists who are American Indian from a tribe other than their own (Walker, Whitener, Trupin, & Migliarini, 2013). Familiarity with studies such as this may provide some insight into the context of American Indian family interactions and

dynamics that can impact the effectiveness of the clinician in making therapeutic connections.

Participants made poignant comments regarding the roles of parents and grandparents in their lives. Some experienced their authority as positive while other did not. It may be beneficial to help clients deconstruct power and respect of parents and grandparents in the context of the changing dynamics of their life worlds, considering both their positive aspects and the less beneficial aspects. These discussions will require great sensitivity and respect. Therapists must be careful not to align themselves with colonialization of American Indians by promoting "the reality" of our mobile society or the benefits of the nuclear family over the extended family. But they should not ignore the unique and sometimes destructive nature of individual familial situations either.

The above participant comments also suggest that counselors should be aware that many aspects of White cultures should not be accepted as universal. In fact, American Indian families must contend with opposing views regarding scheduling, such as with involvement in sporting activities. Participants suggest that a larger issue is at stake. Mainstream social rhythms are not always in sink with American Indian ceremonies. Counselors can never reconcile this conflict for American Indians but they can help them clarify the conflicts and come up with strategies to cope on a psychological level and negotiate their needs with institutions.

Finally, this study graphically demonstrated that counselor knowledge of family extensiveness and hierarchy is vital when working with American Indians. Such knowledge could be crucial when considering proper protocol when

demonstrating respect and in order of talking to family members. It also revealed the strength and power that is assessable to American Indians during times of crisis. Counselors might remember that there is potentially great support to be found in the American Indian extended family.

Limitations

The information and discussion here must be viewed within the contexts of limitations. This study consisted in a small sample size. Further the sample only represented a very small number of the over 500 tribes in the United States. Consequently, generalizability to tribes with different family values and interactive styles is limited. Still, the narrower focus on five similar tribes in Oklahoma can be viewed as a strength. These tribes also have a shared history of removal from homelands in an area of relative proximity to one another in the southeastern United States and relocation to the State of Oklahoma, and the individual participants share a common tie having been reared in Oklahoma. Readers need to know that when working with American Indians that localized and tribally specific knowledge is crucial to inform their work. Such specific knowledge allows American Indian clients to experience treatment that is delivered within a meaningful context with which they can identify.

Future Research

In considering research related to this study's focus of American Indian family connections, there is an array of possibilities due to the limited existing research. One major area that would likely benefit from research is that of assessment and evaluation. This study was in part inspired by trends noticed in a specific tribal family

counseling setting around the use of the Family Adaptability and Cohesiveness Scale, Version IV (FACES-IV). This study has demonstrated that though many of the constructs that underlie Faces-IV is important to American Indians, they may wear a different costume that is vital to take into account.

Further exploration may be beneficial in a similar study carried out with other American Indian groups not of the southeastern region of the United States. Such research could contribute to understanding of divergent American Indian family interactions. In keeping with the themes identified in terms of family connection, it may also be beneficial to examine family connectedness attitudes as related to perceptions of support as guidance and autonomy support. This may be of particular interest given the ideas around connection and notions of individual identity as being a member of a larger family or community.

In addition to qualitative exploration, the use of quantitative exploration may also be beneficial to address assessments through examination of norms on American Indian cultures or to address the development of specific assessment tools to be used with this population. This study may serve to inform in part or serve as model for similar studies with other minority cultural groups.

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Appendix A: Subjectivity Statement

My research topic is the examination of views of family cohesiveness, or connections within the family, and flexibility between American Indians and non-American Indians in the United States. I intend to examine the difference in views of cohesiveness and flexibility that are influenced by American Indian cultures within themselves as opposed to the views in the general population. I intend to interview people who identify as American Indians over the age of 18 years, and are no more than two generations removed from ancestors who speak their native languages and other non-American Indians who are over the age of 18.

I am a American Indian man of Chickasaw descent. As a American Indian person and a person who has worked in mental health for more than ten years, I have seen a number of instances in which American Indian people are identified as having troubles in family or home lives because they have family practices that are different than those of the majority of mainstream American society. I have sporadically for some time worked with Native American children and families, and intend to continue to do so throughout the remainder of my career. It is my assumption that many negative views of American Indian families come from a lack of understanding of the norm. In my work with American Indian people of various tribal backgrounds, it has been my assertion that the majority of American Indian families do have differing views on connectedness and flexibility than those of non-American Indians.

American Indian families, in my experience, have often presented with the appearance of being more chaotic yet more connected than do non-American Indians. It is my belief that if non-American Indians are able to see these views from the

perspective of a American Indian person following empirical research to display these differences, American Indian people may be able to gain some acknowledgement that their practices are as beneficial as those of non-American Indians. Having grown up in a American Indian family and community with a large American Indian population I also feel this is the case from personal experience.

In conducting this research I would like to work toward developing ways to identify how to help American Indian families through broadening the view of what a family should look like. I feel that if there were research that identified why American Indian people hold different views of what makes a strong or cohesive and well-functioning family unit it would be easier for non-American Indians to identify what the norm is in American Indian families. American Indians are often identified as holding a lower socioeconomic status than the majority of the population of the United States, and as such I believe most of the participants sought out in the research would likely be of moderate-to-low socioeconomic status. I intend to interview both male and female participants, and do not intend to limit the participant pool to heterosexual people.

I would like to examine this by interviewing American Indian people about their views of what family means and what a typical American Indian family looks like.

I believe one strength I have is that as a American Indian person I am able to gain access to other American Indian people in a manner that non-American Indians are not. This can be beneficial, as previous research has shown that American Indian people are often not trusting of non-American Indians.

Regarding weaknesses, I believe the same ethnic background I possess and have identified as beneficial may also play into a weakness. There is a chance that I may hold some biases in hoping for results that indicate normality in terms of connectedness and flexibility that is often seen as detrimental. However, I do see this as a potential pitfall for any researcher regardless of race given that all researchers are likely to wish their research to be found as substantially significant and correct.

Appendix B: Demographics Table

Primary Role	Gender	Age	Tribal Affiliation(s)	Family
Father	Male	55	Cherokee	A
Mother	Female	56	Choctaw	A
Son	Male	28	Cherokee/Choctaw	A
Mother	Female	49	Creek/Cherokee	B
Father	Male	35	Creek/Seminole	C
Mother	Female	37	Yuchi/Creek	D
Father	Male	38	Chickasaw/Choctaw	D
Grandmother	Female	60	Cherokee	E
Grandfather	Male	79	Cherokee	E

Table 1. Demographic Information

Appendix C: Demographic Information Form

Age: _____

Gender: _____

Income (circle one):   Below $20,000 $20,000-39,999 $40,000-59,999 $60,000-79,999

80,000+

Level of education (circle one):

Some High School

High School Graduate

Some College

College Graduate

Some Graduate/Professional school

Graduate/Professional degree completed

Primary language spoken in the home: _____

Other languages spoken in the home in which you were raised: _____

_____

Please list any other languages in which you are fluent: _____

_____

Primary Identified Ethnic/Cultural descent (circle one*): Euro-American Native American

If you answered Native American, please indicate your tribe(s): _____

_____
_____

Appendix D: Interview Protocol

Introduction
Thank you for time and willingness to participate. As you know, I am interested in examining views of family connections and flexibility. Particularly, I am trying to explore American Indian views of family connections regarding flexibility and cohesion and how culture influences individual views of what a family is and how families function. If the questions are general and abstract, you may volunteer any detail you wish. Also, depending on your answer, I may ask probing questions. You also have the option of declining to answer – passing on – any of the questions. Do you have any questions before we start?

Interview Questions
1. In what rituals do you participate?
2. What role does ritual play in your life?
3. How would you describe your family environment?
4. What does being in a family mean?
5. How flexible were your parents with you/are you with your children in terms of allowing freedom in making life choices?
6. How does culture play into your role within your own family?
7. What were/are the roles of others in your family?
8. How has culture influenced family values?
9. How would you describe the experiences you have had as a part of your family?

Closing
Now that we are done, do you have any questions you'd like to ask me about this research project? If you want to contact me later, here is my contact information, please feel free to contact me should you have any questions. The best way to contact me is through e-mail. Also, I may need to contact you later for additional questions or clarification. Can I also have your follow-up contact information?