Wicasa Was'aka: Addressing Historical Trauma with American Indian Males*

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***Brave Heart, et al., 2012 , American Journal of Public Health, 102, (S2) S177-S183**
ISTSS 27th Annual Meeting, Thursday November 3rd, 2011, Baltimore, MD
Oyate Wiconi Kte, Cha Lechel Echu Kun Pi (We Do This So the People May Live)
Mental Health & Behavioral Health Conference,
Aberdeen Area, April 17, 2012

Presentation Part I Review

- Contemporary American Indian males face generations of historical trauma, changing gender roles, military experience, erosion of traditional male identity development opportunities, and lack of access to health/behavioral health services

- Examining current psychosocial issues within the framework of the historical context and collective massive group trauma across generations

- Explores the impact of collective traumatic experiences of AI males; traditional prescriptions and values for male roles, values, and behaviors

Presentation Part I Review

- Historical Trauma and Historical Unresolved Grief
- Implications for Native Men, Traditional Warriors and Protectors of the People
- Modern Warriors - Military Service and Veterans
- The HTUG Intervention: A Tribal Best Practice
- Historical Trauma Informed Research

1. HTUG Intervention Research
2. Gender Differences in Response to HTUG

Part II Overview & Introduction

- Collective Responses
- Diverse, Idiosyncratic (Individual or Unique) Responses
- Ambivalence and Guilt
- Recommendations to Restore Native Men as Traditional Warriors and Protectors of the People
- Experiences of Participants in Working with Native Military Servicemen and Veterans – Discussion
- DVD Clip - **Oyate Wiconi Kte, Cha Lechel Echu Kun Pi**

"We Do This So That The People May Live"

Part I Review: Scope of the Problem

- Although American Indians are the smallest ethnic group in the United States, they rank highest in health disparities compared to any ethnic or racial group.
- Many American Indian communities face multiple traumatic deaths with great frequency due to elevated morbidity and mortality rates, lowered life expectancy, and high accidental death rates.
- Both Northern Plains and Southwest tribal groups have greater degrees of trauma exposure compared with the general population.
- Traditional mourning practices and cultural protective factors were impaired.

Part I Review:
Scope of the Problem

- Death rates for American Indian males exceed their female counterparts for every age group up to 75 years and in six of the eight leading causes of death.
- 5 of the top 10 leading causes of death are related to voluntary risky behaviors that might be preventable with appropriate public health interventions
- Need for culturally appropriate, historically cognizant prevention and intervention models
- Seeks to reduce the suffering of AI males and improving their behavioral as well as overall health

Part I Review: Conceptual Framework: Historical Trauma

<u>Definitions</u>

- Historical Trauma
- Historical Unresolved Grief
- Historical Trauma Response

Part I Review: The Takini Network

The *Takini* (Survivor) Network formed in 1992 as a collective to address healing from historical trauma and historical unresolved grief among the Lakota as well as other Native people through therapeutic work, prevention, research, publication and community education. Now known as the Takini Institute

Part I Review: Wakiksuyapi (Memorial People)

- Takini Network as *Wakiksuyapi*, carrying the historical trauma but working on healing from it and sharing that healing with others
- Wardi's work Memorial Candles – where one person in Holocaust family is selected to carry the trauma
- For the Lakota, specific *tiospaye* (extended kinship network) or bands may carry the trauma for the Nation, i.e. those most impacted by Wounded Knee Massacre
- We are descendants of traditional warriors and survivors; we are children of World War II Marine, Army, and Navy veterans; Takini includes Vietnam veterans and involving Korean War, OEF/OIF veterans

Wakiksuyapi (Memorial People)

- We are survivors, descendants, of boarding school trauma, alcoholism in our families, and other trauma
- We are committed to healing and to our traditional ways
- 2/3 of American Indian youth affirm multiple traumas (Manson et al., 1996)
- American Indians 15-54 years had a trauma exposure rate of 62.4% to 69.8% to at least one traumatic event; a substantial proportion of these entail death of a loved one (Manson, Beals, Klein, Croy, & AI-SUPERPFP Team, 2005)
- **American Indian males and females have similar trauma exposure rates in contrast with gender differences in the general population; AI women have greater rates than other women** (Manson, et al., 2005)

Part I Review: American Indian Veterans: Wakiksuyapi

Approximately 177,000 American Indians and Alaska Natives are veterans. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006.

<u>World War 1</u>

- **About 12,000 American Indians served during <u>WW I</u>**

<u>World War II</u>

- More than **44,000 American Indians** served in the military from 1941 to 1945, including 800 women.
- An estimated 99 percent of healthy male American Indians ages 21 to 44 were registered for the draft.

American Indian Veterans

Korean War

- More than **10,000 American Indians served** during the Korean War.

Vietnam War

- More than **42,000 American Indians served** in the Armed Forces between 1965 and 1975.

American Indian Veterans

Post-Vietnam Era

- During the Gulf War, more **than 3,000 American Indians served** in the Gulf region.
- Includes Desert Storm/Shield and Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom.

American Indians in Current Active Duty Military

- More than 24,000 active duty military are American Indians.

Source: Department of Defense 2005

The DOD number is somewhat understated in that American Indians of mixed ancestry (that is, those who are of another race or races as well as American Indian) are not included.

Part I Review: Other Issues

- Both Native male and female veterans have frequent signs of PTSD and PTS; although Native men have greater combat exposure, Native women have higher rates of victimization and sexual trauma in military; sexual trauma in the military exists among both genders
- Both Native men and women need outreach and support; victims of such trauma tend to blame themselves and feel shame often keeping them from seeking help
- Substances abuse can cause changes in brain and body, making it difficult to stay clean and sober
- Research that shows people participating in traditional ceremonies are more likely to stay drug and alcohol free

Part I Review: Other Issues

- **Backdrop of intergenerational trauma – modern, lifespan trauma, combat trauma, military trauma is superimposed upon the collective historical trauma**
- **Complex, often ambivalent relationships with the military (e.g. the 7th Cavalry – Custer's regiment)**
- **Challenge of translating traditional responsibilities as warriors and protectors into modern times**
- Military service often seen as only viable option
- Socioeconomic factors also come into play for other communities of color and impoverished communities
- **"Ambivalent transference" – age of recruits developmentally**

Part I: Identification & Self-Hatred

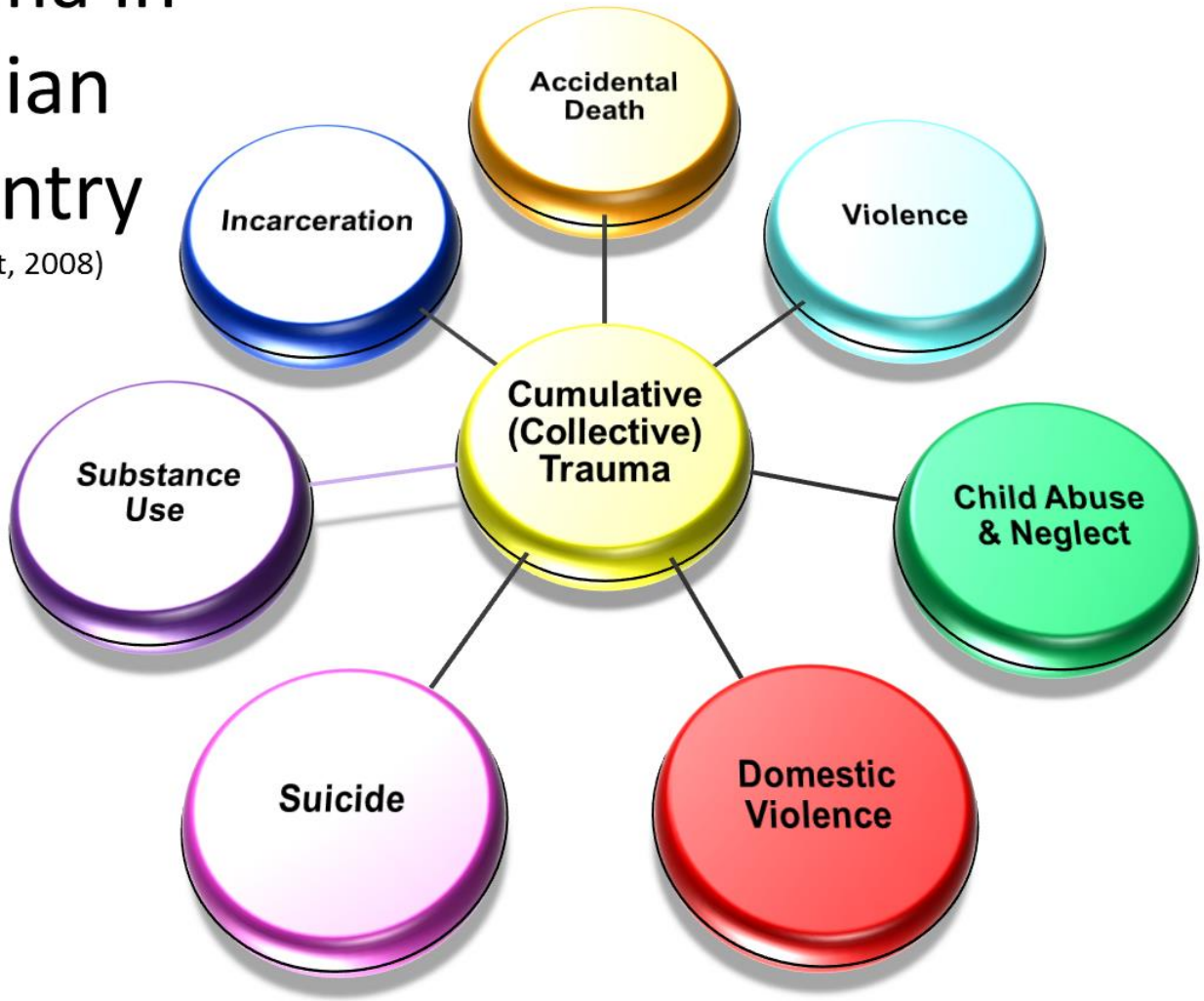
- Identification with the aggressor (A. Freud) & internalized oppression (Freire)
- Identification with the oppressor's view of Natives, resulting in self-hatred
- Self-destructive behavior (i.e. SA) to avoid pain and to act out the self-hatred
- "*Ain't no cavalry running around – now we are doing it to ourselves*."

Part I Review: **Cultural Context & Grief**

- Native mourning resolution is distinct from European American grief
- Loss of close relative experienced as loss of part of self, exhibited by cutting the hair
- Natives maintain active relationship with ancestor spirits
- Culturally, AI men more relational than white males, more similar styles of attachment to AI women
- **Massive group trauma (genocide) impairs normative grief; extent & quality of losses (trauma exposure) limit time for culturally congruent mourning resolution**

Trauma in Indian Country

(Bigfoot, 2008)



Intergenerational Parental Trauma

I never bonded with any parental figures in my home. At seven years old, I could be gone for days at a time and no one would look for me….I've never been to a boarding school....all of the abuse we've talked about happened in my home. If it had happened by strangers, it wouldn't have been so bad- the sexual abuse, the neglect. Then, I could blame it all on another race….And, yes, they [my parents] went to boarding school.

A Lakota Parent & Veteran in Recovery

(Brave Heart, 2000, pp. 254-255)

Conceptual Framework: Historical Trauma

Historical Trauma in Males

– *Wicasa Was'aka:* Traditional Protectors

"I think losing the land was the most traumatic ... I remember my aunts and uncles and my dad talked about ...how they were treated, some were shot…They were starved....So this happened in my great grandparents' generation when they lost the buffalo. My grandparents' generation lost the land and their livelihood....That's from generation to generation. There are a lot of answers that I don't have and a lot of questions that I do have and there is a lot of hurt inside me. .... Some of these things happening over the years are still happening today, like my grandparents, my great grandparents had their children moved to schools ... I was moved, my brothers and sisters moved…There's a big hole in my heart. We see it happening to our grandchildren already.... Where does it stop?"

Conceptual Framework: Historical Trauma

<u>Historical Trauma in Males</u>

- Impact of Historical Trauma on Modern American Indian Male Roles, Values and Behaviors (HTR)

"I went there [Vietnam] prepared to die, looking to die, so being in combat, war, and shooting guns and being shot at was not traumatic to me. That was my purpose and my reason for being there. What was traumatic for me was that it brought on a lot of rage when seeing other people, the same color as me, being abused by the war. That was the hardest thing while I was there .... I was having a battle with the army I was in."

Conceptual Framework: Historical Trauma

- Frames lifespan idiosyncratic trauma within collective, historical context
- Empowers American Indian survivors of both communal & individual trauma by reducing sense of stigma and isolation
- Individual trauma responses emerge from genocide, oppression, and racism

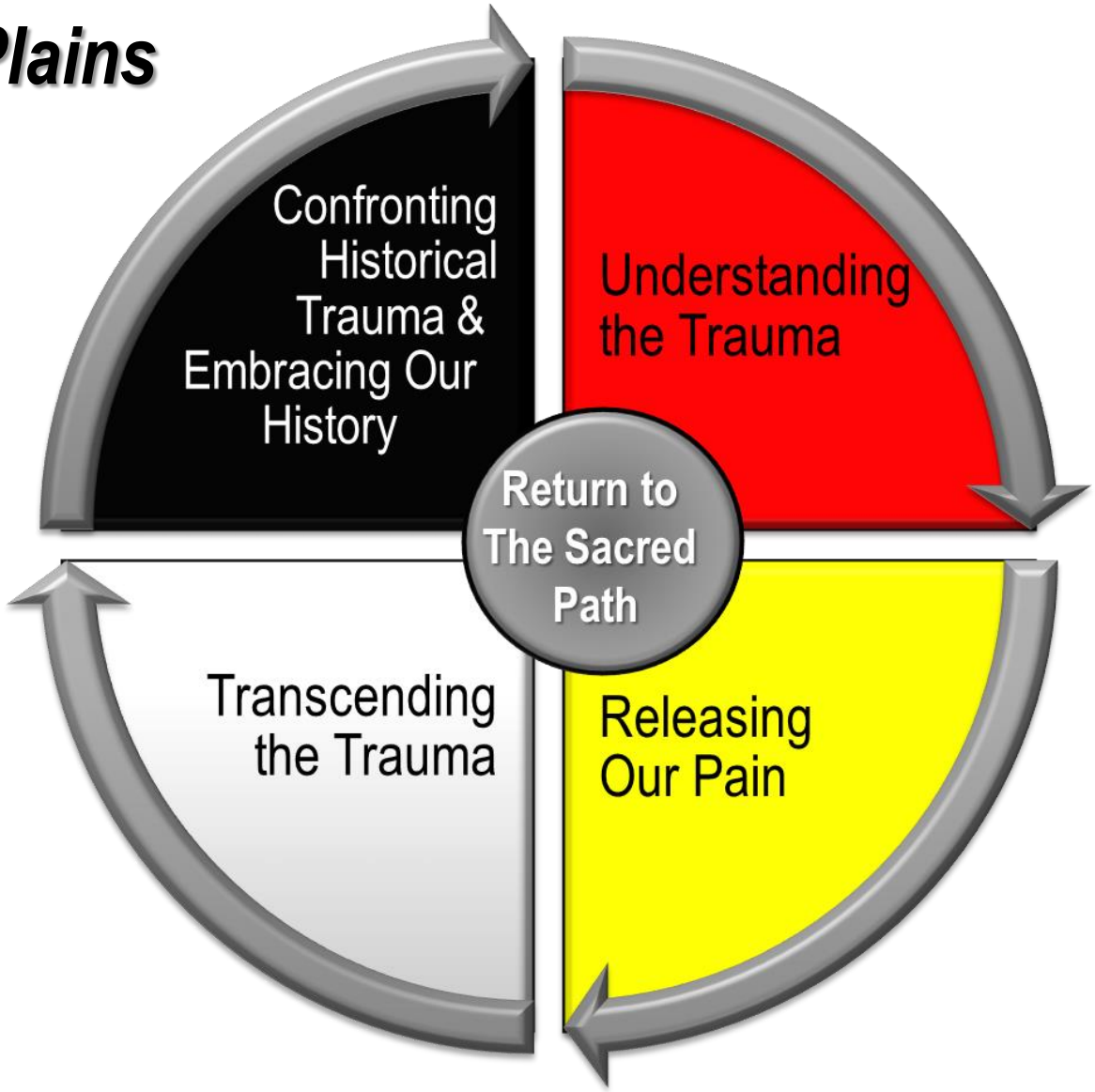
Survivor guilt
Depression
PTSD symptoms
Psychic numbing
Fixation to trauma
Somatic symptoms
Low self-esteem
Victim Identity
Anger

Suicidal ideation
Hypervigilance
Intense fear
Dissociation
Compensatory fantasies
Poor affect tolerance
Self-destructive behavior
Death identity; Trauma & death preoccupation

Dreams of massacres, historical trauma content
Loyalty to ancestral suffering & the deceased
Internalization of ancestral suffering
Vitality in own life betrayal to ancestors

Historical Trauma Informed Interventions:

Northern Plains Example



Intergenerational Traumatic Grief

- Federal prohibition against practice of traditional Native spirituality limited bereavement resulting in unresolved grief across generations

- Dominant societal view of Natives as “savage” and unfeeling – dehumanizing, invalidating grief
- Acute grief which persists becomes unresolved, prolonged, complicated

- **Modern multiple losses & cumulative traumatic losses superimposed upon collective generational trauma**

HT Theory, Depression, PTSD, Trauma Exposure, & Prolonged Grief: Wakiksuyapi

- **American Indian males 15-54 years old have greater prevalence of any lifetime depressive disorder, PTSD, or any anxiety disorder than general population**

- For PTSD, American Indian male prevalence is 12.8% in SW and 11.5% in NP

- For any anxiety disorder, it is 15.9% and 13.1% compared to 8.6% among males in general population

- American Indian female rates are higher than American Indian males and than females in general population (females in general have higher rates of anxiety and depression)

(Beals, et al., 2005)

HT Theory, Depression, PTSD, Trauma Exposure, & Prolonged Grief: Wakiksuyapi

- American Indian males have non-interpersonal trauma exposure rates of 25.2% in SW and 36.4% in NP, including natural disasters, life-threatening accidents (Manson, et al., 2005)

- Interpersonal trauma exposure rates (assault, rape, abuse, combat) – 25.5% in SW and 31% in NP for Native men

- Witness to trauma – 46.7% SW & 46.3% NP

- **Many Native military and veterans may be *wakiksuyapi,* carrying both historical trauma and modern combat trauma**

HT Impact on Parents & on Gender Roles and Relationships

- Traditional gender roles and relationships impaired – women & children were never the property of men, sacredness of children lost, & men lost traditional parenting roles as well as traditional roles of warriors and protectors

- Native men targeted for greater genocide – seen as more of a threat, higher bounties for male scalps, prohibition of long hair in past, impairment of traditional hunting and ways for men to express their Native manhood

- Many Native men and women internalized white male values, including the view of women & children as property due to forced socialization in boarding schools

Historical Trauma Response Features

- Death identity – fantasies of reunification with the deceased; cheated death
- Preoccupation with trauma, with death
- Dreams of massacres, historical trauma content

- **Loyalty to ancestral suffering & the deceased**
- **Internalization of ancestral suffering**
- **Vitality in own life seen as a betrayal to ancestors who suffered so much**

Young Native Men and Women

- Often lack clear concepts of what it means to be Indigenous, what their roles should be in their communities
- Many carry distortions regarding the responsibility of being a true warrior or a Native woman
- Confusion stems from the early genocide and erosion of Native culture, resulting in violence, abuse, oppression of peers, self-hatred, and self-destruction
- Evidence of internalized oppression and identification with the oppressor; sexualized dominant culture

Historical Trauma Interventions

- Traditional culture & ceremonies throughout facilitated release of emotions
- Psychoeducation; narratives & trauma testimony
- Delivered over 4 days; small process groups with the trained Native facilitators
- Focus on *returning to the sacred path* – the strengths in our traditional culture
- Ceremonies may help in the healing process, changing brain chemistry, calming traumatic brain

Table 11: Gender Differences for Affects Experienced Often Before, During and After the Intervention

	Before Female/Male		During Female/Male		After Female/Male	
Anger	70.6%	73.3%	41.2%	66.7%	11.8%	26.7%
Sadness	70.6%	66.7%	100.0%	80.0%	5.9%	33.3%
Guilt	70.6%	53.3%	29.4%	33.3%	0.0%	13.3%
Shame	64.7%	60.0%	5.9%	40.0%	0.0%	13.3%
Joy	58.8%	33.3%	64.7%	66.7%	70.6%	86.7%

Gender Differences: Boarding School Experiences

Experiences	%Men	%Women
Attended boarding school	82.4%	65.4%
Hit at boarding school	85.7%	35.3%
Punished for speaking	57.1%	20.0%
Racism in boarding school	85.7%	58.8%
Sexually abused at school	28.6%	17.7%

(Brave Heart, 1999. Gender differences in the historical trauma response, *J of Health & Social Policy*, *10*(4), 1-21)

Historical Trauma Intervention Research & Evaluation (1992 - 2003)

- Reduction in sense of feeling responsible to undo painful historical past
- Less shame, stigma, anger, sadness
- Decrease in guilt
- Increase in joy
- Improved valuation of true self and of tribe
- Increased sense of personal power

Return to the Sacred Path Study (1992): Results for Men

- Men experienced greater degree of boarding school trauma including assault from staff for speaking Native language and sexual abuse
- Men had less conscious emotional experience of historical trauma yet reported more traumatic events in boarding schools
- Gender may have interacted with greater Indian phenotype (skin color & features) to place men at greater risk for lifespan trauma exposure
- Men may have used avoidance (common in PTSD and prolonged grief) to defend against their emotional pain, hence less awareness

Return to the Sacred Path Study (1992): Results for Men

- Men's grief scores differed from women's – they may have been in an earlier stage of grief resolution
- Men, however, were more conscious of survivor guilt than women
- For Lakota men in the intervention, guilt about the Wounded Knee Massacre was one probable explanation for differences before the intervention

Return to the Sacred Path Study (1992): Results for Men

- Men's historical inability to enact their traditional roles as protectors during the Wounded Knee Massacre may have heightened initial (T1) defensive denial of shame and general guilt (as opposed to survivor guilt) and lessened conscious awareness of the Lakota historical trauma and its impact

- At T2, men reported increase in survivor guilt & shame as well as joy, suggesting an increase in affect (emotion) tolerance and a decrease in psychic numbing as well as greater consciousness of trauma response features

Complicated/Prolonged Grief

- CG/PG: sadness, separation distress including strong yearnings, longing for and preoccupation with thoughts of the deceased, and intrusive images, psychic numbness, guilt, extreme difficulty moving on with life, and a sense of the part of the self having died (Boelen & Prigerson, 2007; Shear et al., 2005). CG may also co-occur with PTSD (20-50%); prevalence unclear for American Indians/Alaska Natives.

- Historical unresolved grief includes these but also yearning, pining, preoccupation with thoughts of ancestors lost in massacres, loyalty to ancestors with a focus on their suffering, as if to not suffer is to not honor them, to forget them.

Complicated/Prolonged Grief

- Tribes may also be at high risk for CG related to the impact of genocide across generations and frequent deaths of attachment figures, due to high morbidity and mortality rates, & generational boarding school trauma.

- Rather than ambivalent relationships, some CG researchers think that close attachments may predispose CG development; AI/AN attachment styles may be closer and more intense as a cultural norm

HT Interventions for Native Veterans

- Traditional roles of akicita can help Native veterans to reclaim positive sense of self
- Traditional societies for both Native men and women helpful in reclaiming sense of self and sacredness
- Importance of purification for those returning from war for reintegration into society and to release the traumatic exposure, combat stress; attend to spiritual beliefs about sacredness of life, death and war (Black Elk – painting faces black to hide from the Creator)
- Releasing the historical trauma through healing and reclaiming traditional protective values and practices

HT-Informed Interventions

- Acknowledge the “cultural dissonance” and ambivalence re: what it means to serve in the military that may still discriminate and conflict with traditional values
- Perceived discrimination and depression (Whitbeck)
- Address unrealistic or harsh expectations of self as a warrior and falling short in ones eyes about that and about having combat stress or trauma reactions, PTSD, etc.

Transcending the Trauma

[Healing] means to talk about the past and the future ....That's why we are doing this, it's addressing the issues, I suppose, and that's why the person must come out of the healing, our mourning, our pain.(p261)

- Brave Heart M. Wakiksuyapi: Carrying the historical trauma of the Lakota. *Tulane Studies in Social Welfare.* 2000;21(22):245-266.

Implications & Recommendations

1. Engage and give voice to American Indian males
2. Increase knowledge about the experience of American Indian males and their health seeking
3. Incorporation of American Indian customs and traditional healing approaches as well as a consideration of historical trauma in interventions – traditional purification for veterans
4. Foster safe environments for males to speak and where traditional healing models are respected and discussed in culturally appropriate ways that honor the traditional role of males across multiple generations;
5. Support initiatives that encourage positive identity development for American Indian males that honors both contemporary and historical contexts & **REDUCE TRAUMA EXPOSURE**

Reclaiming Our Traditional Warriors and Protectors

***Mitakuyepi* (My Relatives),**

We each honor and recognize you as *akicita*, our warriors who serve to protect our people. *Lila wopila tanka* (Lakota) - many thanks – *wopida* (Dakota), *Migwetch* (Chippewa/Ojibway), *Madzi gidaz /Madzi gidats* (Hidatsa)- for serving and trying to protect the *Oyate* (the People).

***Mitakuye Oyasin*!**

We are all related!

Oyate Wiconi Kte, Cha Lechel Echu Kun Pi
"We Do This So That The People May Live"

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