Historical Trauma and Parenting
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Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, PhD
Associate Professor of Psychiatry/Director,
Native American & Disparities Research
Center for Rural & Community Behavioral Health
mbraveheart@salud.unm.edu
Director, The Takini Institute

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Omniciye Woiyaksape: Sharing Wisdom Council Project

It is our way to mourn for one year when one of our relations enters the Spirit World. Tradition is to wear black while mourning our lost one, tradition is not to be happy, not to sing and dance and enjoy life's beauty during mourning time. Tradition is to suffer with the remembering of our lost one, and to give away much of what we own and to cut our hair short….Chief Sitting Bull was more than a relation….He represented an entire people: our freedom, our way of life -- all that we were. And for one hundred years we as a people have mourned our great leader.

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Omniciye Woiyaksape

We have followed tradition in our mourning. We have not been happy, have not enjoyed life's beauty, have not danced or sung as a proud nation. We have suffered remembering our great Chief and have given away much of what was ours…. blackness has been around us for a hundred years. During this time the heartbeat of our people has been weak, and our life style has deteriorated to a devastating degree. Our people now suffer from the highest rates of unemployment, poverty, alcoholism, and suicide in the country.

Traditional Hunkpapa Lakota Elders Council (Blackcloud, 1990)

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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 in Recovery

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

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Multiple Losses and Current Trauma Exposure

- Death of five family members killed in a collision by a drunk driver on a reservation road
- One month earlier, death of a diabetic relative
- Following month, adolescent cousin's suicide and the death of another relative from a heart attack
- Surviving family members include individuals who are descendants of massacre survivors & abuse in boarding schools
- Many community members comment that they feel they are always in a state of mourning and constantly attending funerals.

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Presentation Overview

- Historical Trauma and Historical Unresolved Grief Definition and the Historical Trauma Response Features
- Collective Trauma History & Negative Boarding School Experiences' Impact upon Parenting
- Incorporating Historical Trauma and Unresolved Grief Components in Parenting Interventions

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Historical Trauma and Unresolved Grief

- ***Historical trauma*** is cumulative emotional and psychological wounding over the lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma (1985-88)
- ***Historical unresolved grief*** accompanies that trauma

(Brave Heart, 1998, 1999, 2000)

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Historical Trauma Response

- The ***historical trauma response*** (HTR) is a constellation of features in reaction to massive group trauma
- This response is observed among Lakota and other Native populations, Jewish Holocaust survivors and descendants, Japanese American internment camp survivors and descendants.

(Brave Heart, 1998, 1999, 2000)

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Historical Trauma Theory & Practice

The *Takini* (Survivor) Network is a Native non-profit organization that is designed 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.

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Cumulative, Massive Group Trauma

- Origins of trauma are in genocide
- Boarding schools compounded trauma
- Trauma is transferred across generations through impairment of traditional parenting skills, identification, and other complex processes
- Children of massacre survivors, children of boarding school survivors pass on the trauma to their descendents

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Early Boarding Schools

- **Congressional documents outlined boarding school policy of forced separation of children from tribal communities**
- **Attempt to break collective landholding (caretaking) values to open up the land for White settlement; this included attack on traditional spirituality and culture**
- **BIA Education initially called "Civilization Division"**
- **DOI under War Department until 1849**
- **Gender roles and relationships impaired by boarding schools**
- **Tuberculosis epidemic was related to overcrowding deficient conditions in boarding schools**

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Boarding School Era

- This bill provides for the utilization of vacant military posts and barracks for the industrial education of nomadic youth and the employment of officers of the army as teachers or to be otherwise detailed by the Department of War. Education as a means of civilizing and elevating the savage has ceased to be experimental. Best results are obtained with the removal of children from all tribal influence (US Congress, 1879).

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Impact of HT & Early Boarding School Policy on Native Parents

- Disempowerment of our sacred roles and sacredness of women and children
- Devaluation of traditional Native parenting and removal of our basic rights to raise our children in our own ways
- Negative impact upon our self-esteem as parents and as Native Peoples
- Increase in domestic violence/child abuse which were foreign to Native cultures

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Impact of HT & Early Boarding School Policy on Native Parents, on Gender Roles and Relationships

- Traditional role for men as warriors and protectors was undermined
- Injury to Native men's self-esteem and sense of self as unable to protect women and children, and as providers (i.e. decimation of the buffalo limited hunting)
- Women carrying the grief of the Nation and men in state of unresolved grief

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Impact Continued

- Dominant societal view of Native men in particular as "savage" and unfeeling – the warrior stereotype (in contrast to Black Elk and Luther Standing Bear)
- Native men, when rights acknowledged were seen as owning Native women and children in violation of traditional (no surnames traditionally)
- Native men's role in child rearing and nurturing devalued and women's political power not recognized by dominant culture
- Traditional gender roles and relationships replaced through colonization by dominant, sexist, oppressive values

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Boarding School Era

- Early Boarding School History
- Current impaired parenting may be related to negative boarding school legacies
- Corporal punishment, abuse, neglect, inconsistent parenting, lack of child-centered parenting – common practices in early boarding school days
- Diverse experiences in modern boarding schools; need to respect/validate individual experiences

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Impact of Negative Boarding School Experiences on 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
- Complicated or prolonged grief – may be associated with PTSD

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Impact of Negative Boarding School Experiences on Traumatic Grief

- Early separations from children - a source of incredible traumatic grief for parents
- Early separations from parents, grandparents, and extended family traumatic for children – source of grief
- Testimonies of abandonment issues
- Children unable to fully comprehend why parents would not come for them (parents had no choice)

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Impact of Negative Boarding School Experiences on Traumatic Grief

- Evidence in oral histories of grief reactions among children in early boarding school days including somatization of loss, manifested in illness
- *So the Witch Won't Eat Me* – Dorothy Bloch (Psychoanalyst) – childhood fears of infanticide, self-blame, erecting unusual explanations for the perceived abandonment or child abuse

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Additional Relevant Theories

- **Identification with the aggressor (A. Freud) (noted in child abuse cases) & internalized oppression (Freire)**
- **These can lead to self-hatred or low self-esteem and devaluing others like oneself – such as one's tribe, one's family, one's children**

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Historical Trauma Response Features

- **Survivor guilt**
- **Depression**
- **Sometimes PTSD symptoms**
- **Psychic numbing**
- **Fixation to trauma**
- **Somatic (physical) symptoms**
- **Low self-esteem**
- **Victim Identity**
- **Anger**
- **Self-destructive behavior including substance abuse**
- **Suicidal ideation**
- **Hypervigilance**
- **Intense fear**
- **Dissociation**
- **Compensatory fantasies**
- **Poor affect (emotion) tolerance**

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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**

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Intergenerational Transfer of the Historical Trauma Response

- **Parents who have been traumatized as children often pass on trauma response patterns to their offspring.**
- **Internalization of ancestral suffering**
- **Loyalty to the deceased**
- **Death wishes – to join deceased ancestors**
- **Vitality in own life seen as a betrayal to ancestors who suffered so much**

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Yehuda (1999)

- Vulnerability among children of Holocaust survivors for the development of PTSD
- COS had greater degree of cumulative lifetime stress yet no differences in degree of trauma exposure (self-report)
- Offspring perceive or experience events as more traumatic and stressful
- COS with chronic PTSD parent more likely to develop PTSD
- **Parental trauma symptoms are the critical risk factors COS trauma responses**
- Lifetime and current PTSD was significantly higher among Holocaust descendants

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Epigenetics, Transgenerational Effects, and PTSD

- Yehuda & Bierer, (2009) *J of Traumatic Stress, 22* (5)
- Yehuda, et al., (2005) *J of Clinical Endocrinology & Metabolism, 90* (7)
- Walters et al., (2011) *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race, 8*(1)
- Transgenerational, higher stress vulnerability (doesn't mean poor mental health necessarily but greater *risk* for traumatic responses to stress and more likely to have PTSD-like symptoms)
- Stressful environmental conditions *can* leave a genetic imprint, changes in neurobiology
- Testimonies of "inherited" grief in qualitative research

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Healing from Historical Trauma & Unresolved Grief

- Historical Trauma & Unresolved Grief Intervention (HTUG): A Tribal Best Practice
- Psychoeducation about genocide, boarding school losses, & oppression
- Audiovisual materials about collective trauma
- Small & large group processing
- Focus as well on lifespan trauma
- Grounded in traditional cultural experiences

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Historical Trauma Intervention

- The focus of our historical trauma intervention is alleviate the cumulative trauma response through a brief intensive psychoeducational group experience
- Traditional ceremonies provide grounding as well as validation & release of emotions
- Response to HTUG includes sense of empowerment, de-stigmatizes own problems, and lessens self-blame/shame

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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

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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%

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Themes from Qualitative Evaluation of Parental Responses to HTUG Parenting Work (1996-2004)

- Increased sense of parental competence
- Increase in use of traditional language
- Increased communication with own parents and grandparents about HT
- Improved relationships with children, parents, grandparents, and extended kinship network
- Increased pride in being Lakota and valuing own culture, i.e. Seven Laws

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)

Approach for Native Parenting Intervention

- Starting with collective tribal trauma and then parents' own wounding
- Education about historical trauma, historical trauma response
- Sharing tribal traditional values and traditional sacredness of children
- Education about traditional protective factors and modern risk factors
- Providing group support for parents, parenting challenges
- Parenting strategies, developmental stages, traditional values/laws in parenting

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Taking Care of the Nation: The Traditional Meaning of Native Parenting

- Taking care of the Nation
- Sacred responsibility
- We don’t own our children
- Children are placed at the center of the Nation
- Need to rebuild our Nation
- Children may be old spirits returning to earth and have wisdom

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Ground Rules based upon the Woope Sakowin

(7 Laws of the Lakota)

- Wacante Ognake - Generosity
  - To share time with others, to share opinions, thoughts and feelings in a good way
  - To remain silent at times to allow others to share
  - To share, help, give
- Wowaunsila – Compassion, Pity
  - Compassion for other participants

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Ground Rules

(Con't.)

- Wowayuonihan – Respect, Honor
  - To have respect and honor for others
  - Each opinion is valued

- Wowacin Tanka - To Have a Great Mind
  - To be patient and silent, and to observe
  - No need to repeat what has already been said
  - Patience, tolerance

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Ground Rules

(Con't.)

- Wowahwala – Humility, State of Silence, To be humble
  - To put the good of the group first
  - No one is above another
- Woohitike – Courage, Bravery, Principal, Discipline
  - To be honest

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Ground Rules

(Con't.)

- Woksape – Wisdom, Understanding
  - Wisdom which is sought through respectful listening and observing
  - Use wisdom in the group process
  - Self-discipline; focus on the task at hand

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Need to Share Risk Factors for Youth with Parents

Ineffective or destructive parenting includes:

- Authoritarian, harsh, & inconsistent responses to children – early boarding school style discipline
- Lack of nurturing, criticalness, insensitivity to child's needs
- Poor bonding with parents & lack of maternal involvement [I would add paternal as well]
- Family norms permitting alcohol **USE**, along with these other risk factors for alcoholism or drug abuse [as well as seen for juvenile delinquency]

(Hawkins, Catalano, & Miller, 1992 re: substance abuse risk factors in youth; more recent literature supports this early classic work)

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Protective Factors

Effective parenting includes:

- High parental acceptance of child, consistency [including keeping your promises, doing what you say, and consistency in discipline]
- Moderate to high restrictiveness [without being harsh or "hollering around"]
- Nurturing, sensitivity to child's needs
- High positive parental involvement with child
- Strong attachment, bonding with family & social groups that value **NON-USE** of substances/alcohol

(Hawkins, Catalano, & Miller, 1992)

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Oyate Ptayela: Protective Factors

Effective parenting includes:

- Firm discipline coupled with nurturing
- Family & social support for child
- Regular "religious" involvement

(Hawkins, Catalano, & Miller, 1992)

- Traditional parenting had protective factors; oral histories attest to love & affection in the home before boarding school attendance in 1940s & in some cases more recently
- Boarding school style discipline has replaced many of these practices

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Website

- www.historicaltrauma.com
- Developed by Raymond Daw (Dine’)

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Relevant Recent HT Publications

- Brave Heart, M.Y.H., Elkins, J., Tafoya, G., Bird, D., & Salvador (2012). *Wicasa Was'aka*: Restoring the traditional strength of American Indian males. *American Journal of Public Health*, *102* (S2), 177-183.
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- Brave Heart, M.Y.H. & Deschenie, T. (2006). Resource guide: Historical trauma and post-colonial stress in American Indian populations. *Tribal College Journal of American Indian Higher Education*, *17* (3), 24-27.
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Other Relevant Publications

- American Indians had an adult 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).
- 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

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