

**COMMENTARY
BY
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One is struck by two outstanding features of this study. The first observation is that it is an ambitious undertaking fraught/pregnant with theoretical complexities and potential empirical outcomes in a much needed area of research, as well as being exemplary in maintaining strong subject participation in a longitudinal investigation. The second observation is the apparent paucity of empirical data that has been reported to date. I will attempt to expand on both these observations in as balanced a fashion as possible, a prospect which I also find difficult to do for two reasons. One concerns my profound appreciation for the difficulties involved in the conduct of longitudinal studies of any type, let alone one that is designed to be conducted over fifteen years. The other stems from an impatience with our collective (i.e., we researchers) inability to generate urgently needed data with which to design and implement far more effective treatment and prevention programs to counter the devastating effects of substance abuse among the current generation of American Indian and Alaska Native adolescents.

The background review that informs the selection of variables and choice of instruments for this study of risk factors for substance abuse among urban American Indian adolescents and women is among the best in the literature. It will almost certainly become one of the most commonly cited sources by researchers who subsequently undertake studies in this area. The description of the psychosocial risk factors, as well as the hypothesized mediating and moderating variables for adolescent alcohol abuse provides a rich array of theoretical concepts and empirical variables with which to develop predictive models that can inform both treatment and preventive intervention efforts, as is the intent of the longer term outcomes of this study. The prospects for evaluating youth and parents at multiple assessment points across a diversity of risk factor domains marks it as a watershed event in studies among Indian and Native populations. The intergenerational composition of the subject pool will also permit empirical examination of potentially powerful predictive relationships that have heretofore been primarily speculative or only supported by meager empirical data. Although perhaps not intended as a focal issue of the study, there is also a unique opportunity to conduct a prospective study of "Indianness" insofar as the shaping of Indian identity among adolescents can be examined both in terms of the predictive power of such variables in determining late adolescent and young adult drinking patterns, as well as the influence of adolescent drinking patterns

this report is only intended as the introduction for a series of rapidly ensuing manuscripts that will provide greatly expanded coverage of the empirical outcomes and interpretation of such data within the rich theoretical context that is made possible by the study design.

One of the specified aims of the study has been to develop and test an additive risk factor model for predicting adolescent alcohol abuse. It would have been informative to have the casual model specified, if not evaluated for at least one change period. A risk model need not be fully developed theoretically to examine T1 to T2 changes for some of the more presumptively powerful predictor variables of drinking behavior for adolescents. Alternatively, appropriate regression analysis would have provided some preliminary empirical data related to the psychosocial risk factors for drinking behaviors in the current sample. The ultimate outcomes of a longitudinal study need not be fully reported and confirmed before disseminating data that may be useful for developing potentially efficacious treatment or prevention strategies for substance abuse among Indian and Native adolescents. Although specification of causal mechanism(s) for negative health outcomes may be highly desirable, they are not an absolute requirement for preventive interventions to have positive effects for high risk populations.

While fully appreciating the difficulties and complexities of longitudinal research, one nonetheless grows impatient for more and better data with which to inform the design of treatment and prevention programs that will be more effective in controlling and reducing the devastating effects of substance abuse among Indian and Native adolescents. Considering the stakes, there would seem to be a certain urgency in the earliest possible reporting of any relevant information consistent with reasonable caution for the adequacy, appropriateness, and integrity of the data. This study holds that promise and one looks forward to a more complete presentation in the near future of what will undoubtedly prove to be both theoretically and pragmatically valuable outcomes.

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