

BICULTURAL RESYNTHESIS: TAILORING AN EFFECTIVENESS TRIAL FOR A GROUP OF URBAN AMERICAN INDIAN WOMEN

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Abstract: The purpose of this qualitative study of a 6 week effectiveness trial was to describe among a group of urban American Indian women, the process of successful traditionalism in the form of bicultural resynthesis. Bicultural resynthesis represents a major current attempt on the part of the participants to integrate traditional and contemporary demands in a positive, culturally-consistent manner. The themes of shame and isolation, adapting to survive, deculturation, ethnic switching/renewal, and bicultural resynthesis are discussed. Further support is achieved for retraditionalization of American Indian women's roles as an effective means of achieving American Indian self-determination and as a potential way of helping women overcome problems.

Loss of cultural values and ties, as well as physical distance from traditional support centers has been associated with a number of mental health problems among American Indians. Research has shown that the risk of alcohol abuse is accentuated by such a loss (Frederick, 1973; May, 1982; Streissguth, LaDue, & Randels, 1988). For example, the termination/relocation movement of the 1950s and 1960s which further took away American Indian rights and land, was associated with an increase in alcoholism among Natives (Tyler, 1973; Wilkinson, 1987). These social and psychological changes have had an impact on coping and adaptive strategies which has created a great deal of stress and disruption in the American Indian culturally based life-style orientation (Cvetkovich, Baumgardner, & Trimble, 1984, p. 412). American Indians were removed, once again, from their homes, families, and way of life (O'Sullivan & Handel, 1988). LaDue (1994) emphasizes the importance of understanding the historical reality that has impacted and continues to impact on the mental health of American Indians. She points out that the so-called

"discovery" of America 500 years ago has left American Indian communities with the reality of the disintegration of their ways of life, the loss of elders who hold the knowledge of their traditional ways, their ceremonies, their languages, and spirituality. For example, loss of traditional gender roles occurred when the main social change among tribes shifted from matriarchal to patriarchal societies (Mihsuah, 1996). Today, many American Indians are working to regain and preserve their Native identity by reclaiming their Native cultural traditions, languages, and values (Swinomish Tribal Mental Health Project, 1989).

The many stressors faced by urban American Indian working women, may negatively impact their psychological well-being. For instance, traditional American Indian culture in general emphasizes a way of life that places great importance on kinship ties and family. This central focus on the family makes it more likely that urban American Indian women who are employed will experience bicultural stress. Urban American Indian women also tend to be isolated from a traditional framework that could provide social support to resolve conflicts (Welch, 1987). Because American Indian working women tend to be more isolated from such important social supports, it may be more difficult to maintain a strong American Indian identity. Even though more highly educated American Indian women may enjoy greater economic opportunity by acculturating to the majority culture, there is evidence that this way of life can also be a significant source of conflict and stress (LaFromboise, 1988; Spindler & Spindler, 1958), and is associated with psychological problems (Kemnitzer, 1973). It has been suggested that the resolution of role conflict and the easing of bicultural stress can be facilitated by supporting the individuals' strong sense of Indianism, while maintaining "the flexibility to adapt to the expectations of the larger social system" (French, 1987, p. 197).

Retraditionalization

A cultural therapy program devised by French (1987) for American Indians was incorporated into an existing drug and alcohol abuse program in the Qualla Boundary. Adult Cherokee female alcoholics, who taught one another their particular craft skills, found that other Cherokee—younger women and children—wanted to learn their traditional customs. French (1987) asserts that the process of transformation for the women to honored teachers resulted in a "tremendous therapeutic process" that "greatly enhanced their self-esteem, providing them with a positive reward for being Indian" (p.194). It was concluded that the positive self-image and psychological well-being of American Indians in general is tied to a positive American Indian identity that must be reinforced and supported by regular involvement in traditionally based rituals, customs, and spirituality. Maintaining some traditional customs and roles, however, does not

necessitate a return to all of the “old ways.” Many American Indian women, for example, have undertaken a retraditionalization of their former roles as caretakers and transmitters of cultural knowledge within the context of contemporary American Indian life (LaFromboise, Trimble, & Mohatt, 1990). “Contrary to standard feminist calls for revolutionary change, American Indian women insist on taking their traditional places as healers, legal specialists, and tribal governors. Their call is for a return to forms which, they insist, involve women and men in complementary, mutual roles” (Green, 1983, p. 14). American Indian women’s assertiveness does not arise from a feminist perspective, but is demonstrated through the pursuit of traditional beliefs and talents in an effort to ensure tribal survival. This is more of a reassertion of complementary American Indian women’s roles within a tribal setting (Mihesuah, 1996, p. 65). The structure of the cultural system remains intact, but the specific jobs have been updated and modernized in accordance with societal change. Green (1983) and Allen (1986) further suggest that a complete return to the traditional roles and customs would not be desirable to all American Indian women but that awareness and discussion in regard to the retraditionalization paradigm would facilitate more balanced, culturally appropriate research on American Indian women. Additionally, LaFromboise (1994) identified that American Indians are at different stages of acculturation. She says that “some retain a mostly traditional lifestyle, while others are almost completely Westernized. Some are caught between the two cultures and have difficulty traversing the two worlds; others are comfortable in both cultures” (p.36).

The purpose of the present study was to test the effectiveness of a six week intervention based on the survey results of Napholz (1995) which focused on American Indian working women, role conflict and psychological well-being, and intensive interviewing. Although the participants participated in both quantitative and qualitative aspects of the study, the latter is the focus here. The purpose of the retraditionalization part of the effectiveness trial was to identify, among a group of urban American Indian women, the process of successful traditionalism in the form of bicultural resynthesis.

Method

Participants

Approval was obtained from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects. A convenience sample of eight American Indian working women between the ages of 30-65 from the Milwaukee area participated in the intervention group sessions. The workplace was the setting selected by the participants for the intervention group.

Of the eight women that participated in the group intervention, four were Oneida, one was half Oneida, one was Oneida, Chippewa, and Menominee mixed, and the other two participants identified themselves as being of American Indian descent. These participants lived in the greater Milwaukee area. There are six different American Indian nations in Wisconsin on eleven locations. At least a fourth of the Wisconsin's 40,000 American Indians live in the greater Milwaukee area (Bauer, 1992). Two of the women were married and without children, one was widowed, and the others were single or divorced and had children. The average level of education achieved was 15 years. The majority of the women identified themselves as middle class.

Materials

The materials for the intervention consisted of six sessions, each averaging at least 90 minutes in length, a slide show, and handouts addressing the psychological well-being issues of American Indian working women (see Table 1). The six sessions were audio taped. The psychoeducational materials were both collected and designed by the author to address intervention issues such as culturally assigned gender roles, stress, self-esteem, coping, empowerment, and life satisfaction. All handouts were revised to be eighth grade or lower in reading level to allow for greater applicability in future trials. The reading level of the handouts was assessed using the Flesch-Kincaid reading difficulty index (Microsoft Corporation, 1993-94). The intervention manual is available by request from the author.

Measure

The aim of the qualitative data analysis of the retraditionalization component of the intervention, was to describe through oral tradition (Chavez & Oetting, 1995) the process of bicultural resynthesis as related to psychological well-being among the participants. The qualitative commentary generated from the intervention group was audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. The purpose of this type of phenomenological research approach was to focus on the meaning of the phenomena as described by the individual (Jasper, 1994). As such, phenomenology begins with a description and ends with an understanding of the meaning of the lived world of experience (Ray, 1994). Behaviors, associated key phrases, as well as significant nonverbal observations were typed in field notes after each session by the investigator and research assistant independently. Intervention group data were managed utilizing a computer program Ethnograph to facilitate coding and retrieval of qualitative data that had been transcribed using Microsoft Word 6.0 word-processing program. The

Table 1
Six Week Intervention

Intervention Topic by Week	Format	Handouts, Self-assessment Inventories, and Homework
Week 1 Who am I?	Slide presentation: Well-Being Among American Indian Women. Lecture: Who Am I? What Are My Goals? Discussion: What does stress mean?	-Stress Awareness Checklist -Life Events Stress Checklist -Who Am I Inventory -Signs of Discontent Checklist -Why are you Stuck Checklist -Stress Management Handout -Self-Care Techniques Handout -Getting Back to My Real Self Handout -Goal Development Handout
Week 2 Who am I as an American Indian working woman?	Lecture: Stress Related to Acculturation, Oppression, and Discrimination on Well-Being. Antiguilt Exercise	Were You Encouraged or Criticized Inventory Guilt and Regrets Inventory Managing Guilt Handout Depression Handout -Signs and Symptoms of Depression Handout -Twisted Thinking Handout
Week 3 What are the costs of multiple roles?	Lecture: Relationship Between Multiple Roles on Physical and Mental Health.	What Do You Value Inventory
Week 4 Making a choice to do something different.	Lecture: Role Conflict Management, Assertive Behavior, and Your Opinion Counts.	Anger Checklist -Blocks to expressing anger Handout -Ways to manage anger Handout How to say "no" Handout Self-assertion Handout How to Fight Fair Handout Letting Go Handout Homework: Ways You Feel Good About Yourself Inventory

Table Continues

Table 1 (Continued)
Six Week Intervention

Intervention Topic by Week	Format	Handouts, Self-assessment Inventories, and Homework
Week 5 Making it work.	Lecture: The Coping Process Coping Strategies and Elimination of Ineffective Coping Patterns. Coping and Empowerment	Coping Self-Assessment Exercise Reality Check Inventory Self-Esteem Checklist Self-Esteem Handout The Coping Process Handout What to Do to Cope With it All Sources of Support Handout Homework: Unfinished Business Inventory
Week 6 Continuing to make it work.	Lecture: Self-empowerment and Affirmations. Developing Goals Certification of Completion Closure	Are you Afraid of Success Inventory Forgiveness Feeling Good About Oneself Loving yourself Affirmations Guide to Self-Empowerment-Handout Goals

data were coded into certain pre-determined themes derived from a previous study (Napholz, 1995). From the exploration of the group's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors it was expected that new major themes would be identified from the data. In addition, the data were analyzed through double coding of all transcripts, identification of subcategories within each major category and the construction of descriptive grids. The analysis of the data entailed a description of the content of each major category, a description of the content of each subcategory, and a description of the participants. During the final phase of the study, after identifying and delineating major descriptive themes, themes were then clustered into categories related to the phenomena deculturation and bicultural resynthesis. The data was then rebuilt to form a classification of attributes of the phenomena into a thematically relevant whole (Jasper, 1994).

Procedure

The researcher received approval by a head administrator at the worksite to conduct the intervention at their facility. Participants were recruited for the intervention group by telephone and on site visits. Some of the participants had previously responded to the questionnaire that was distributed by Napholz (1995) and had indicated on a form their interest in joining an intervention group for American Indian working women. Other participants were informed about the group through friends. Intervention group sessions were conducted weekly for six consecutive weeks. Each session was audiotaped and each session lasted on the average 100 minutes. To encourage discussion and to promote retention of participants, efforts were made to create a comfortable space within an environment of respect, learning, and credibility. This was accomplished through the sharing of nutritious food and beverages (Attneave, 1982), soft lighting, allowing the group to select the meeting site, and providing flexibility for meeting dates as well as the length of time for each group session. Other strategies to enhance retention were: providing postage-paid postcards for participants to inform the researcher of a change in address or telephone number and weekly pre-session phone calls (Napholz, 1998).

Empowerment or the development of a personal feeling of increased power or control without an actual change in structural arrangements (Pernell, 1985) was a major component of the intervention. Support for empowerment was encouraged through demonstrating genuineness, mutual respect, open communication, and informality with participants (Gutierrez, 1990). The interventions included lecture, self-assessment exercises, homework assignments, and discussion. Discussion took place in the context of collaboration. This was done to facilitate the development of insights, skills, and the capacity to resolve concerns. The focus was on activities ranging from problem exploration to the development of alternative structures. Support was given for the participants to experience a sense of personal power within the intervention group. The intent was for the participants to generalize to feelings of power within their larger social environment. Praxis was also encouraged, which is the blending of reflection and action. A forum was available for emotional and concrete support, and an opportunity to learn new skills through observing others. Other empowerment techniques utilized included, accepting the participants' definition of the stressor, identifying and building existing strengths, identifying forgotten skills/strengths, acknowledging current strengths/skills, and utilizing past/current social support networks and organizations.

The intervention was developed from the results of a previous study (Napholz, 1995), an extensive review of the literature, input from two American Indian women's mental health content experts, and a qualitative research methods expert. The major theme of this part of the

program of research, retraditionalization, focused on the process of going forward by going back. This process incorporated the ceremony of storytelling. The concept of the “talking cure” was utilized as an intervention to encourage the participants to begin telling their own stories in a meaningful way (Tafoya, 1994). Storytelling was utilized as a way of allowing participants to discuss their stories within a supportive network and to learn from other participant’s testimonies, their struggles, triumphs, and defeats (Comas-Diaz, 1994). The focus was not on modal cultural attributes, but rather on the subjective culture of the individual participant (Triandis, Vassiliou, Vassiliou, Ranaka, & Shanmugam, 1972). Subjective culture is the manner in which the participant absorbs, retains, modifies, or applies those discrete cultural attributes that are relevant to the intervention process.

A structured format was used to guide the six one-and-a-half hour intervention sessions. The intervention included a psychoeducational format that incorporated culturally appropriate interventions regarding bicultural stress, self-esteem, guilt, anger, conflict resolution, coping through retraditionalization, and affirmations. Group discussion and peer support was encouraged. Suggestions from the group were encouraged to promote that the intervention would more likely fit and be adapted to the social and cultural milieu to which the participants must function.

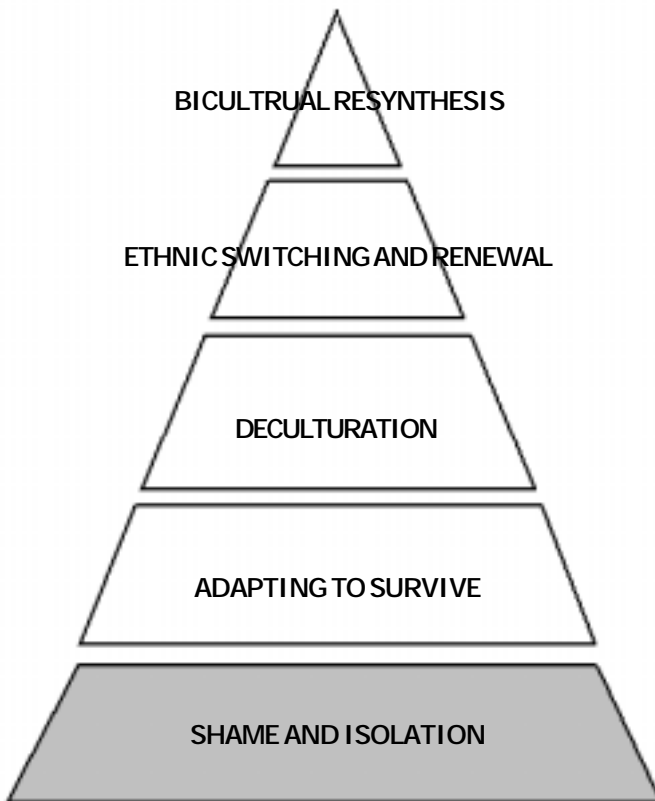
Results

Central Themes and Subthemes of the Study

A hierarchical process emerged that began by breaking out of the dominant culture, breaking free from negativity and oppression, and breaking open to a new way of living with a renewed sense of American Indian pride and identity. The process of going back to go forward unfolded with the ceremony of storytelling, the testimony of experiences of shame and isolation, as well as those illustrating adapting to survive (forced acculturation). For the purposes of this study, “deculturation” is defined as a process where a person releases his or her attachments to mainstream cultural values. The process of deculturation (from the majority) was seen as a necessary process in finding oneself. Deculturation was a conscious choice that, at the time, disrupted family and other significant relationships. “Ethnic switching,” the next step, is defined as a conscious switch in values from the dominant to the nondominant culture. This is reflected in an increased interest and participation in the nondominant culture and customs. Ethnic switching was the next step in this retraditionalization process. This retraditionalization or ethnic renewal seemed to be associated with a sense of increased American Indian pride.

Once there was an understanding of who one was in the context of one's chosen culture, there was a resynthesis into the majority culture for the participants. This reintegration was from a more solid sense of American Indian identity and pride. This final process of going back and reclaiming the self seemed to solidify a sense of pride and knowing who one was and who one wanted to be. There was a blending of both cultures and valued customs. This bicultural resynthesis into the dominant culture was done from a strong ethnic minority base rather than a reassimilation. For ease of understanding, Figure 1 shows the hierarchy of this process.

Figure 1
Bicultural Resynthesis Model



The findings reported here are based on thematic findings of the study. The following is a description of some of the narrations supporting the retraditionalization themes that emerged during the six week intervention.

Shame and Isolation

Most of the participants reported feelings of shame and isolation related to being an American Indian at some time in their lives. One participant, A. L., reported not knowing that she was half American Indian until she was in her 30's. Growing up her mother told her that they [she and her daughter] were Italian. She indicated that she believes her mother was ashamed of her own American Indian heritage, and therefore did not want to acknowledge it. As a child growing up in a predominantly White neighborhood A. L. had feelings of shame and isolation because she was visibly different from the majority. Sadly, her mother still has not acknowledged to A. L. her true American Indian heritage.

A. L.: I grew up not knowing who I was or really having any connection with anything. I was always trying to be what I thought I should be, because that was what my mother was doing. My mother was ashamed that she is Oneida.

A second participant stated:

B. Y.: Well, because I always thought there was something wrong with me anyway, I think I felt partly that it was my fault. There is something wrong with me, they don't address me directly because they don't like me, or something. You know, I really... I don't recall ever thinking about an injustice for myself.

A third participant shared:

C. X.: I thought and felt that I was inadequate for some reason, for that reason [being an American Indian]. I had some very painful experiences as a young child because I had dark skin and dark eyes. So I think because of that difference and that experience, I grew up thinking what I wasn't accepted.

I have heard people sometimes say "I grew up an Indian." In other words they were identified always as an Indian. They were discriminated against. They were oppressed. They were teased. They were ridiculed. You know, all kinds of negative stuff that they had to grow up with. If we have suffered enough we can claim to be real Indians.

A fourth participant said:

D. W.: I can remember being real suicidal, I must have been 12 to 16. I wanted to like take my radio into the tub with me, or if I cut my wrists, how fast would I bleed to death. There was a point in there that I was having a lot of dream stuff going on, and I think that that was probably the very beginning of becoming more aware of who I was. I learned it real young as a kindergartner. I mean it was brought out to me at that point that "you are different" you know? When I was six years old I remember that the kindergartner teacher made me dance around a paper fire because I was Indian, and not only in front of my class, but in front of two classes. I think from that point on I know I was different.

The following are a description of other responses that the participants reported related to shame and isolation.

E. V.: It always made me think that because of the difference I thought that something was wrong with me.

F. U.: What the cultural questions triggered in me was the number of people that dwelled on that with me, and they seem overly concerned about it always, I felt.

G. T.: All I knew was that my difference was somehow bad. I was made to feel that something was wrong with me.

B. Y.: My grandma taught me to be ashamed of my Indianess. Mother taught me not to like myself. I struggle with that.

This grief process resulted in a type of sadness, a "turning of one's face to the wall" (Manson, Shore, & Bloom, 1985). This process seemed to include various stages of disappointment where participants felt alone and sad, and at times worthless. The participants seemed to move through this process similar to what O'Neil (1996) describes from her research on the Flathead Indian narratives of history and identity. Throughout the narratives of loss and sadness, there was a health transformation process going on. This process was an eventual shift from loss and sadness to generosity and compassion.

Adapting to Survive

The participants discussed the difficulty with learning and maintaining their American Indian heritage. Some shared that they were forced to adapt to the majority culture, others had their heritage hidden by their parents, and some families refused to teach or participate in any American Indian traditions. The following examples highlight this denial of culture to make it in the White man's world.

H. S.: I know my parents talk about that a lot, about losing their culture. How come grandma and grandpa didn't do that tradition? That was the era, that was the time that everyone was to be acculturated to the America. So no [Native] language was spoken.

G. T.: I strove to acculturate to the majority culture, but in order to do this and to feel accepted by it, I believed as my parents did, that I had to deny my Indian ethnicity.

One participant, B. Y., recalled her parents indicating to her that it was best to acculturate to the majority culture and to suppress her Indianism as it relates to traditional American Indian cultural practices and beliefs. She was told that this was necessary to make it in the "White man's world" and to be successful in it. Though she grew up on an American Indian reservation and lived with her family, she reported that they did not engage in the traditional American Indian customs that may have helped her to understand and feel connected to her American Indian culture. She stated:

B. Y.: My parents were boarding school kids, so I didn't have tradition, except for the tradition of living together as Indian people, as an extended family on the reservation. That's really the only tradition we had, besides corn soup and fry bread and an occasional powwow. I only went to one powwow between the age of 0 to 18. So that's how disconnected my family, even though on the reservation, separated themselves from being Indian.

One participant commented on family forced acculturation:

E. V.: Father believed if I was ever going to be anything in my life, I had to become like White people and hang with White people and all that. The more Indian you are the less likely you are to succeed. Conflict occurred when I moved off the reservation, to mix, and went to school. My husband was whitewashed on how to be an Indian in this society and that confusion was always there.

Another participant commented:

F. U.: They [White people] want you to be like them, but they are not going to accept you [American Indians], they [American Indians] are forced to be a certain way, to give up their culture and adopt a new culture, but they [White people] are not accepting them into the culture by the people of the dominant culture, by the culture that you are trying to adjust to.

Deculturation

The process of deculturation (from the majority) was seen as a necessary process in finding oneself. This process was a choice that at the time for some, disrupted family and other significant relationships. One participant described this deculturation process as follows:

B. Y.: Even though I cannot go back into the past and grab that part of myself, the part of my Indian heritage that I never had, but I can experience some of that now and be a part of this process and help me to connect with that. There was a time in my life when I was beginning to understand in the more traditional Indian ways, and values, and I got real arrogant and kind of cut off my family.

Ethnic Switching and Renewal

As one participant (A. L.) reported, when she participated in a ceremony of her Oneida tribe, she felt for the first time a sense of belonging. This helped her to understand more about who she is individually and ethnically. This particular woman was estranged from her American Indian heritage for most of her life and felt a deep sense of loss and emptiness, for the first time A. L. felt she was home. She said she is “attempting to release the shame I’ve carried and to gain a sense of self-esteem and self-love I feel I’ve never had.”

Another participant said:

D. W.: I thank creator that what I got inspired in the ways of Indian people—the more traditional ways—and I don’t believe that there are too many traditionalists left, but there are a few traditional beliefs and traditional ways viable yet and I grew to have a sense of love and respect for my children, for their very lives. I think one reason why a lot of people today are going back to find traditional ways to try and help us to find ourselves.

Some of the participants reported that their self-esteem and satisfaction with life were positively impacted through the process of “reclaiming their Indian identity and sense of spirituality.” Some of the ways they have done this have been through traditional song, dance, drumming, ceremony, and spiritual beliefs and practices. One of the women, who has been working to better understand herself in relation to her American Indian heritage, expressed her long-time desire and need to connect with her Indianism on a spiritual level, through traditional spiritual practices and ceremonies. Well into her adulthood, this participant (F. U.) shared about an American Indian woman mentor who helped her with her ethnic renewal. F. U. said, “this person helped me to reclaim my Indianism by teaching me about my Oneida tribe traditional customs and spirituality. I no longer feel ashamed or isolated from my Indian identity.”

Most of the participants expressed sadness at the loss of their traditional languages, indicating that such a loss denied them of an essential and profound part of their American Indian heritage and American Indian identity. This loss of American Indian heritage has been very difficult for them, and Native communities in general, to regain on a large scale. They indicated that very few American Indian people, with the exception of elders, speak their Native tongue. Two of the participants who are honored elders, support ethnic renewal through teaching their Native language to American Indian children, and anyone else who wants to learn, in an effort to pass it on and to preserve it. The status of honored teacher has been a tremendous therapeutic process in providing these teachers with a positive reward for being American Indian. This new found culturally based status has greatly enhanced their sense of purpose and well-being (French, 1987). An example of loss of language was reported by F. U. She sang Christian songs written in Oneida by her ancestors, who were permitted to speak their Native language only when singing Christian songs.

F. U.: I sing the songs not because I believe in the songs, but because I believe in the grandmothers and grandfathers who died to try to preserve their language, and that is the only way the missionaries would allow them to use their language, was to sing, and when I sing those songs in that language, I mean I just cry because I know what they went through. I just love those words, and I love what they stand for.

Bicultural Resynthesis

Resynthesis into the dominant culture was accomplished from a strong ethnic minority base. Participants reported that the intense conflict and stress they once felt between trying to adjust to the majority culture

has been reduced since reclaiming one's American Indian Identity. Other participants reported the following:

B.Y.: If I didn't talk about my whole belief system [retraditionalization], if I didn't talk about what I know as painful subjects in the family [ethnic renewal], I'm fine. I have learned what to say to who.

F. U.: People that I have met and know go to a Methodist church. I wasn't even baptized Methodist, but I like it because a lot of Indian people are there. But they also hold to their traditional beliefs, you know they will all be at gatherings where we do smudges or any kind of smokes and things like that and they will profess that part of what they believe, and then yet they like to go to the other part because there are other Indian people there, and they can believe in some of the Christianity too.

There is no question anymore. I bobble between two worlds of Christianity and Native American spirituality, but there is no question. There is no conflict. I am what I am supposed to be. I have identified me. I need to live that way to make it, to know, assimilate it to make it part of myself.

D. W.: To me, when you are getting open there is a scariness to it because there is a kind of resistance. You are trying to keep things the same and when things start to change, its like the game is up. You can't keep going on with the same things you are doing, and at the same time it feels good. It's good when it happens, but I think the degree it happens to you, is it happens to you in a way that you are ready to deal with it.

Discussion

In summary, these participants were forced to invent their own methods and models to negotiate both the American Indian and Anglo worlds. This was a very stressful and lonely journey that involved grieving personal and tribal losses of language, tradition, and religion. Encouraging the participants to design their own model of bicultural resynthesis based on healthy traditional values and practices within the context of formal group support seemed to facilitate their healing process. The focus on empowerment at the personal level was efficacious for this group.

Encouragement was given to the participants to use the power within to mobilize their abilities to successfully interact within a culturally pluralistic environment. This formal group support network seemed to allow for the discharging of anger and shame associated with historic trauma. Retraditionalization of roles appeared to be an effective means of balancing multiple roles and achieving American Indian self-determination for these participants.

The analysis of the qualitative results also suggests that the concept of ethnic identity and pride is a salient factor for this group of American Indian women. The theme of shame and isolation among the participants may indicate a relationship between poor American Indian identity and mental health. The results support that many of the participants reported such a relationship at times in their life. It seemed at some point they went through a deculturating process of not wanting to belong to the majority culture and wanting to retraditionalize to their American Indian ethnic identity. These findings are supported by French (1987), who found that those who are denied crucial elements of their heritage during the critical formative years attempt to acquire these missing elements through active and regular participation in their culture later on.

Many of the participants spent time with tribal elders seeking instruction in tribal history and traditions, some learned more of their tribal language, some abandoned their Christian religions and turned to Native spiritual traditions, and others incorporated their Native spirituality with Christianity. When the participants were able to connect with, reclaim and participate in their traditional American Indian culture, they seemed to feel an inner peace and a sense of well-being about themselves. These findings are congruent with those from a study by French (1987) of traditionally enculturated Cherokee Indian women. French (1987) found that the reported self-esteem of the women was positively enhanced when they received a positive reward for being American Indian. Tribal customs and traditions have provided sources of strength that provide culturally consistent coping mechanisms (Fixico, 1985; Green, 1983). Further support for retraditionalization of roles of American Indian women as caretakers and transmitters of cultural knowledge is maintained as an effective means of overcoming problems and achieving American Indian self-determination. Many American Indian women, for example, have undertaken a retraditionalization of their former roles as caretakers and transmitters of cultural knowledge within the context of contemporary American Indian life (LaFromboise, Trimble, & Mohatt, 1990; LaFromboise, Heyle, & Ozer, 1990). From this, empowerment through retraditionalization and biculturalism must be considered (LaFromboise, Trimble, et al., 1990).

There is very limited generalizability because the study population was from a small, educated convenience sample located in one geographical area. A more definitive assessment of the process of bicultural resynthesis would require further studies. Longitudinal developmental research

employing probability sampling may provide more sensitivity and insight in assessing the process of retraditionalization and bicultural resynthesis for American Indian women. No inferences can be drawn from this sample, however, these findings support literature from scholars like LaFromboise, Heyle, and Ozer (1990) and LaFromboise, Trimble, and Mohatt (1990). Future evaluation and refinement of the intervention is indicated. An adaptation of relevant components of the curriculum developed by LaFromboise (1989, 1996) to enhance adolescents life development skills has some applicability for this adult women's intervention. Possible relevant components include management of anger, depression, grief, coping, affirmations, problem solving, stress reduction, and self-esteem. Another issue, is the extent to which long standing research conventions may be breeched in order to make interventions culturally appropriate and yet rigorous enough to allow for cross cultural comparisons. For example, the intervention group usually continued to discuss the topics of the week, going over the ninety minute time period. Honoring custom and values regarding the concept of time could interfere with the strict rigors expected by the research community.

Bicultural resynthesis, or the extension of traditional care-taking and cultural transmission roles to include activities vital to the continuity of American Indian communities represents a major current attempt on the part of American Indian women to integrate traditional and contemporary demands in a positive, culturally-consistent manner (Green, 1983). The structure of the cultural system remains intact, but the specific jobs are modernized in accordance with social change.

Metcalfe (1982) applied the acculturation model to urban Navajo women. She found that, "adjustment" should be negatively associated with "traditionalism," positively associated with "acculturation" and enhanced by "social integration" (p. 79). Concepts such as traditionalism and acculturation do not belong at opposite ends of the same continuum, but are, in fact, distinct entities which are capable of independent variation. The degree to which the participants successfully blended two cultures seemed to be positively related to the degree to which they retained traditional behaviors (Metcalfe, 1982). These findings correspond with the study results. In other words, successful traditionalism in the form of bicultural resynthesis for this group of American Indian women included the ability to successfully participate simultaneously in more than one cultural system.

Moving up the pyramid (see Figure 1) involved an end result of bicultural resynthesis with the majority culture, with new strength and an enhanced sense of American Indian pride. These findings also correspond with LaFromboise, Heyle, and Ozer's (1990) discussion of a final process involving a reculturation and reconstruction of ethnicity resulting in a reframing of American Indian identity within the majority culture through the assertion of American Indian pride. The process involved a balance of

traditional and contemporary feminine strengths. Perhaps, the conclusion reached by French (1987), that the positive self-image and psychological well-being of American Indians in general must be reinforced and supported by regular and lifelong involvement in traditionally based practices, is also viable for this group of urban American Indian women. Mihesuah (1996) supports criticalness of reinforcing American Indian identity as a means of supporting tribal survival.

It is possible to infer from the results of this study what Berman (1989) and LaDue (1994) have themselves suggested in their research regarding the mental health of American Indians in general. They indicate that it is absolutely necessary for researchers who are investigating the mental health of American Indians to understand the history that has impacted on Native communities at large, and to be culturally sensitive to their Native traditions, beliefs, and values. Such a sensitivity and understanding can by no means make us experts, as LaDue (1994) has pointed out, but it can help health professionals to understand the multitude of mental health issues that are impacting on the mental health of American Indian communities. Hopefully, this research will contribute to the recognition of the positive values of certain culturally grounded behaviors and attitudes that can support healthy change (O'Neil, 1996). Additionally, support for increased research on culturally normative behaviors, ability to differentiate between adaptive and maladaptive behavior, appropriate interpretation of symptoms, and advice that is supportive of cultural norms is critical. Increased research, understanding, and respect is necessary to avoid an imposition of Euro-American values that may unwittingly perpetuate a powerful deligitimizing of American Indian women's life, ways, and values (O'Neil, 1996, p. 208)

Previous studies which focused on isolated aspects of American Indian women's lives without understanding their complexity and cultural contexts are finally being supplemented by American Indian women's own reflections and research (Green, 1983). Attention to the coping styles and life-styles of biculturally competent American Indians is necessary for a shift in focus away from a deficit hypothesis to the design of interventions that build on the natural strengths of American Indian women and communities considered (LaFromboise, Trimble et al., 1990). These sense that their participation in the various aspects of traditional Native culture (such as drumming, singing, dancing, and spiritual practice) has given the participants a sense of spirituality, belonging, and wholeness, and has allowed them to feel profoundly connected to who they are as American Indian women. The fact that several of the women reported that their self-esteem and satisfaction with life were positively impacted through reclaiming their Native traditions (which includes spirituality) gives warrant to more investigation into the relationship between a positive Native identity and mental health (Tafuya & Del Vecchio, 1996).

The research findings support the contextual paradigm that focuses on the study of the individual; within the context of a family, which is in turn embedded in a cultural context which is exposed to both Native and mainstream values and customs (Szapocznik & Kurtines, 1993). The struggle may be supporting autonomy while maintaining family connectedness. They recommend support, to enhance bicultural skills and promote greater competency, in managing cultural differences within family and society. In past eras, in American history, cultural diversity was rejected by social, cultural, and political norms. There was pressure for culturally diverse people to blend. However, according to Szapocznik and Kurtines (1993), if current trends continue, they hope that cultural diversity will be respected, perhaps even cherished and nurtured. "To the extent that we nurture cultural diversity, while promoting interethnic relations, we create a world in which families will be living increasingly at the interface between culture and customs" (p. 406). We need to adjust our thinking to broader framework that we live within a culturally pluralistic environment.

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