

***Historical Trauma & Unresolved Grief: Impact on Native  
Parents and Youth***

***Early Childhood Development Conference  
Minneapolis, MN October 5, 2016***

**Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, PhD, LCSW  
Associate Professor of Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences  
Director, Native American & Disparities Research  
Division of Community Behavioral Health  
UNM Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences  
& Takini Institute**

**Josephine A. Chase, PhD, MSW, LCSW-PIP  
Oglala Lakota College, Consultant  
Horse Nation Healing, INC  
Takini Institute**

# Introduction

*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.*

# *Introduction*

*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)*

# 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)

# Multiple Losses, Trauma Exposure, & Psychosocial Risk Factors

- 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.

# Presentation Overview

- Framework of historical trauma and historical unresolved grief
- Historical trauma response features and intergenerational manifestations
- The HTUG Intervention: A Tribal Best Practice
- HTUG and parenting interventions
- Parenting challenges and early childhood development

# First HTUG, 1992

## Founded the Takini Network/Institute



Tunkasila Tatanka Iyotake, Mother Her  
Holy Door, Daughter, and Grandchild

# The Development of Historical Trauma Theory and Interventions

- Motivated by desire & commitment to reduce the suffering of Native Peoples
- By 1992 – first version of the Historical Trauma and Unresolved Grief Intervention (HTUG)
- 1996 – 2004 - Designed the first Lakota/Native parenting curriculum incorporating *historical trauma*
- 2001-2004 Models for Healing Indigenous Survivors of HT Conferences (SAMSHA CMHS and CSAT support)
- 2013 -Current NIMH funded study of HTUG combined with Group Interpersonal Psychotherapy in two tribal sites

# 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)

# 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)

# Historical Trauma, Genocide and Survival

- **Congressional genocidal policy:** *no further recognition of their rights to the land over which they roam; go upon said reservations...chose between this policy of the government and **extermination**; wards of the government, controlled and managed at its discretion*
- **BIA started under the War Department; BIA Education Division called “Civilization Division”**
- **Congressional policy of forced separation of children from family and tribe; militaristic**
- **Massacres (e.g. 1890 Wounded Knee Massacre of Lakota), mass graves, forced sterilization of Native women in the 1950s**

# 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).

# 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)

# 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

# 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***

# HT, Gender, Parenting Issues

- 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 roles of warriors and protectors
- Women carrying the grief of the Nation
- Parents received messages that our culture was inferior and we could not raise our own children

# 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

# Intergenerational Traumatic Grief

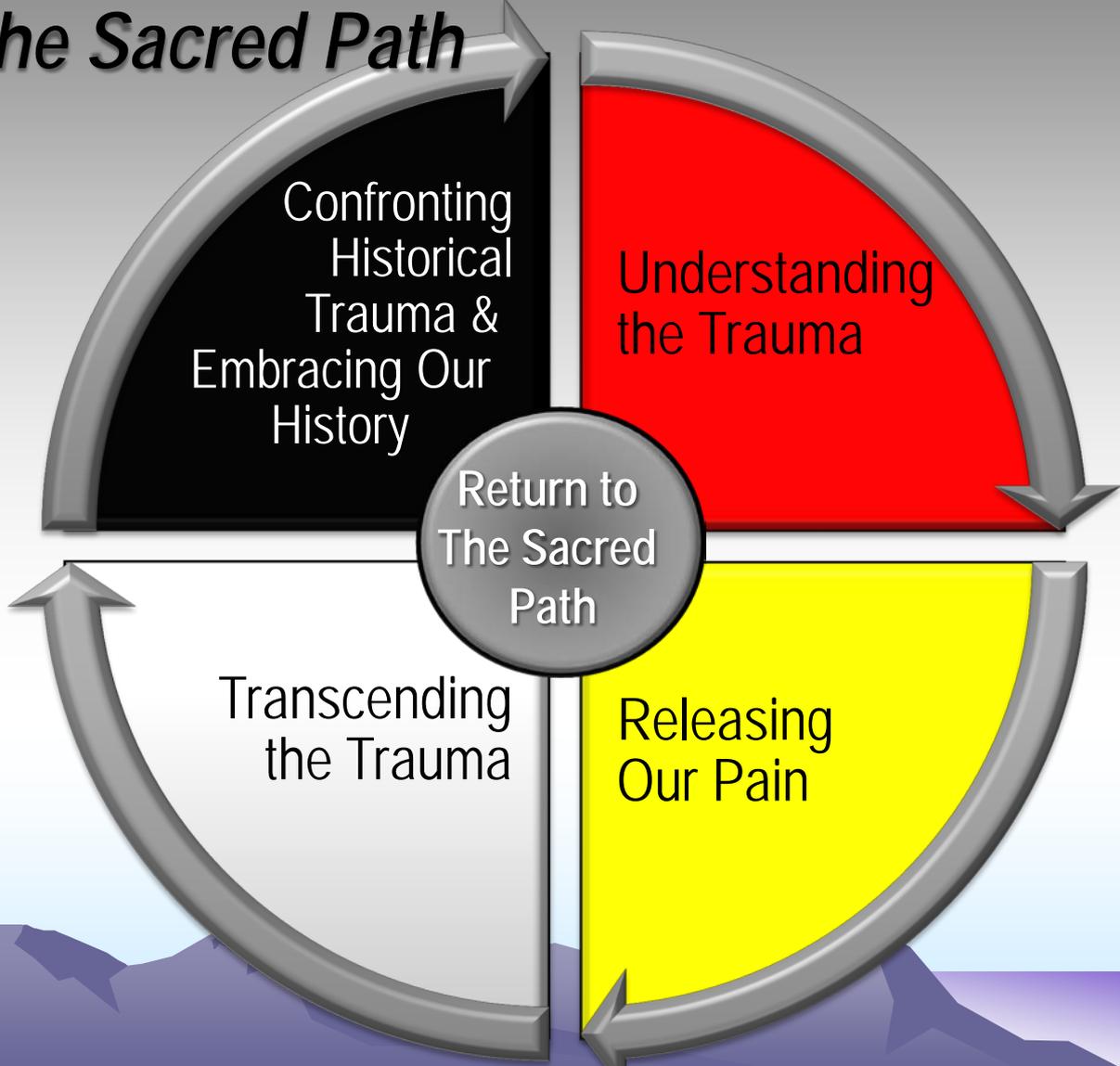
- Federal prohibition against practice of traditional Native spirituality limited bereavement resulting in unresolved grief across generations
- Acute grief which persists becomes unresolved, prolonged, complicated
- Modern multiple losses & cumulative traumatic losses superimposed upon collective generational trauma; imbalance in extended family kinship networks – social support and increased trauma exposure
- Native grief resolution may be different (attachment)

# 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, act out self-hatred
- Identifying with parents' trauma responses

# Historical Trauma & Unresolved Grief Tribal Best Practice (HTUG):

## *Return to the Sacred Path*



Confronting  
Historical  
Trauma &  
Embracing Our  
History

Understanding  
the Trauma

Return to  
The Sacred  
Path

Releasing  
Our Pain

Transcending  
the Trauma

# 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

# *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

# *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

# *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)

# *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

# *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

# Traditional Protective Factors: Woope Sakowin

(7 Laws of the Lakota)\*

- Wacante Ognake - Generosity
- Wowaunsila – Compassion
- Wowayuonihan – Respect
- Wowacin Tanka - To Have a Great Mind
- Wowahwala – Humility, State of Silence,  
To be humble
- Woohitike – Courage, Bravery, Principal,  
Discipline
- Woksape – Wisdom, Understanding
- \*Tiblo B. Kills Straight (some versions differ slightly but core values similar)

# Themes from Qualitative Evaluation of Parental Responses (1996-1998; 2000-2003)

- 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

# Suggested Solutions

- Updated parenting research needed re: effective parental monitoring
- Parenting programs that start with emotional support for parents; identifying resources for gift cards, incentives for parental attendance; ongoing parent support groups
- Parenting education and modeling for *children*, using play with toddlers; teach children and youth how to become good parents

# Indigenous Culture and Healing

- Brain resilient, traditional healing powerful
- Traditional ceremonies can alter brain chemistry (similar to research on meditation – brain activation, complementary tx alternative forms of healing, MRIs in people who meditate, etc.
- Traditional practices – examples – HTR – psychotic diagnosis, meds, ceremony, healed; survivor guilt of children; student dropping out due to guilt

# Celebration of Survival



# Celebration of Survival



# Celebration of Survival



# References

- Brave Heart, M.Y.H., DeBruyn, L.M., Crazy Thunder, D., Rodriguez, B., & Grube, K. (2005). . *This is hallowed ground: Native Voices From Ground Zero*, In Danieli, Y. & Dingman, R. (Eds) On the Ground After September 11: Mental Health Responses and Practical Knowledge Gained. New York: Haworth Press.
- Brave Heart, M.Y.H. (2003) The Historical Trauma Response Among Natives and Its Relationship with Substance Abuse: A Lakota Illustration, Journal of Psychoactive Drugs, 35 (1), 7-13.
- Brave Heart, MYH (1998). The return to the sacred path: Healing the historical trauma response among the Lakota. *Smith College Studies in Social Work*, 68(3), 287-305

# References

- Brave Heart, M.Y.H. (1999) *Oyate Ptayela: Rebuilding the Lakota Nation through addressing historical trauma among Lakota parents. Journal of Human Behavior and the Social Environment, 2(1/2), 109-126.*
- Brave Heart, M.Y.H. (2000) *Wakiksuyapi: Carrying the historical trauma of the Lakota. Tulane Studies in Social Welfare, 21-22, 245-266.*
- Brave Heart, M.Y.H. (2001) Clinical assessment with American Indians. In R.Fong & S. Furuto (Eds), *Cultural competent social work practice: Practice skills, interventions, and evaluation* (pp. 163-177). Reading, MA: Longman Publishers.
- Brave Heart, M.Y.H. (2001) Clinical interventions with American Indians. In R. Fong & S. Furuto (Eds). *Cultural competent social work practice: Practice skills, interventions, and evaluation* (pp. 285-298). Reading, MA: Longman Publishers.

# References

- Beals, J., Manson, S., Whitesell, N. Spicer, P., Novins, D. & Mitchell, C. (2005). Prevalence of DSM-IV disorders and attendant help-seeking in 2 American Indian reservation populations. *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 162, 99-108.
- Beristain, C., Paez, D. & Gonzalez, J. (2000). Rituals, social sharing, silence, emotions and collective memory claims in the case of the Guatemalan genocide. *Psicothema*, 12(Supl.), 117-130.
- Duran, BM, Sanders, M, Skipper, B, Waitzkin, H, Malcoe, LH, Paine, S, & Yager, J. (2004). Prevalence & correlates of mental disorders among Native American women in primary care. *American Journal of Public Health*, 94(1), 71-77.
- Huang, B., Grant, BF., Dawson, DA., Stinson, FS., Chou, SP, Saha, TD, Goldstein, RB, Smith, S.M. , Ruan, WJ, & Pickering, RP. (2006). Race-ethnicity & the prevalence & co-occurrence of Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition, alcohol and drug use disorders and Axis I and II disorders: United States, 2001 to 2002. *Comprehensive Psychiatry*, 47, 252-257.

# References

- Indian Health Service (2001). *Trends in Indian Health 2000-2001*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health & Human Services.
- Legters, L.H. (1988). The American genocide. *Policy Studies Journal*, 16 (4), 768-777.
- Lewis-Fernandez, R. & Diaz, N. (2002). The cultural formulation: A method for assessing cultural factors affecting the clinical encounter. *Psychiatric Quarterly*, 73(4), 271-295.
- Manson, S., Beals, J., O'Neil, T., Piasecki, J., Bechtold, D., Keane, E., & Jones, M. (1996). Wounded spirits, ailing hearts: PTSD and related disorders among American Indians. In A. Marsella, M. Friedman, E. Gerrity, & R. Scurfield (Eds), *Ethnocultural aspects of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder* (pp. 255-283). Washington DC: American Psychological Association.
- Robin, R.W., Chester, B., & Goldman, D. (1996). Cumulative trauma and PTSD in American Indian communities (pp. 239-253). In Marsella, A.J., Friedman, M.J., Gerrity, E.T., & Scurfield, R.M. (Eds), *Ethnocultural aspects of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Press

# References

- Robin, R., Chester, B., Rasmussen, J., Jaranson, J. & Goldman, D. (1997). Prevalence and characteristics of trauma and posttraumatic stress disorder in a southwestern American Indian community. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 154(11), 1582–1588.
- Shear, K., Frank, E., Houck, P.R., and Reynolds, C.F. Treatment of complicated grief: A randomized controlled trial, 2005, *JAMA*, 293 (21), 2601-2608.
- US Senate Miscellaneous Document, #1, 40th Congress, 2nd Session, 1868, [1319]

# References

- Brave Heart, M.Y.H. (1999) Gender differences in the historical trauma response among the Lakota. *Journal of Health and Social Policy*, 10(4), 1-21.
- Brave Heart, M.Y.H. & Spicer, P. (1999). *The sociocultural context of American Indian Infant Mental Health. World Association of Infant Mental Health Handbook of Infant Mental Health*. J.D. Osofsky & H.E. Fitzgerald (Eds.). John Wiley & Sons.
- Brave Heart, M.Y.H., & De Bruyn, L. (1998). The American holocaust: Historical unresolved grief among native American Indians. *National Center for American Indian and Alaska Native Mental Health Research Journal*, 8(2), 56-78.