

The Urban Los Angeles American Indian Experience: Perspectives from the Field

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ABSTRACT. This article reports on the findings from two studies conducted in the Los Angeles urban American Indian/Alaska Native (AIAN) community. The research investigated the relationship between the American Indian and Alaska Native cultural values and the social problems that challenge the urban Native community in the greater Los Angeles and Orange County regions, in addition to other topics. In both studies, respondents were American Indian/Alaska Native human services providers who are affiliated with the network of American Indian organizations in the region. The respondents identify and discuss the significance of cultural values, the protective functions of the cultural inheritance, and challenges confronting the native community in the urban Los Angeles region. Similar findings emerged in each study, indicating that perspectives are relatively constant despite the passage of time. However, concerns about the challenges confronting the American Indian/Alaska Native community have not shifted substantially in the intervening years. The findings from both studies indicate that the cultural inheritance provides protective functions that promote resilient capacities and

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that serve as a primary resource for addressing social problems within the Native community. doi:10.1300/J051v16n01_02 [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2007 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

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INTRODUCTION

This article examines the relationship between the American Indian and Alaska Native cultural values and the social problems that challenge the urban Native community in the greater Los Angeles and Orange County regions. The discussion of issues is informed by the perceptions of American Indian/Alaska Native (AIAN) service providers who work in the greater Los Angeles community. Data are presented that are derived from two research projects: dissertation research conducted in 1993 and 1995, and a funded research project, for which data were collected in 2003-2004. The second project builds on the findings of the first project, although the scope of the second research is broader than the first. In both studies, respondents are AIAN human services providers who are affiliated with the network of American Indian organizations in the region. The respondents identify significant cultural values, the protective functions of the cultural inheritance, and discuss challenges confronting the Native community in the urban Los Angeles region. Each sample includes duplicated as well as non-duplicated respondents, and data collection is separated by an eight to ten year span of time. It is significant, therefore, that the passage of time has not shifted the identification of cultural values that are deemed important to the community. Unfortunately, the challenges confronting the AIAN community also have not shifted despite the passage of time, and in many cases, the vulnerability status of the community is exacerbated by prolonged exposure to hazardous social conditions and the social problems endemic to the region.

The cultural inheritance of American Indians and Alaska Native communities includes cultural values, beliefs, practices, and behaviors associated with traditional life, the legacy of contact that includes political relationships between the federal government and tribal communities,

innumerable losses, traumatic experiences and a history of accommodation, and a demographic profile that indicates psychological, social, health, and educational vulnerabilities. A history of survival and strength is embedded within the cultural inheritance of the community, which is articulated through culturally based values. The cultural inheritance provides protective functions that promote resilient capacities and that serve as a primary resource for addressing social problems within the Native community. This article explores these issues with reference to the American Indians and Alaska Natives in the urban Los Angeles environment by comparing the findings about the influence of culture from the two research studies.

CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

The Demographic and Historical Context

The majority of American Indian and Alaska Native communities share in common an overarching set of culturally based beliefs and values, although there is great diversity with regard to language, cultural practices and ceremonies, social and political infrastructures, and tribal histories. The history of contact with non-natives, and the dual legacies of colonization and conquest have resulted in experiences that are similar across tribes. The AIAN experience is unique, because of the political relationships that exist between sovereign entities: the federal government of the United States and the 562 federally recognized tribal nations. Treaties, compacts, and federal policies exert profound influence on the daily lives of AIAN communities. The consequences of contact with non-natives for American Indian and Alaska Native communities extend across five hundred years, and the legacies of contact are illuminated in post-colonial relationships that are characterized by colonization, conquest, genocide, trauma, cultural survival, resilience, and social and political disorganization, reorganization, and accommodation.

Demographic data indicate that health, educational, and economic disparities characterize American Indian and Alaska Native communities across the nation. American Indian and Alaska Natives in the Los Angeles metropolitan region experience disparities that mirror national trends. Ogunwole (2006) reports that there are 4.3 million American Indians and Alaska Natives in the United States and that approximately 64% of this population resides outside of tribal communities. This population is relatively young, and its numbers are growing.

Census 2000 data indicate that the majority of American Indians are concentrated in the Western United States, with the presence of large Indian populations in the metropolitan New York and Los Angeles regions. Ong (2004) reports that Los Angeles County has the largest urban population of American Indians and Alaska Natives, with a total of 138,427 residents, including 33,652 children under the age of 17. Satter et al. (2005) note that problems in racial classification and data collection result in under counts of American Indians and Alaska Natives in the Los Angeles region.

The Current Population Survey (1997-1999) and Census 2000 data (Ogunwole, 2006) indicate that American Indian and Alaska Native families have higher rates of poverty and larger families than non-native families. When compared to U.S. All Races data, the 2000 census reports that the AIAN community has lower educational attainment and lower rates of labor force participation. In 1999, 12.4% of the total U.S. population lived in poverty; however, 25.7% of the American Indian and Alaska Native population was impoverished. Among the Sioux, 38.9% of the population is poor; for the Navajo, the figure is 37%; and the Aleuts have the lowest poverty rate at 15%. In Los Angeles County, the Children's Planning Council ScoreCard 2006, indicates the following about American Indian children and economic well-being: 19.5% live in families with incomes that are less than 100% of the Federal Poverty Threshold (FPT); 37.9% live in families with incomes that are less than 200% of the FPT; and 68.5% live in households that are below 300% of the FPT. The Native community in the greater urban Los Angeles region is very diverse, including representation from many tribal nations, and the region is home to a very large community of Lakota (Sioux), Navajo and Cherokee.

According to the Indian Health Service (2006), the AIAN population is younger than the general population, and life expectancy has improved for those born in the last twenty years, but American Indians and Alaska Natives continue to die more frequently than non-natives from tuberculosis (600%), alcoholism (510%), motor vehicle accidents (229%), diabetes (189%), unintentional injuries (152%), homicide (61%), and suicide (62%). In rural and reservation communities, housing is often substandard or overcrowded and lacking indoor plumbing, electricity, safe heating sources, and cooking facilities. National behavioral health data indicate disproportionately high rates of psychological distress, suicide, alcoholism, and substance abuse for the American Indian and Alaska Native community. Indian Health Service (2006) reports that the suicide rate for American Indians is 60% higher than the rates for non-Indians and that

“the highest suicide rate is found in American Indians ages 15-34.” The behavioral health data indicate high levels of psychological distress within the community as well as heightened vulnerabilities for problems of child maltreatment, domestic violence, and interpersonal violence for the AIAN in tribal and urban environments.

Ong and Houston (2002) report that the urban AIAN population in the Los Angeles region is geographically dispersed and poor. In Los Angeles, urban Indians must compete for low-income and substandard housing with other poor families in the region. The housing market in Los Angeles is notable for high rents and an absence of affordable housing options. The American Indian and Alaska Native community in Los Angeles experiences the same social stressors, vulnerabilities, and challenges that undermine the vitality of Indian communities across the nation as well as the vulnerabilities and challenges that undermine the vitality of other poor families and children in the Los Angeles region (substandard housing, exorbitant rents, overcrowded and under performing schools, poor public transportation, and problems in the child welfare, health, and mental health service delivery systems). The AIAN population lacks visibility and a high profile in comparison to other communities, which exacerbates conditions. The large numbers of other racial and ethnic minorities who reside in the region frequently obscure the American Indian presence in this community and their specific needs. The strengths, struggles, and resources that characterize the Native community are frequently unknown to those outside of the community. Further, the vulnerability status of American Indians and Alaska Natives in the Los Angeles urban region is exacerbated, because community members are frequently disconnected from reservation-based social and health service delivery systems as well as reservation-based cultural and spiritual resources.

The Cultural Context

Building on the findings of Blanchard (1983), Duran and Duran (1995), Guilmet and Whited (1989), Sage (1991), Tafoya (1989) and Braveheart and DeBruyn (1998), Weaver (1998) and others, this author has examined the influence of the American Indian and Alaska Native cultural inheritance in research and direct practice settings. Research findings, practice experience within the urban community, and review of the literature indicate that the cultural inheritance of American Indians and Alaska Natives exerts profound influence on the social construction

of life and is perceived as a resource for addressing the substantial problems that confront the community.

Culture is conceptualized as an internal structure that informs how individuals and communities create and experience daily life. It includes a collection of beliefs, values, practices, and productions that form a recognizable pattern which is transferred across generations in recognizable religious, healing, linguistic, artistic, social, educational, and organizational activities. These activities manifest in the cultural values, belief systems, oral histories, stories, dances, family traditions, and relational styles of members of the community. Cultural material links generations and is reinvented and renewed in each generation. However, culture is not pristine and unchanging. Cultural structures react to and are influenced by the social ecology and political environment. Distortions, adaptations, and changes in cultural practices are inevitable, because of changes in the structural and material conditions and the ecological environments where culture is lived and replicated. Cultural values, behaviors, and practices continue to be transferred from generation to generation, however, in spite of changed social and political conditions (Duran and Duran, 1995; Guilmet and Whited, 1989; Sage, 1991; Tafoya, 1989).

The Theoretical Context

An integrated theoretical approach is utilized in this research. This integrated approach supports the examination of cultural material and socio-historical circumstance, and it promotes an approach that reflects the lived reality of the participants and the community. The theoretical frameworks and perspectives that support the research methodology and the interpretation of findings include: attachment theory, Cultural Studies, and frameworks that examine trauma, loss and grief. This integrated stance has demonstrated utility for direct practice within the American Indian and Alaska Native communities and for generating knowledge about the community through research.

Cultural Studies

Cultural Studies has the objective of increasing knowledge about culture, social transformation and social change. The Cultural Studies perspective is theoretically open and versatile with reflexive characteristics and offers an antidote to traditional positivism and Euro-centric paradigms (Johnson, 1986). It supports examination of issues from groups,

such as American Indians and Alaska Natives, whose experiences and stories are absent or minimally represented in the prevailing discourse. Cultural Studies is defined as “an interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary and sometimes counter-disciplinary field” (Grossberg, Nelson and Treichler, 1991, p. 4). Darder (1995) and McLaren (1997) acknowledge that cultural and socio-economic factors illuminate relationships of power and the social construction of life. Cultural Studies advances an orientation that recognizes that:

culture is dynamic and politicized;

culture informs the construction/deconstruction of social reality;

culture is foundation upon which human experiences are built; and

culture is informed by the social, political, and ecological environment.

The parameters of Cultural Studies include a broad range of theoretical and political perspectives that are bound together by a commitment to examine cultural practices as they are rooted within relations of power. For the two research projects discussed in this article, this perspective supported investigation of cultural material (values, beliefs, and practices), definitions of health, identification of health sustaining practices, loss experiences, historical trauma, end of life issues, as well as examination of the post-colonial legacy.

Trauma, Loss, and Grief

Harvey (2000) and Walsh-Burke (2006) provide frameworks for defining and interpreting loss and grief experiences across the life span. Loss and grief experiences are conceptualized as a fundamentally human experience that may result in a multitude of emotions (positive and negative). Neimeyer (2002) advances a perspective on loss that moves beyond the widely held notions that loss is experienced and processed as a series of stages. In this newer paradigm, the narrative construction of the loss experience informs the interpretation of the loss experience and the meaning that is assigned to experiences.

Loss and grief include a wide range of human interactions, including separation, trauma, war, relocation, death, injury, and diasporas, among

other experiences. Exposure to a loss experience results in many outcomes, and psychosocial development may be undermined or advanced. The loss experience, grief, and mourning may be transferred across generations in the stories and through the behaviors of those affected. Losses may “pile-up,” if one experiences too many losses in too short a period of time. A “pile-up” of losses can derail psychosocial development, as well as, overwhelm capacities to ascribe meaning to the event and/or to make sense of the experience. This, in turn, can impair and undermine capacities that might lead to a productive adaptation of the loss experience.

There are multitudes of ways in which one reacts to and lives with loss and grief, and many of these reactions and the ceremonies acknowledging these losses are culturally informed. At the individual level, one can react with hostility, courage, grace, hope, pain, suffering, resentment, and/or strength. Reactions are informed by the developmental stage during which the event is experienced, the quality of the support systems available during and after the event, and the meaning assigned to the event by the individual experiencing the event as well as the community. Loss experiences are relative and cumulative; the meaning assigned to experiences reflects the internal world and the external circumstance of the individual, family or community who experiences the event. Loss and grief experiences are informed by cultural material, and these experiences can influence identity, world view, and relationships.

Many loss experiences are traumatic, and as a result, the grief and meaning making processes are complicated. The loss event may be so sudden, random, and unanticipated that capacities for interpreting the event are overwhelmed. The event may result in physical or psychological injury, and/or the event may extend over time. In such cases, extreme psychological and/or physiological grief reactions may ensue. Harvey (2002), Cable (1996) and Davis (2002) note that traumatic losses often result in significant stress reactions, “shattered assumptions” about how one experiences the world and relationships, and profound longing and mourning. Duran and Duran (1995) and Yellow Horse Brave Heart and DeBruyn (1998) discuss the traumatic losses that are the legacy of contact with non-natives, including the removal of American Indian children from families and placement in Boarding Schools, and the “soul wound” and “chronic trauma and unresolved grief,” which is transferred across generations and implicated in a host of psychosocial problems for American Indians and Alaska Natives. These authors note that cultural beliefs and practices associated with traditional native life can promote recovery from traumatic losses.

Attachment Theory

Attachment theory advances knowledge about how early relationships influence later development. Bowlby (1983) indicates that the attachment behavioral system is a biologically based system of behaviors that is driven by the need for survival, which unfolds as the infant seeks proximity to the caregiver and protests separation. Cassidy (1999) notes that attachment is significant across the lifespan and that attachment experiences are implicated in psychological development, in the formation of intimate relationships, and in capacities to withstand stressful situations. Ledesma (2007) has noted that attachment theory can advance knowledge about the bonds that exist between American Indians and Alaska Natives and their cultural inheritance, affiliation with geographic place, and ties to homelands. Ledesma reports that these bonds are embedded in the memories and stories of elders and the artifacts of culture, illuminating the strengths and loss experiences of the people. Attachment theory, which offers an explanatory model for interpreting the quality of the bonds that exist between infant and caregiver, demonstrates utility for advancing our understanding about the enduring significance of the American Indian Alaska Native cultural inheritance as it is intersected by the historical context and contemporary conditions. This article discusses research findings that demonstrate that powerful bonds exist between Native people living in an urban community and their traditional cultural inheritance, and that this inheritance, influences social problems confronting the community and provides protective functions, offers comfort, and promotes healing and strength.

METHODS

This section provides a description of the research studies that generated the data reported in this article. Each study is grounded in a qualitative approach that reflects the theoretical orientation. This methodology and orientation are selected, because the studies seek to examine and articulate the perceptions and experiences of individuals working within the AIAN urban Los Angeles community. This grounded approach generates knowledge about the community and issues that have received scant attention in the literature, as well as documents perspectives and voices from within the community. In each study, a purposively selected sample of expert respondents (AIAN human services providers) was identified, and a structured and open-ended intensive interview

protocol was administered to elicit information about cultural values and social conditions affecting the urban AIAN community. Similar methods were utilized for sample identification, data collection and data analysis.

Description of the Studies

The first research project, "Cultural Influences upon Definitions of Health and Health Sustaining Practices for American Indian Children," investigated the significance of cultural material for AIAN service providers and the role and influence of culture in defining health, identifying health concerns, and identifying practices that support the health and well-being of AIAN children. A pilot study conducted on Pine Ridge Reservation, South Dakota in 1993 provided the opportunity to investigate and refine guiding hypotheses and assumptions and to field test the interview protocol and methodology. Five American Indian (Lakota) respondents, who were employed as human services providers, participated in this study. Building on the findings from the pilot study, dissertation research, conducted in the Los Angeles urban American Indian community in 1994-96, investigated the same issues. An intertribal sample of twenty-five American Indian respondents, employed as human services providers working for Native organizations, participated in this study.

The second research project, "Loss and Bereavement in an American Indian Community," investigated culture, exposure to loss, grief, mourning, and bereavement experiences by gathering data from three expert purposively selected samples in the greater Los Angeles urban community (N = 31), on Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota (N = 12), and in communities close to Tuba City, Arizona on the Navajo Reservation (N = 8).

The research resulted in a wealth of data that provide information about the AIAN cultural inheritance, the strength of the bonds to cultural material, and the issues that intersect the loss and bereavement experiences in AIAN communities. This article reports only on data that are derived from the urban AIAN sample and focuses on cultural material and social conditions in order to support comparison with the earlier research.

The data emerging in both studies demonstrate a high level of congruence and consistency. The data triangulate across the studies, the research sites, and the sample populations and over time. This provides a measure of reliability and validity to the findings. The research studies will be identified as "Research Study 1: Culture and Health" and "Research

Study 2: Culture and Loss” when it is necessary to focus the discussion on a specific study.

Design

Each study utilized qualitative methods to realize research objectives and elicit data about the areas of interest. Marshall and Rossman (2006) indicate that the strength of this method is evident when the research seeks information directly from the subjects about their individual point of view and perspective, when little is known about the research topic, and when the focus of research is theory generating rather than theory testing. In this perspective, qualitative methodologies promote understanding of human behavior and interactions. This occurs because attention is directed to the setting wherein the behavior unfolds, and appreciation of the significance of the behavior is increased when research uncovers how respondents interpret, process, and assign meaning to events. The data that emerge from qualitative methods promote understanding of the respondents’ perceptions of issues, while the frequency of responses indicates the degree to which perceptions are shared across the sample. Each study was designed in a manner that facilitated demonstrations of respect, gratitude, flexibility, and knowledge about the community in order to facilitate participation and garner support from within the community.

Sample

In both studies, the respondents are individuals who are employed by or affiliated with the network of agencies and organizations providing services to American Indians and Alaska Natives residing in the greater urban region of Los Angeles. The direct service providers who are respondents in both studies can be characterized as “elite informants,” who are purposively selected and identified, because they possess direct knowledge of and frontline experience with the issues of interest. For “Research Study 1: Culture and Health,” the sample included 25 AIAN respondents, and in “Research Study 2: Culture and Loss,” the urban sample included 26 AIAN respondents. The urban sample also included five non-AIAN respondents; data from these respondents is not reported in this discussion. There are 3 “duplicated” respondents who participated in both studies.

Participation in each study was voluntary, and snowball sampling techniques were utilized to identify and recommend other elites for the study.

In both studies, the sample was located in multiple sites spread across the region. For both studies, entry was negotiated with the assistance of agency gatekeepers and community contacts. After potential respondents were identified and/or referred, a description of the research was distributed. Individuals who were interested in participating were contacted, and interviews were scheduled at mutually convenient locations and times.

The ethical considerations for the research were addressed in a similar fashion for each study. Participation in each study was voluntary, written descriptions of the research and research strategies were reviewed, informed consents were obtained, and confidentiality was provided. Respondents were free to decline to answer any questions and to withdraw from the study. Small gifts were distributed to respondents or the host agencies in acknowledgment of participation in the research. The offering of gifts to respondents or the host agency was consistent with AIAN cultural values of generosity, mutuality, sharing, and respect.

Data Collection and Analysis

In both studies, data were collected from elite respondents, who participated in an intensive interview. A demographic data form was designed to document the characteristics of respondents. A standardized, open-ended and structured interview protocol was administered with each respondent. Interviews were audio-taped and transcribed. During the course of each interview, the researcher would restate/reframe material in order to check the accuracy of interpretation and to promote opportunities for clarification and elaboration. Feedback on the research process was solicited from each respondent in both studies.

Although each study had a different research objective, the second study builds on the findings from the first, and there are similarities between the studies that allow for comparison. Each study sought to learn more about the perceptions of urban American Indian and Alaska Native service providers with regard to the intersection of cultural material and health (“Research Study 1: Culture and Health”) or loss (“Research Study 2: Culture and Loss”). Therefore, there are similarities in the research protocols that bring a consistent structure to data collection. Each study sought information about the cultural values deemed important to the respondent and to tribal communities; perceptions about why values are deemed significant; conditions that strengthen or undermine cultural values; and concerns about challenges that confront the urban AIAN community, in addition to questions that were specific to the research objectives. The following examples of questions from each

protocol are provided to illustrate how/why findings from each study can be compared:

- “*Research Study 1: Culture and Health*”: Please identify and describe any values that are important to your tribe, to your family or to you clients. Where do we see examples of these values in your daily activities or in the daily activities of your clients? Why are these particular values important? What values are important to you as a service provider? Please discuss the relationship between the values you have described and health or illness. What conditions in the social or natural environment do you think help people to stay healthy or to become unhealthy? What do you think are the most serious health problems confronting this community? What do you think are the causes of these problems? If you could change anything to improve the quality of health for Indian people in this community, what would you change?
- “*Research Study 2: Culture and Loss*”: Please describe the general cultural values that are important to American Indian and Alaska Native people. Can you provide examples that demonstrate how these values are practiced or lived either within your family or by your clients? What is the significance or importance of the values you’ve described for this AIAN community? What conditions strengthen or undermine these values and the influence that they have on life in this community? Which problems/conditions do you see that undermine life for Indians in this community. What problems/conditions worry you the most? What do you think represents the greatest threat to AIAN communities? What represents the greatest resource? What do people need to know in order to work within this community?

Each research protocol has a larger number of questions, designed to elicit data that are specific to the research objectives of the particular study and that resulted in a wealth of data that are beyond the scope of this discussion. Analysis of the data elicited in response to the questions noted above indicates sufficient similarities in patterns and themes to support comparison and discussion across both studies.

Similar procedures and methods structured data analysis in both studies. Each interview was audiotaped and transcribed. In the first study, the author collected all data and transcribed all tapes. In the second study, the author collected data from the South Dakota reservation sample and 1/2 of the urban sample. Research associates collected data from the

Tuba City sample and the remainder of the urban sample. Interviews were transcribed verbatim by the research associates, and the author reviewed all transcripts and notes. A research associate assisted the author with data analysis. In both studies, analysis began by classifying, aggregating, and hand ordering/coding the data. The next level of analysis focused upon identifying key words and conceptual domains, by generating frequencies, clustering data, and examining causal relationships. These processes led to the identification of broad content domains that reflected the material that emerged in each interview. Analysis considered researcher bias and influence and examined the degree to which data triangulated across samples, sites, and the individual characteristics of respondents.

FINDINGS

This section presents the major findings of each study that provide information about the cultural material deemed important to the respondents, the challenges confronting the urban Indian community, and the resources available for meeting these challenges. The data indicate that there are many similarities between both samples with regard to demographic profiles and concerns about the AIAN urban community. These similarities continue to be illuminated as the respondents discuss and identify: (1) cultural values that are important to Indian people; (2) social conditions that undermine the vitality of the community; and (3) resources available for addressing problems and strengthening the community.

Description of the Samples

During the data collection phase (1995-1996) of "Research Study 1: Culture and Health," 64% (n = 16) of the respondents were affiliated with the major organizations serving the urban Indian community. The remaining respondents (n = 9) were affiliated with other community-based organizations and institutions. During the data collection period (2003-2004) for "Research Study 2: Culture and Loss," all AIAN respondents (N = 26/100%) were affiliated with the network of American Indian and Alaska Native service providers and various arts, educational, or advocacy groups. In both studies, the respondents are a diverse group with regard to tribal affiliation, so the samples serve as an exemplar of the diversity that characterizes the urban American Indian Alaska Native community in the region. The following tables provide a demographic

snapshot of each sample. Different data were collected on the demographic profiles in each study; only Table 1 reports employment settings, and only Table 2 reports educational background.

Similarities between respondents are illustrated in the tables: the samples are almost equal in size, and the numbers for gender, tribal affiliations, employment settings, and average number of years working within the AIAN community are equally close. Field notes indicate however, that the “Research Study 1: Culture and Health” had less diversity with regard to the age of the respondents, educational achievement, and the range of

TABLE 1. “Research Study 1: Culture and Health”: Demographic Profile of Respondents

1.	Total Respondents:	N = 25 (100%)	
2.	Gender:	Male: n = 9 (36%)	Female: n = 16 (64%)
3.	Tribal Affiliation	n	
	Cherokee	3	
	Apache	2	
	Lakota	2	
	Chippewa	2	
	Comanche	2	
	Hupa	2	
	Coast Miwok	1	
	Cheyenne	1	
	Cheyenne River Sioux	1	
	Laguna Pueblo	1	
	Navajo	1	
	Oneida	1	
	Otoe Missouria	1	
	Papago	1	
	Seneca	2	
	Winnebago	1	
4.	Employment Setting	n	%
	Child/Family (Public)	4	16
	Child/Family (non-profit)	9	36
	Clergy/Religious	3	12
	Education	3	12
	Health/Mental Health	6	24
5.	Average Years of Experience Working Within Community: 16 years		

TABLE 2. "Research Study 2: Culture and Loss": Demographic Profile of Respondents

1.	Total Respondents—Urban Sample:	N = 26 (100%)	
2.	Gender:	Male: n = 9 (35%)	Female: n = 17 (65%)
3.	Tribal Affiliation:	n	
	Apache	4	
	Choctaw	3	
	Navajo	3	
	Lakota	2	
	Apache/Cherokee	1	
	Blackfoot	1	
	Cherokee/Chicksaw	1	
	Chumash	1	
	Dakota	1	
	Laguna Pueblo	1	
	Oneida/Chippewa	1	
	Oneida/Cree	1	
	Oneida of Wisconsin	1	
	Osage	1	
	Pima	1	
	Pima/Choctaw	1	
	Sac and Fox/Pueblo	1	
	Tohono O'odham	1	
4.	Educational Background:	n	%
	Some College:	7	27
	AA Degree:	4	15
	BA/BS:	4	15
	Graduate Degree:	11	42
	Note: The graduate degree total includes 3 respondents with a doctorate degree.		
5.	Average Years of Experience Working Within Community: 14 years		

years working in the urban Indian community. The sample from "Research Study 2: Culture and Loss" exhibits greater diversity with regard to age, with 46% (n = 12) of the respondents over the age of 51, with regard to education as 8% (n = 3) of the respondents possess doctorate degrees, and with regard to the range of years working within the community which extends from two years to fifty years. The passage of time has not only aged the respondents and the AIAN workforce, but the intervening years have seen an expansion of services and achievements in the educational profiles of the AIAN workforce.

Field notes indicate another similarity between both samples. In both studies, the respondents have elected to work within the AIAN community, and this choice and their perspective on the issues demonstrate profound commitment to and concern for the AIAN community. Two respondents, one from each study, illustrate this:

Research Study 1: I would rather that Indian people have a choice, instead of the “take it or leave it” attitude that comes from the BIA and other government organizations. So, I decided that whatever knowledge I had, I was going to share with other Indians.

Research Study 2: I’m not sure how I decided to work in the Indian community, but by the time I was in graduate school and was doing research and learning counseling methods, etc., I started to consider, would this work with my Grandma or my uncles? I started to seek out more information and go to conferences, and once, I did my internship at an Indian agency, it was so much more rewarding than my previous internship. That was it; this is where I feel I am needed, where I can contribute.

Culture

In both studies, questions about cultural values and beliefs associated with the American Indian and Alaska Native community elicited responses which resulted in the identification of important cultural values and beliefs. These responses often led to discussions about the historical and contemporary significance of values, including discussions about the relationship between values and life for urban Indians in the Los Angeles region. The data resonate with theoretical frameworks associated with Cultural Studies, in that the respondents in both studies provide evidence that cultural material is practiced and transferred across generations, that cultural material is influenced by relationships of power, and that culture is dynamic and responsive to social, political, ecological, and historical conditions. Traditional Native culture has been altered and transformed as a result of post-colonial experiences, yet according to these respondents, it is also perceived as a resource in the management of the social changes that are the legacy of the post-colonial experience. The commentaries of two respondents illustrate this:

Research Study 1: In my work with clients and from meeting other Indians here in LA and in other places that I’ve lived, I have come

to know that we share the same values. We know that without our stories, without family, without community, without ceremony that life is more difficult. We know about respect, about what the Medicine Wheel stands for, our colors, our directions, the need for balance, for giving and sharing, for being responsible, for being disciplined and clear thinking, for caring for our community's children. These things are fundamental to all our Indian people, even though we may have different songs, different stories, different art. The differences are just because we lived in different environments, and whatever we did was in relationship to where we lived. And, it amazes me that some of this is known even to those who have been separated from their traditional communities.

Research Study 2: As American Indians, our cultural value is based on who we are as a people, as a family in how we care for our extended families, how we lived in communities, how we lived with the land, versus trying to conquer the land, how we had an equilibrium or a balance with everything around us versus trying to control something. American Indians felt like we had always been a people of respect. There was a sense of, kind of like, a wanting, I guess—not feeling that we were better than other people, but a sense that we all belong in this circle of, you know, what we call and understand as life, . . . Respect for yourself, respect for Mother Earth, there was a respect for women, men . . . there was a sense of community and family, and everyone looked out for everyone.

Respondents in both studies indicate that the core values associated with AIAN communities are values that reflect a traditional orientation to life and relationships. They speak in general terms about values that resonate with an intertribal experience and acknowledge that there is great diversity across AIAN nations and differences with regard to culturally based practices and social and political structures across tribes.

The respondents in each study are themselves members of different nations; they have spent varying lengths of time living in this urban environment; they are employed in different capacities in different agencies across the urban Los Angeles region. However, they identify essentially the same set of values. In their narratives, respondents from “Research Study 1: Culture and Health” identify cultural values and discuss how values promote the ability to work and collaborate with members of different tribes, and how values inform definitions of health and health sustaining practices in the urban environment. In Research Study 1,

84% (n = 21) of the respondents indicated that traditional values and practices promote the health and well-being of the community. In Research Study 2, respondents followed a similar path in the discussion on cultural values and loss and bereavement experiences. Eighty-eight percent (88%; n = 23) of these respondents indicated that traditional values and practices offer support and comfort in times of distress. Respondents in both samples clearly identify similar cultural values and perceive the significance of these values in similar ways.

The respondents associate cultural values as the foundation upon which the AIAN experience rests. These values are noted in the Table 3, which illustrates the agreement across the two studies with regard to core cultural values.

The following commentaries from respondents illustrate similarities in the discussion on values across the two studies, particularly their stressing of the core value of interconnectedness.

Research Study 1: The value of family, extended family, family gatherings, the closeness of your people is really important. The values of community and sharing, being generous with one another, the value of cooperation and the spiritual values of carrying on traditions is important. You see this in how people live and in how they treat one another, in giving thanks.

TABLE 3. Cultural Values Associated with AIAN People

	"Culture and Health"		"Culture and Loss"	
	n	%	n	%
Family (immediate and extended)	25	100	24	92
Respect	23	92	26	100
Responsibility/Accountability	17	68	25	96
Spirituality	No data		19	73
Generosity	17	68	22	85
Honesty/Truthfulness	16	64	19	73
Discipline	16	64	17	65
Elders and Children	15	60	14	54
Respect for Environment/Land	15	60	17	65
Courtesy	14	56	14	56
Kindness/Sincerity	12	48	10	38
Harmony/Balance	7	27	16	62

Research Study 1: When we talk about family, we have to think about who we are, how we share and take care of one another, how we are responsible. There are certain elements of family that help people have a sense of belonging and a sense of community. There are certain practices that belong to certain groups, yes, but there are other things that belong to all Indians, mainly community, sharing, and interconnectedness.

Research Study 1: Family is a central value, family meaning your own kin, the tribe and the community. And, generosity is evident within the community, in that we are always giving to our family, to our extended family. We are sharing meals or giving somebody gas money or using your gas to pick someone up. These are just examples of that on-going giving. Also, respect comes with family. Respect is best exemplified by respect for all people, especially for people who are older than me, and lot of our learning comes from people who have lived longer, who have more experience.

Research Study 2: Well, I think both personally and in my work, one of the most important values has been family and extended family, so just being able to have that support, family support, or extended family support is extremely critical . . . growing up in New Mexico, that was a tremendous value in terms of different family trying to raise children and help out.

Research Study 2: Respect, of course, for your elders, your family and the Creator—these are key, and I think family, the importance of having a family and the different generations in one dwelling, and at least, if you're not in the same dwelling, then definitely near by to help raise the children for the family. And so, grandparents in the family structure, part of the day to day lifestyle, I grew up that way; my clients have that as well. I think the interdependence on each other to raise the children and help with the family, my grandparents helped raise my brother and myself, as well as my aunts and uncles and my parents did the same.

Research Study 2: Respect, when we go back to the core value, it really shapes our world, because it's not just respect for people, but it's respect for the environment and everything that is in the environment. The circular view of the world, and respect for all the four

seasons, for the earth, the water and the air that we breathe and all the life that inhabits the earth. I think it is real important, because those are the things that shape what we put value on, so respect is a real important one. Respect for other people is important, but sometimes we get confused, and we think respect is only about other people, but in our value system we are taught that it is a respect for everything and everyone, so it incorporates a complete worldview.

The data indicate that perceptions about the core cultural values associated with AIAN communities remain relatively constant and consistent. While this may be an artifact of socialization, it is also likely that the consistency of the reports reflects the quality of the attachment to cultural values for American Indians and Alaska Natives.

Hazardous Conditions

The data from both studies indicate that the primary hazards undermining the life circumstance in the urban Los Angeles community are personal, socio-economic, and environmental. Table 4 summarizes these

TABLE 4. Hazardous Social Conditions in the Urban Community

	"Culture and Health"		"Culture and Loss"	
	n	%	n	%
Poverty	19	76	24	92
Geographic Dispersion of community	17	68	22	86
Disconnected from Family or Culture	16	64	21	80
Loss of "Identity" Multiple losses*	16	64	19	73
Legacy of Boarding School	15	60	23	88
Substance Abuse	11	44	15	58
Fragmented Social Services Delivery System	9	36	15	58
Isolation	2	8	10	38

*Loss was described somewhat differently between the two studies. In the "Culture and Health," the most clear and consistent discussions of loss referenced loss of identity when attachment to a traditional family or community is severed. Although respondents in the second sample included that description, given the focus on trauma and loss, the discussion was more elaborate and included a wider range of experiences: severed connections to family or community, deaths, injuries, historical losses, and the Boarding Schools experience.

data and demonstrates the similarities and patterns that emerge across the two studies.

Respondents indicate that personal behaviors, such as interpersonal violence, family abuse and substance abuse, pose continuing threats to the AIAN urban Los Angeles community. The comments of two respondents serve as exemplars of these findings:

Research Study 1: I think the most common problem and the most troublesome is depressed families. Families that are masking some kind of pain, whether it was physical violence or sexual abuse or whether it was generational abuse; I mean there is pain that goes with that. And, for many families, that's all they have known. So, the parents or kids take drugs or drink as a way of alleviating all that pain. And, this creates the emotional and physical problems related to substance abuse and developmental problems for the kids, because the way that they are living is just not healthy, and this is the greatest problem for the kids, being raised in a depressed environment by depressed and poorly functioning parents.

Research Study 2: I think what worried me the most is, you know, for the younger generation as well as pretty much for all ages, is the alcoholism and the drug addiction. You know, they're out there, and it just has to do with death. You know, that really worries me. I mean we just had a recent death in the community of a young member, and it's just really sad that it had to be, because he was so young. I knew him, and I met him, and it's just really sad that he wasn't able to connect and get, whatever his needs were, to stay in sobriety. It just worries me, you know, because I have children his age and he knew my children, and it's just really sad.

The respondents in both studies state that substance abuse represents a significant threat to American Indians and Alaska Natives in the urban Los Angeles community. The data reported here resonate with all national data that document the profound toll that substance abuse has on AIAN communities.

The legacy of the Boarding School exerts a profound affect on AIAN life in urban and reservation communities for respondents in both studies. Boarding and missions schools have exacted a punishing toll on the psychosocial development of individuals, families, and communities and resulted in trauma that passed from generation to generation. The commentaries of two respondents illustrate this concern:

Research Study 1: Many of the issues that we see with our families are related to a parent being raised in the Boarding School, where the emphasis was on structure and rules, and less on passing on the skills needed to raise children in the traditional way. It doesn't matter what tribe, the being exposed to Boarding School leaves the same kind of impact. On the reservation and in this community, for the families who don't have ceremony and a positive support system to help them, then, there's the alcohol, the depression, and then, we see kids who are being abused or not properly exposed to their traditions.

Research Study 2: I think that almost every family has been touched by the boarding schools, the same way that every family has been touched by alcoholism. There is a connection between the two. What happens to children when you take them away? What happens to the parents, the aunts, uncles, grandmas, grandpas? There was a lot of mental, physical, and emotional abuse. There was a loss of knowing your family on a day to day basis, your language, your community. And, the abuse and the loss has come down to affect the following generations, because of poor parenting, family violence, drinking, drugs, or just emotional numbness. If there was one thing I could change about Indian history, it would be the boarding school, because it has left so much wreckage.

The data are rich with examples of the legacy of the boarding school experience.

Poverty is articulated in both studies as a significant problem for the urban AIAN community in Los Angeles. Poverty is implicated in a host of problems that undermine the health, well-being, and capacities of the community, and poverty compounds loss experiences. In the "Culture and Health" study, slightly more than two-thirds of the respondents cite poverty as a critical problem for the community; however, there is a significant increase in the number of respondents who identify "poverty" as a concern in the "Culture and Loss" study. The comment of one respondent provides one possible explanation:

Research Study 2: Well, I think that poverty is at the root of so many of the problems that our clients face. And, it seems to have just gotten worse as time passes. If it was this bad ten years ago, maybe I didn't notice. But now, look, it is so hard to get rent together; so they are evicted, and eventually, they will end up in a motel. Then, the kids start missing school, and it gets harder for

Mom to get to work; so she starts missing work. They are spending what little money they have eating out, and it's just impossible for them to save the first and last (months' rent). And, sometimes they are used to going to the tribe or their family for help, but here they're alone. So, it's the fact that they come here poor or they're born here poor, and there isn't much help out there. One little thing pushes them over, and it is really really hard to get on your feet again. It's such a downward spiral from then on.

Respondents in both studies note that the poverty status of the AIAN community exacerbates health, educational, and social problems and loss experiences. The following statement from a respondent in the "Culture and Loss" study elaborates this theme:

Research Study 2: In the urban environment, I see similarities to what I experienced back home. You know the substance use, the domestic violence, mental illness, trauma and so on—the health problems, diabetes. I see this as a big problem. I work in health agency, and that's kind of what we deal with all the time. The poverty, the housing issues, all those factors are significant issues now, I think they (issues) all intertwine. I see people with multiple issues that they have to contend with, and it's sad when you see someone who is abusing substances, who is homeless, and who makes \$200.00-\$300.00 a month to live on, in place like LA. They have no transportation, and I think that it is just so important to address all those issues. I don't just look at treatment, you really have to deal with all the issues that the person comes in with. And, so really, for me there is not one that concerns me more than the others, because they are all pretty severe.

As respondents discuss poverty, they indicate that poverty erodes the spirit and vitality of the community and renders AIAN families emotionally and spiritually depleted, which leads to other problems. A respondent from the "Culture and Health" study offers the following:

Research Study 1: I believe that the main health problem for Indian kids is poverty. Poverty affects these kids' lives in so many ways. They don't eat well; they don't get adequate preventive health and dental care, and many times, their mothers did not have good prenatal care; so, they are vulnerable from the time that they are born. And, this continues through their childhood. This affects learning

and every facet of development. But, most importantly, when their parent's spirit is touched by poverty, the child's spirit is affected as well. This is not limited only to Indian children; all poor children face similar problems. But, it is somewhat different for urban Indian kids, because if they were home, they might have more access to health services and social support for their families. Here, they lose so much more in that their physical health status is made poor by the circumstances, and they can lose their culture, which only makes them more vulnerable as they grow older.

The data indicate that the respondents perceive that the consequences of being poor in Los Angeles are exacerbated by AIAN residential patterns in the region.

The geographic dispersion of the AIAN community throughout the greater Los Angeles region is a concern for the majority of respondents in both studies. The Los Angeles region is an incredibly diverse community, and many neighborhoods are clearly identified and recognized as ethnic or racial enclaves. However, there is no AIAN neighborhood or geographic center for this community, although AIAN social services organizations often function as the venue for Indian people to come together. The vastness of the metropolitan area, the inadequacies of the public transportation system, and a fragmented AIAN social services delivery system compound the problems associated with the geographic dispersion of AIAN. One respondent from the "Culture and Loss" study notes, "One problem is that we don't have any neighborhood, the way other groups do. When Indians need help, they have to travel, and if they don't have a car, it's harder. And even if they are seeking help from an Indian organization, they might have to go to TANF up on Wilshire, and if they need something else, they have to travel again."

The data indicate that the geographic dispersion of the AIANS undermines opportunities to affiliate with other Indians and contributes to social and cultural isolation that can have long-term consequences:

Research Study 1: Back home, there isn't that much to do for kids, so they are running around with their cousins and their friends. Adults are working, playing bingo, doing tribal business, maybe even drinking, but the thing is that you are always surrounded by your own family, your tribe. So, that even if you go down the wrong path, there is the possibility that you can get set right and learn or restart a way of life that is influenced by your values. But here, because there is so much else that is offered, it's real easy to lose

your way. It's easy for the kids to identify or fall in with Latinos or whoever, and it's easy for families to be too busy or to get isolated from other families; plus some things just can't be done here.

Research Study 2: One of the biggest problems I see is the isolation, being that families are all spread out or being that they are in this urban community without any real support. Families are here with no support, no money, no housing, no transportation, really nobody to fall back on, and part of that goes back to the history, the history of American Indian policy and what has happened to the people and how they have been dislocated and relocated . . . And, once families come to the urban areas, and they raise children here, so the disconnect kind of goes on to the next generation, . . . but, the urban areas are really hard, I think, lack of transportation, lack of money, lack of health insurance, jobs, education, all those things. If you have those things going against you, which most American Indian families in LA do, it's really hard to get ahead. But again, I think, that's a historical problem.

The data in each study reveal that a number of social, economic, and environmental hazards challenge the American Indian and Alaska Native community in Los Angeles. These hazardous conditions are perceived as threats to the well-being of the community. Respondents in both studies acknowledge the role of personal behavior, but the data overwhelmingly return to themes that acknowledge the broader social and political context that informs AIAN life in the urban community. The data indicate that the resources necessary for addressing conditions are embedded in the cultural fabric of the community.

Cultural as a Resource

The findings in both studies indicate that cultural material provides protective functions and promotes resilient capacities. A respondent in the "Culture and Loss" study summarized: "Think about all the things that have happened to Indian people in the last 500 years, terrible things—genocide, conquest, boarding schools, abuse—and yet, we are still here, because there is something inside of us, some knowledge we have about this world, beliefs and ceremonies that we have, that have protected us and allowed us to survive."

Respondents state that in order to cope with the legacies of loss and the challenges of living in the urban environment, American Indian and

Alaska Native people, as well as service providers for the community should: (1) develop knowledge of and practice traditional values, beliefs, and behaviors in daily life; (2) develop a strong identity as an Indian person by seeking knowledge of personal, family and tribal history; (3) seek opportunities to engage with and affiliate with American Indians and Alaska Natives; and (4) actively incorporate prayer and ceremony in the routines of daily life. The respondents indicate that these recommendations are tried and tested, and that the AIAN community has survived, because these recommendations have been actualized. They note that culture is a strength and resource. In the “Culture and Health” research, these findings emerged in response to questions that sought information about how to promote the health of children and families and how to address problems in the urban environment. In the “Culture and Loss” research, the data were elicited in response to questions that sought information about how culture is a resource in addressing the traumas and problems associated with AIAN communities. Table 5 summarizes these findings.

The following passages illustrate the sentiments articulated by the respondents on these issues:

Research Study 1: A few years ago, I wrote a tobacco control education project grant. My whole thing is that tobacco is a sacred plant and is used in our rituals, our ceremonies and our prayers. Let's not abuse it. Yet non-Indians don't understand that; so our programs must be developed in culturally sensitive ways. So, it is the strength of our cultural values and ways that can help us overcome all the barriers in this environment. And, the first thing that comes to mind is prayer, not only my prayer, but the prayers that support the community, support the family and the strength of those individuals who are committed to their communities, to their values and who follow through with these commitments.

Research Study 1: We, and the parents we serve, must deal with our weaknesses, with our egos. Sometimes, we can be our own worst enemy. If we look at history, we should be extinct, but we are still here, so that tells me that our strengths are there, and they will prevail. So, our prayers and ceremonies support our lives and our health. In our prayers, we pray for all our relations; we pray to give thanks for our responsibilities and our gifts. So, we pray because we are the caretakers of our children, and this will sustain us; this will help them.

TABLE 5. Traditional Culture and Recommendations for Addressing Social Problems

Cultural Resource	"Culture and Health"		"Culture and Loss"	
	n	%	n	%
Develop Knowledge of/Practice Traditional Values and Behaviors	21	84	24	92
Develop Strong Identity and Knowledge of Personal/Tribal History	19	76	22	86
Seek Engagement/Affiliation w/AIAN community	16	64	19	73
Prayer and Ceremony	13	52	24	92

The following passage from a respondent in the "Culture and Loss" study captures prevailing conceptions about culture as a resource historically and in the contemporary environment:

I think American Indians have fought their whole lives to continue to preserve their culture and to preserve who they are. I think American Indians have definitely have tried to maintain their lifestyle, and integrate it with mainstream society. From what I understand, I think American Indians have been the only people in America to really continue to preserve and hold a lot of their ancestral beliefs, more so than Latinos, Blacks, Whites . . . But I think as American Indians, we definitely have to fight, and definitely had to hide a lot of our cultural ceremonies, beliefs, language at the very grassroots level. From the boarding school era, you know, and the missions in California, everything that had to do with 'exterminate the Red man' or 'let's kill the Red' or 'let's kill the Indian to save the man' type of idea . . . There still is that fire that, I think, burns within American Indians to want to still be—we still want to learn our language, we still want to learn some of our songs, we still want to continue to keep that circle going, we still want to continue to improve our lives and uplift our people. You know, I think there still is a small group of people who want that, who want to continue to have a connection with the home—what I mean by home is I mean back on the reservation. They want to have a connection with the people back home. But I think it has to—there has to be an effort between all the parties, urban and rural, rich and poor, people who help versus people who need services, to come together to continue to help each other out in order to continue to have

a resistance—a resilience, to maintain that culture, maintain what our ancestors have fought for and died for, to continue to live on.

Although the data are replete with examples that further elaborate these sentiments, this snapshot provides a substantive portrait of the findings in this category.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings from the two studies demonstrate remarkable similarity and consistency, despite the fact that data collection was separated by an 8 to 10 year interval. The data articulate a cultural orientation in the practice of urban AIAN service providers in the metropolitan Los Angeles region. The vexing social problems and conditions of life for urban Indians appear relatively unchanged in the last 8 to 10 years from the vantage point of the respondents. The findings indicate that culture is perceived as a resource that provides protective functions and promotes resilient capacities. Each study had a different research agenda, yet both shared a methodology that sought an “insider’s” perspective, and both sought information about cultural material. The similarities of the sample in concert with the similarities in perceptions add weight to the “insider” perspective. Further, these studies are among the first to articulate the perspective and concerns of American Indians and Alaska Natives in an urban community.

The profiles of the two samples are almost indistinguishable in their demographic composition and in their assessment of issues. Both samples reflect the intertribal diversity of the AIAN community in Los Angeles, which is noted in published reports on the community. Additionally, a broad spectrum of the AIAN service delivery system is represented in each study. The respondents from the second study include individuals who are older than the first study, as well as a younger set of providers who have achieved graduate level education. This suggests that the AIAN service provider network in the region is becoming more professionalized, and the presence of three respondents with a doctorate degree indicates the possibility that the community is cultivating its own “experts.” They possess insider knowledge of community needs that is balanced by research and academic credentials and a profound commitment to working within the AIAN community. This bodes well for the future of the AIAN community, because this cadre of young and well educated professionals can assume positions of leadership.

The findings from both studies suggest that cultural material shapes the social realities of urban American Indians and Alaska Natives who live and work in the metropolitan Los Angeles region. American Indian and Alaska Native service providers in the community draw on culturally based knowledge and social, political, and historical knowledge of AIAN communities in the assessment of issues and in direct practice. The AIAN service providers, whose voices are documented in this research, integrate knowledge of and commitment to traditional cultural values in the assessment of issues and in the design and delivery of services. The data indicate that the respondents are well versed in the social, political, and historical issues that shape the AIAN experience in urban and reservation communities, and that, in particular, they continue to elaborate understanding about how Boarding School experiences influence the lives of constituents. For these respondents, a central issue in assessment includes examination of the degree to which social, historical, and political changes over generations are implicated in the current condition of the client and the community. This orientation is consistent with Cultural Studies paradigms that note that culture is the mediator of all life experiences and that social change and interactions between groups illuminate relationships of power and the consequences of those relationships.

For these respondents, culture functions as a thread that is woven throughout every discussion, and traditional AIAN cultural values and practices are clearly articulated as a resource for the community. There is remarkable clarity about the core values that are important to the respondents and the AIAN community that has not shifted in 8 to 10 years. While this can be attributed to professional socialization, the data suggest quite strongly that conceptualizations about values transcend professional training and employment.

In both research studies, traditional values provide guidelines for living and interpretations for life experiences. Values influence relationship protocols, social expectations, operate as resources in stressful conditions, and promote resilient capacities. In these data, values influence individual and group identity and are the foundation on which the AIAN experience rests. The characteristics and values associated with traditional life include a group and collective orientation as well as an appreciation for family: kin, extended, and tribal. Discussions about family are entangled with discussions about respect, accountability, obligation, interdependence, and generosity. Concerns about children reference concerns about protecting the most precious resource for American Indian and Alaska Native communities. The data clearly

support the thesis that cultural material and characteristics are perceived to promote the resilient capacities, survival, and well-being of AIAN people.

Urban life presents special challenges and contradictions that exacerbate the social problems as well as the vulnerabilities of the AIAN community. The data suggest that the Boarding School experience is never far removed from the struggles and challenges that confront American Indians and Alaska Natives in urban and reservation environments. The data from both studies resonate with the body of literature that examines historical trauma and the legacy of the Boarding Schools. With regard to life in this urban environment, the findings suggest that the geographic dispersion and residential patterns of American Indians and Alaska Natives across the community creates social and cultural isolation. Social, economic, and environmental conditions undermine the productivity, stability, and the cultural integrity of American Indians and Alaska Native who live in Los Angeles. The data suggest that social, health, and educational disparities are exacerbated by the poverty status of so many members of the AIAN community. Poverty is implicated in a number of psychosocial problems, including substance abuse, family violence, suicide, unemployment, and poor health and psychological distress. The findings suggest that poverty, social and geographic isolation, and repeated exposure to loss undermine the vitality of the community and fuel depression, disenfranchisement, and despair. The pace of life in the urban region, the dual pressures of acculturation and isolation, and the competition for resources erode the quality of life for AIANs in the region. Further, it appears that AIAN in the urban environment are often disconnected from reservation-based cultural and social support networks.

The data imply that the issues and concerns of American Indians and Alaska Natives in the metropolitan region are rendered invisible in this large multicultural community and that American Indians and Alaska Natives are a community, recognized by fellow members of the community, but that they are not a constituency. This has significant implications for resolving the vexing problems that plague the community and concern the respondents. When the community is geographically dispersed, the social and political structures supporting the expression of core values can become fragile, and the risk for community fragmentation and isolation increases. The AIAN community is vulnerable, because reservation social and political structures are not easily replicated in the urban community, and opportunities to affiliate with other American Indians and Alaska Natives are reduced. A fragmented service delivery system and social policies that are hostile to the community exacerbate

conditions for community members and undermine the opportunities to practice bedrock cultural values.

The data are replete with eloquent testimony about why culture is a resource and how culture can protect the community in times of distress and promote resilient capacities. In both studies, the data suggests that traditional cultural values, beliefs, and practices have contributed to the survival of the American Indian and Alaska Native communities in the face of significant and traumatic challenges and losses. The data indicate that culture is a major support and critical resource that for generations has sustained AIAN communities, promoted the well-being of the community, and offered solace in the face of the traumatic losses that have spanned generations. The urban environment exacerbates these losses. There is no "place," other than AIAN organizations, that members of the community can turn to within the community for comfort or to practice particular types of ceremonies. For the AIAN population, it is clear that culture cannot be disentangled from the analysis of issues nor the remedies for relief. Moreover, the findings simultaneously acknowledge intertribal diversity with regard to cultural beliefs and behaviors and illuminate the many intertribal similarities with regard to fundamental cultural values.

The respondents testify to the tenacity and pervasiveness of traditional culture, and about indicate how culture can serve as a resource for ameliorating these conditions. The findings suggest an alternative model for interpreting and responding to the significant problems that confront American Indians and Alaska Natives in the urban environment. It appears that prevention and interventions approaches should continue to adopt and develop culturally based and values-laden practices for the AIAN community. Practice and policy for American Indians and Alaska Natives in the urban Los Angeles community should attend to cultural material and address the disparities that undermine quality of life in this community. Practice and policy can advance an agenda that addresses the fragmentation of the AIAN social services delivery system and promotes opportunities for affiliation and engagement.

The findings imply that the survival, adaptive capacities, growth and development of the urban American Indian and Alaska Native community has been facilitated, throughout history and in the contemporary context, because cultural values, beliefs and practices promote strength, resilience, attachment, and identity. A healthy and vibrant attachment to cultural values, family and tribal community promotes a number of psychosocial benefits, including a strong identity, affiliations with an expansive support network and traditional practices that offer guidance, comfort, and consolation. Consonant with attachment theory, this process

is evident in respondent narratives that illustrate how traditional culture provides support, security, and comfort for generations. The respondents, through the data, offer a perspective from the field that can inform the interpretation of issues and the development of practice and policy for American Indians and Alaska Natives in the urban Los Angeles community.

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