

Giving Voice to Historical Trauma through Storytelling

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INTRODUCTION

- A common dilemma among health care professionals is how to best serve members of the 562 American Indian tribes (Department of the Interior, 2002) with their unique needs. Health care may be complicated by an undercurrent of seemingly dysfunctional behaviors and relationships, combined with obstacles regarding the communication of needs and expectations on the part of both the patient and the health care provider.



- Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, an authority on the residual effects of adversity among American Indians, suggests that the first step healers must take involves understanding the nature and causes of historical trauma in the American Indian population.



DEFINITION OF HISTORICAL TRAUMA

- Brave Heart (2003) defined historical trauma as ‘the collective and cumulative emotional wounding across generations’.
- HT is held personally, yet may be transmitted over and over from one generation to the next; consequently, even family members who had not directly experienced the traumatic events may be significantly impacted by it because even these descendants carry that trauma within themselves and respond to their world in ways that would be typical of one who had experienced the trauma personally (Brave Heart, 2003; Whitbeck, Adams, Hoyt, and Chen, 2004).



Events Contributing to Historical Trauma among American Indians

- *Colonization* Governmental control has been exerted over American Indian commerce since the first treaty was signed in 1722 defining American Indian rights to territorial and economic self-determination (O'Callaghan, 1855).



- *Boarding Schools:* 1876, the federal government decreed that all American Indian children must be forcibly, if not voluntarily, removed from the care of their own mothers and fathers and relatives to be brought up within the strictly regimented confines of what were then termed boarding schools.



- "...the Indian is DEAD in you," the Reverend A. J. Lippincott proclaimed at one Carlisle commencement. "Let all that is Indian within you die! ... You cannot become truly American citizens, industrious, intelligent, cultured, civilized until the INDIAN within you is DEAD" (Adams, p.274).



The Residual Effects of Historical Trauma

- Substance Abuse and Mental Health of American Indians
- Ineffective Parenting
- Conspiracy of Silence
- Delayed or Disenfranchised Grief
- Fixated Trauma



Substance Abuse and Mental Health

- HT increased the risk of developing alcohol and substance abuse among the participants and their children (Brave Heart, 1999 & WhiteShield, 2000).
- Comprising approximately 1.5% of the total population of the United States, the suicide rate of American Indians and Alaskan Natives is 50% higher than the general population and homelessness is four times more prevalent (U.S. Department of Health, 1999).



- Eighty-two percent of males were found to be heavy alcohol users compared to 61.4% of females in an American Indian group from rural South Dakota (Lowe, Long, Wallace, & Welty, 1997).
- American Indians who are former Vietnam veterans are more than twice as likely as the rest of the US veteran population to abuse or be dependent upon alcohol (



Treatment for Historical Trauma

- 1980's PTSD classified as a verifiable mental disorder by the American Psychiatric Association Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: Third Edition (DSM III) (Lasiuk & Hegadoren, 2006).



Assessing Historical Trauma

- Historical Loss Scale HTS, Historical Trauma Symptom Scale are two instruments used to measure historical trauma; however,
- Linguistic Inquiry Word Count (LIWC)
- Storytelling (Smith & Liehr 2008).



Storytelling in Contemporary Health Care Research and Practices

- Promises new insights into a population that has been underrepresented and often unheard.
- Stories are one of the oldest communication channels of world cultures; promoting the development of group cultural identity.
- Nurses are schooled in the art of active listening
- Stories as healing within a cultural context.

