
Akicita are the most underdeveloped, underutilized resource[s] we have across Indian country. (Bill Iron Moccasin)

That fathers are essential in the lives of children is one of the more well-documented aspects of social science. Extensive reviews have been proffered elsewhere (Blankenhorn, 1996, Horn & Sylvestor, 2002; Marsiglio, Amato, & Day, 2000) and include emphases on fathers' roles and family relationships (Booth & Crouter, 1998; Lamb, 1997; Parke, 2002), responsible fathering (Doherty, Kouneski, & Erickson, 1998), attachment bonds (Brotherson, Dollohitte, & Hawkins, 2005), the impact of father absence (Popenoe, 1996), and low-income, unmarried fathers (MacLanahan & Garfinkel, 1999) to name a few. Some of the work is addressed to general audiences (Brotherson & White, 2005) while other work targets researchers and public policy analysts (Brotherson & White, 2002; Day & Lamb, 2004; Tamis-LeMonda, & Cabrera, 2002). The fathering field continues to burgeon with efforts to articulate the impact involved fathers have on the lives of their children in a variety of settings (Brotherson & White, 2002, 2005) and cultures (Day & Lamb, 2004). Although this impact has been studied in majority and minority populations (Marsiglio, Amato, & Day, 2000), American Indian fatherhood, which reflects some of the highest rates of father absence in the country, has received little attention and provides the impetus for this paper.

With forced relocations of Indian tribes that restricted activities and made them dependent upon government welfare, important family and social roles were lost ... The role of the Indian father as protector, warrior, hunter and teacher was diminished. Thus, many men could not fulfill traditional roles and this undermined their perceived importance to the clan and tribe. (Abbott & Slater, 2000, p. 155)

This undermined role increases the likelihood that American Indian children will grow up in an uninvolved or absent father home. The loss of male influence in American Indian life can be traced to a loss of cultural practices and traditions. Rituals and traditional practices (or their loss through colonization and subjugation) have a tremendous influence in helping men gain a sense of identity and purpose. The vision quest, for example, was a historical Lakota rite of passage that helped make a young man "useful" to his family. Luther Standing Bear said that "every Lakota boy became a hunter, scout, or warrior"--once the three most important men's roles in Lakota society (Martinez, 2004, p. 88). He tied these roles to the vision quest, calling it one of the most significant ways for a man to "learn about one's calling." Though practitioners advocate preservation of cultural practices and traditions, the fulfillment of male roles is noticeably absent in many American Indian homes today. Therefore, a call to action among American Indian men and fathers that promotes expectations of involvement and that brings recognition and respect is warranted. A similar call to action for all men has been made elsewhere (Horn, Blankenhorn, & Pearlstein, 1999). The well-known Lakota elder, Black Elk, came to understand his vision, after he went through his own vision quest, and the obligations it placed on him as a Lakota man to serve his people (Martinez, 2004). Similar expectations

from today's tribal communities may help men understand, adapt, and fulfill their roles and obligations to their family.

Given that two of the three authors of this article are Dakota and all have worked with Dakota men, our focus is on Dakota (in the interest of clarity and flow, the general term Dakota will be used for Dakota, Lakota, and Nakota tribes) fathers. Focus groups, talking circles, and discussions with respected Dakota elders provided insight into how their challenges influenced their perspectives as men and fathers. Three of the four focus groups about American Indian fathering on Dakota reservations consisted of respected elders (all males, average of six per group) who were invited to participate. The other focus group (five participants, three female) consisted of American Indians who were reservation-based social service providers. Each focus group lasted about two to three hours with a snack break in between. Rather than providing an empirically based approach to American Indian fatherhood (indeed, there are few--see White, Hoyt, Johnson, & Whitbeck, 2005), this paper provides a historical and contextual perspective on the fatherhood crisis within the Dakota nation (including an overview of traditional Dakota family life), suggests a theoretical framework for exploring Dakota fathering, and offers several recommendations for the future of American Indian fathers, one of which includes using the Akicita model as a standard for Dakota fathering.

TRADITIONAL DAKOTA FAMILY LIFE

In the time of "pre-contact" (the phrase used to describe the period prior to Euro-American settlement), American Indian men held a place of honor in their families and tribes. They were respected and played key roles of protection and provision in the function and survival of their extended family. Others played equally important yet different roles. The traditional Dakota family structure was a complex web of relationships in which children had several mothers and fathers. A mother's sisters were equally considered mothers to her children, and her husband's brothers were also fathers (see Figure 1). If a sister lost a husband in battle, or if he was away from camp on a hunt, her extended family, or *tiyospaye*, played a significant role in her life. Based on the social governing system of kinship law, the most important unit among Dakota families was the *hakata*, the opposite-sex sibling and cousin bond (Deloria, 1942). This bond remained stable throughout life. A woman's *hakata* (biological brothers, *tiyospaye* brothers, male cousins-uncles and aunt's sons) had the responsibility of caring for her and her children (Deloria, 1942, 1988).

The internal dynamics of the extended family structure had a strong and resilient web of support in which each person filled specific roles. The mother's male siblings (*hakata*) taught her sons survival skills and assisted with physical development. Hunting, scouting, and being a warrior required physical stamina and stealth, skills that needed practice and monitoring. These uncles were also the delight of their nieces because of their responsibility for protecting them from danger. Their service to these children reflected love and respect for the child's mother and reinforced the *hakata* relationship. *Tiyospaye* fathers (biological father's brothers) were responsible for teaching *tiyospaye* sons (nephews) a man's responsibilities to his family, tribe, and nation and the importance of

accountability, consequences, and spiritual development. The biological mother and father's role was insulated from negative interaction with their children. They never disciplined (the domain of older, same-sex siblings). They served as the primary warmth and support system for their children, the source of unconditional support when others around them may have failed them. Grandparents also contributed to this support system through consistent, unconditional love and support. Because each person filled a specific role, children had a considerable base of blood-related role models from which to emulate and acquire various life skills. This matrix served the Dakota family well. Men had a specific place of honor in this setting and seldom fell from grace because they knew who they were and what they had to do.

HISTORICAL IMPACT ON FATHERS AND FAMILIES

THE SCOPE OF AMERICAN INDIAN FATHERLESSNESS

Fatherlessness in American Indian families is among the highest in the nation. The general population of households in the United States with children under 18 consists of 73% married-couple families and 21% "female householder only" families (no male present; U.S. Census, 2000). Compare that to American Indian married-couple households (with children under 18) at 59% and female householders at 31%, 10% higher than the general population. Father absence in South Dakota is even more alarming. The general population of households in South Dakota (children under 18) include 76% married-couple households and 18% female householder only. In stark contrast, South Dakota's American Indian households (children under 18) include only 39% that are married-couple families and as high as 46% that are female householder only. In other words, nearly half of all homes have no male present. These statistics do not tease out stepfathers that reside in married-couple families. If half of the census's married families (39%) have been remarried (not an unreasonable estimate), then fewer than 20% of children live with their biological father. That is, an estimated one in five Dakota families have youth under the age of 18 who live with their biological father. These figures reflect the significant breakdown that has occurred in American Indian family life. The number of American Indian children living without their biological father or even a father figure represents a responsibility and opportunity for Dakota men to stand up and make a difference in the lives of these children.

BREAKDOWN OF DAKOTA FAMILY STRUCTURE

Several challenges exist for responsible, involved Dakota fathers. A recurring theme with most men in our focus groups involved spirituality and the need to connect with the Creator. They explained the impact spirituality has on their families and on their role as a father. One Elder said, "I hope my kids did good.... They are looking for their own sense of spirituality or creator or something. To me, that's the most important thing--for that kid to find a connection with a spiritual place." In addition to spirituality, traditional norms surrounding child rearing complicate the role of fathers in today's settings since those

parenting practices were lost after the boarding school experiment that was part of the United States government's Indian policy at the time. This policy involved the forced removal of children into schools away from home and in settings where they were forbidden to speak their language and practice their cultural ways. Children taken from their families did not learn to parent according to traditional practices. As a result, subsequent generations have suffered from this loss and today's fathers struggle through the adaptation process (Rock Krech, 2002). One Elder said, "I don't even know what I missed ... but I can see that, when I started having children, I had a difficult time raising them." Children need, expect, and want discipline. Parenting styles (including discipline, monitoring, and warmth and support) in today's Dakota culture are quite varied based on acculturation, enculturation, and assimilation. We will explore the influences of Dakota family law, the Dawes Act, and poverty on historical family structure, each of which suggests insights into healthy adaptations.

Dakota Family Law. Traditional family culture provided that Dakota children learned to trust explicitly and implicitly every adult in their family unit--their tiyospaye. Historical "kinship law" prescribed how that trust would be developed and maintained by a system of counterbalances between adults and children based on their ability to reason. In early childhood, the "nonreasoning stage," infants and toddlers were not expected to know right from wrong and were simply protected from harm. Since they were not responsible for behavior, they were not blamed, corrected, punished, or disciplined. Their attentions were diverted or redirected. If old enough to comprehend, they were subject to scare tactics by older siblings to discourage unacceptable behavior. This was the only person who acted in a threatening manner toward the child (although never striking or punishing). The attitude of impatience and mock anger was enough to scare the child into correct behavior. In adolescence, harsh discipline that was often physically rough or pointed verbal sarcasm aimed to hurt feelings was administered by same-sex siblings and cousins. The counterbalance was provided by the caretaker adults in the tiyospaye who would "take sides" with the child being attacked to fend off the barrage of words and actions. Caretakers never administered discipline. This process was in place until the "social trainee" learned the proper behavior expected of law-abiding citizens. Severe harshness from siblings/collaterals and protection and love from parents, aunts, uncles, and grandparents were the disciplinary dynamics of the traditional Dakota family. In this context, fathers provided unconditional love and guidance and never engaged in discipline or negative, guilt-ridden interaction. This dynamic kept in tact the child's trust with all adults in his or her life.

When children were put into boarding schools, the system of harsh discipline by older siblings was still intact. Unfortunately, boarding school staff were unaware of this dynamic and did not provide the unconditional buffer of love and protection as caretakers. The outcome was that predictable and significant abuse ensued. When they returned to the reservations as young adults, they had not learned traditional family roles. Both they and their spouses became "out of balance" parents without a functional understanding of the Dakota family system and way of life (Rock Krech, 2002). In this context, the natural evolution has moved them toward permissive parenting, a style that does not provide adequate discipline, monitoring, and structure (Baumrind, 1978, 1991a,

1991b). Other factors like the Dawes act and pervasive poverty have contributed to many parenting challenges, including father absence.

The Dawes Act. Disenfranchising American Indian men and ultimately removing their role in the family was accomplished, in large part, by the Dawes Act of 1887. The Dawes, or General Allotment Act (NARA, n.d.), provided tribal members with specific land allotments for agricultural and grazing purposes. Allotment schedules included a quarter section (120 acres) per family, an eighth section (60 acres) per single person over 18 years old, and so on. Forces behind the legislation included those with (a) a demand for allotment, (b) guardianship, and (c) agricultural perspectives (Native American Documents Project, 2004). The demand for allotment force suggested that reservation allotments should be based on potential benefits to non-Indian settlers and merchants. Some saw the "giving" of land to undeserving Indians as criminal and sought ways to circumvent the law and gain possession for European settlers. Senator Henry Teller (1881) said "The real aim of [the Dawes Act] is to get at the Indians' land and open it up for resettlement." The guardianship force came from eastern humanitarians who saw communal landholding as an impediment to "civilizing Indians" and felt the law should protect their property rights from impending settlers. Their goal was to assimilate Indians into the body of the nation instead of segregating them on tribally held reservations. Congressman Henry Dawes (author of the act) said a system of private land ownership would help American Indian people become "civilized" as they "cultivated the ground, lived in houses, rode in Studebaker wagons, sent children to school, and drank whiskey" (Steel, 2000). Finally, promotion of agriculture was a goal of many reformers of Indian policy to promote self-sustaining independence. However, besides the fact that farming was vastly different from most tribal ways of life and that support for seed, tools, equipment, and training was not provided, land allotments were often rocky, forested, or desert lands unsuitable for farming. From the guardianship and agricultural perspectives, the Dawes Act was a profound failure (Schwartz, n.d.).

In addition, American Indian people could not understand how they could be "given" their land since the government did not pay for it. Indian people did recognize, however, that the Dawes Act was being used to break up families through allotment assignments across the reservation (Deloria, 1942). Land assignments were made that split siblings and extended family networks apart across great distances at a time when transportation was difficult at best. As a result Dakota people lost the tiyospaye support system vital to tribalism and tribal survival. The most fundamental relationship in Dakota culture, the hakata (brother/male cousin and sister/female cousin) was, for the most part, lost. This loss contributed greatly to the current state of gender, role, and familial confusion and changed the dynamics of family structure, roles, and process. Central to our discussion is that the loss of the tiyospaye system meant the loss of male roles and particularly the loss of the most honored male role models, the Akicita. With people scattered across miles of prairie on government-assigned lots (with the nearest neighbor on the next "section" of land), male roles in the camp circle were gone. The wars were over, relatives were dispersed across the plains, and every family, including his own, was needy. When the way of sustaining family life (hunting) was removed and the newly imposed way of life (agriculture) was not supported (through skills, seed, or implement), extreme and

pervasive poverty ensued. This set the stage for another factor contributing to the breakdown of male roles because one of their primary functions, to provide for those in need, was no longer possible.

Ensuing Poverty. Today almost all reservation communities continue to fall below federal poverty guidelines. Indicators of poverty among the Dakota people are evident in their region's (Aberdeen) national ranking for median income of \$12,310 per year compared to the U.S. (all races) median of \$30,056 (Indian Health Services, 1998-1999). The Aberdeen region has the lowest median income in the country and the highest percentage of American Indian people below the poverty level at 49.6%. Compared with U.S. poverty rates of 13.1%, Dakota families experience the highest levels of poverty in the nation, nearly 400% higher than the national norm. Add to family structure and family process challenges the difficulties associated with high unemployment, little economic industry, and extreme poverty, and the stage is set for a "welfare state" in which the government provides families with everything. Again, the role of Dakota fathers was inevitably lost. Men became a liability because presence in the home meant reductions in the amount of food and income a woman could get from welfare agencies. American Indian men were emasculated. Their predictable emotional and psychological challenges have never been fully addressed (Rock Krech, 2002). In fact, for some men in our focus groups, the only thing that came to mind when we mentioned the term "father" was a Catholic priest.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR AMERICAN INDIAN FATHERING

The following discussion articulates potential frameworks from which to understand the journey of American Indian men from a proactive perspective and the impact that journey can have on families. These frameworks provide important insights for promoting a consistent and empirically sound perspective, suggest a common language for such discussion, and respectfully complement cultural information relative to Dakota fathers.

Generative Fathering. Generative fathering emerged from Erikson's (1950) work that articulated various developmental challenges people face across the life course. His work evolved, in part, from time spent with Dakota tribes. He identified eight stages in which individuals must resolve a pressing psychosocial conflict or else struggle in future stages until the resulting imbalance from earlier stages is resolved. The seventh stage, generativity versus stagnation, has recently been the subject of interest in the fathering field (Hawkins & DolloHITE, 1997; Snarey, 1993). Individuals experiencing this crisis must resolve a pressing need to give back to future generations, usually through parenting and grandparenting, or else they will experience a sense of stagnation and failure in contributing to the growth of those within their circle of influence. The theoretical implication for fathers is that those who do the work of development throughout life (resolving developmental issues as they occur) will develop an enhanced capacity to care deeply for others beyond their own self (identity--fifth stage) and spouse (intimacy--sixth stage). These "others" are initially children and, in the traditional Dakota setting, his sister's children. That capacity increases over time to include all humanity (integrity--

eighth stage). This final concern is evident in the Dakota phrase "mitakuye oyasin," meaning we are all related (Ross, 1997).

Both men and children benefit from generative development. Men acquire an enhanced capacity to love and care for others, an experience that provides them with a sense of fulfillment in their personal life that cannot be accomplished in any other way. Men who resolve this inherent psychosocial need to be generative, to care more deeply for the next generation, will be able to successfully navigate the final stage of life, integrity versus despair, when they reflect on the meaningfulness of their life. If they were not successful at developing a generative ethic they will struggle to find meaning in life and experience despair. If they made a difference in the lives of others, they will experience a fulfilling sense of integrity and purpose in life. Thus, generative fathering enriches the lives of both children and fathers.

The conceptual ethic of generative fathering suggests that men have responsibilities, capabilities, and a calling to be fathers and to do fathering work that builds relationships through care and nurturance (Hawkins & DolloHITE, 1997). It moves beyond the role inadequacy and deficit perspectives that many researchers have used to study fathers in the past few decades. This approach centers on men's strengths rather than deficits as providers and caregivers. It focuses on fathers meeting the needs of children through relationship, ethical, development, recreational, spiritual, economic, and mentoring work. This focus arises from the child's interpersonal and emotional interdependence with his or her father and facilitates a healthy connection and attachment between them (Brotherson, DolloHITE, & Hawkins, 2004).

"Fatherhood" describes the cultural expectations of what fathers should do. "Fathering" describes what fathers actually do. "Fatherwork" describes the work fathers do with and for children. It emphasizes a father's moral obligation to meet the needs of that child. Generative fathering raises the bar for what men can and should do for their children and families (DolloHITE, Hawkins, & Brotherson, 1997) and suggests seven assumptions for changing the way we perceive and work with fathers. First, we need to assume that fathers care about their children. Second, fathering is a most important work to men. Their children matter greatly to them. Third, we need to assume that most men are capable and want to be great fathers (especially if the correct tools, training, and time to do so are available). The fourth assumption is challenge. Generative fathering demands and deserves the best that a man can give, even though many may face significant challenges in doing so. Fifth, there are great benefits to men who engage in fathering as it provides happiness and self-worth. Sixth, we need to assume that most men recognize their potential for growth as fathers and desire to improve. Seventh, most men realize that good fathering is hard work, that it requires dedication and effort, and many are ready and willing to engage in that work. This framework taps into what some refer to as the heart of a father (Canfield, 1996), that is, the deep-seated commitment to fathering and the desire to engage in fatherwork that many men experience as they become fathers. Most important, this framework provides healthy, functional assumptions about good fathering that may fit well with Dakota culture.

Life Course Perspective. In addition to the generative perspective, we propose that studies of American Indian men and fathers be pursued within a life course developmental framework. From this perspective, the developmental process is one of interrelated, self-perpetuating chains of events that involve individual, family, and environmental influences (Price, McKenry, & Murphy, 2000). Given the variety of factors impinging on American Indian fathers, it would be unwise to suggest a magic bullet solution or a simplistic universal explanation for their current situation. In addition to environmental influences, several life "careers" or paths occur within the same individual, either at the same time or at varying, overlapping times. For example, a man may be involved in an occupational path, a family path, a community service path, and a spiritual path at the same relative time in his life. Each of these paths has its own onset, history, timeline, and significant events along the course of its existence, events not unrelated to other co-occurring events. Insight into such a dynamic perspective is critical in telling the whole story of an individual's life.

Research that explores the impact of cultural change should include key influences and trajectories referenced from a life course perspective because it frames them within and across different contiguous and noncontiguous, simultaneous and discontinuous life events. It provides a comprehensive view of what drives decisions and choices and the interrelationship of those choices. This approach places historical context within individual lives, paths, and choices and fits well with efforts to understand and explain influences on the complex, dynamic Dakota family structure. Forward Looking. A concept related to the life course perspective and generative fathering is the notion of "forward looking," a central tenet of traditional Dakota culture. Forward-looking adults look out for the best interests of children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. Traditional elders are forward looking, always concerned about the child's future growth and improvement. This dynamic perspective across the generations has an impact on several trajectories within an individual's life (i.e., life course perspective) and is reflective of the generative framework. Elders looking out for the next generation earn the respect of children and youth who know they are at the center of that adult's life for that moment in time. Contrast that image to a recent quote (acquired by one of the authors during a discussion with elders on the topic) from Dakota youth who conveyed a lack of respect for their elders: "Why should we? What have they done for us?" These youth shared their disdain for elders who fail to convey a "forward looking" concern for their best interests. Traditional, forward-looking older Dakota women passed on culture while older males passed on critical life skills to children and grandchildren. Both passed on general cultural values through storytelling and oral tradition. If life skills were not passed on, youth did not learn them or learned them ineffectively from unprepared or undesirable sources. Dakota elders fulfilled their role both because it was a duty under kinship law and because it ensured culture, values, and life skills were properly passed on. This is the precise drive behind generativity and highlights its interactive impact on various trajectories within an individual's life.

These concepts provide an important framework from which to look at American Indian fathering in Dakota culture. It is in the context of a life course perspective and generative fathering (including the forward-looking perspective) that we explore the Akicita concept

and discuss a possible future for Dakota fathers and their children and families based on this concept.

AKICITA

"Akicita" (pronounced ah-kee-chee-dah, with emphasis on the second syllable) is a title of honor among the Dakota that refers to men who defend tribe and family with distinction in battle. This title was conferred by others who were themselves Akicita. They are part of an elite warrior society (like a special forces unit in the U.S. military). "True Akicita," according to Ella Deloria (1942), were "wawalas," extremely tame in camp circles but "ferocious as a beast" on the battlefield. They performed both roles and never confused the two. They were revered among their people and were important role models for the male children in their tribe. Historically, Akicita provided for and physically protected family, widows, orphans, aged, and those unable to care for themselves and brought honor and respect to family and tribe. Bill Iron Moccasin, a true Akicita and World War II veteran, said these things are desperately needed in our society. He said traditional men's societies offered a kind of sponsorship to boys that became a rite of passage.

Anyone who accepts the identity of a warrior, today we call them veterans, should accept these responsibilities along with the identity. The single largest undeveloped, underutilized resource we have across Indian country are our veterans. We should be willing to give of our time and sponsor youngsters. We can take them fishing, hunting, or camping. These were the roles of the men folk way back in the old culture. This would be a good place for the men and children to come together. We have a lot of single women who for all practical purposes could be considered widows because the male is not in the household and the children have no male father image. (Simonelli, 2003, p. 5)

However, like changes in roles and expectations of most American Indian fathers (e.g., diminished male roles and functions, Rock Krech, 2002), Akicita have experienced significant shifts in the purpose and definition of their "warrior society." At the more negative end of the continuum are vicious warriors who fight the U.S. government to get back land and kill white people for vengeance (referred to as "stormtroopers"). Less violent perspectives that have drifted from historical definitions include simply being enlisted in the military, a veteran of foreign wars, or better yet, a decorated veteran, with little emphasis on behavior off the battlefield. Some groups have self-identified members based on veteran status, with emphasis on serving a military tour of duty. Among some "war-time" veterans there is debate about whether "peace-time" veterans can "claim" the Akicita title. Unfortunately, low regard for current "Akicita" comes from visible public intoxication and alcoholism, a situation that has created significant challenges for those who promote sobriety and the good that native men can do (Coyhis, 2003; Simonelli, 2003).

Whether an evolving definition will include combat soldiers or not, true Akicita will bring honor and respect to their family and tribe even after the battle is over. They will be law-abiding, provide for and protect family, and look out for the less fortunate (widows, orphans, or otherwise incapacitated). An account of true Akicitas from more than a century and a half ago was found in South Dakota's Ziebach County Historical Society (1982). It states that Akicita were members of a secret soldier/warrior society that became the nucleus of their scouting and Indian Police programs. It explains how Akicita participated in "rescuing captives of another race during a period of unparalleled bloodshed" and how they were "honor-bound to observe such traditional Lakota proverbs as 'only the brave and fearless can be just.'" Akicita were not rewarded for acts of bravery, "but their memory is cherished by men of honor everywhere." Because of the Akicita, "American Indians were the only nonwhites who regularly served in military combat units on an equal footing with white soldiers from the Spanish American War through the first, grim months of the Korean War."

WARRIOR SOCIETIES

Military assignments represent a primary form of contemporary warrior service. Discussion about American Indian men should respectfully recognize their bravery and willingness to defend their country. They have a tradition of participating with distinction in U.S. military actions for more than 200 years, including the War of 1812, Civil War, Spanish-American War, and every conflict of the 20th century. More than 44,000 served in World War II (out of 350,000 American Indians nationwide), 42,000 (more than 90% volunteers) in Vietnam, and many others from Grenada and Panama to the Persian Gulf and Iraq. Compared to other ethnic groups, American Indians have the highest per capita record of service, a testament to their proud warrior tradition. Medal of honor recipients come from many tribes including Cherokee, Choctaw, Creek, and Winnebago (Department of Defense, 2002; Department of Navy, 2005). Obtaining an accurate number of current warrior societies is difficult. There were 60,000 American Indians on South Dakota reservations in 2001 (Cochran, 2002). A conservative 5% to 10% estimate of males over 20 years old may yield as many as 500 to 1,500 Akicita in South Dakota.

Modern Akicita. Akicita would have evolved even without European contact. That adaptation may have involved changes, for example, in provision of food and shelter for the less fortunate whose needs are now cared for by government or retirement systems. Today's Akicita might serve as mentors, role models for the fatherless, visitors for widows and orphans, and strong advocates of nonviolent, nonabusive parenting styles. Adaptation for fathers will also occur. Although siblings traditionally played the role of disciplinarian, adaptation for today's Dakota fathers may require greater involvement with discipline techniques and acceptable, consequential, and developmentally appropriate training and interaction with their children. Efforts to return to the original tiyospaye form and structure may not be possible. This aspect of acculturation is an important point because if Akicita and Dakota men in general are to experience successful adaptation, they need to know where they came from and how to identify acceptable standards for their current family situations. Otherwise, deviant adaptations will likely emerge.

Akicita Deviations. Gang membership is a problematic outcome for American Indian youth. Whitbeck, Hoyt, Chen, and Stubben (2002) found a third of adolescents from several Upper Midwest reservations were recruited by or had friends who were gang members while 6% of males and 4% of females (fifth through eighth grade) actually belonged to gangs. Factors associated with gang involvement clustered with the problem behavior syndrome including delinquency, substance abuse, age, living in a single-mother household, mother's history of antisocial behavior, number of transitions and losses in the past year, involvement in traditional activities, and perceived discrimination. These predictors are similar to other ethnic group gangs with the exception of higher gang membership among youth who participate in more traditional activities and experience discrimination. These youth may see gangs as a means of protection from discrimination and, for males, as something lost within their culture (i.e., warrior societies). While violence and substance use is contrary to Akicita values, gangs may be recruiting youth by tapping into the American Indian warrior image. Strong Dakota fathers could alter the life course and "friendship path" of their youth who are at risk for gang involvement by stepping in as role models and involved parents.

PROMOTING POSITIVE MALE ROLE MODELS

Obviously, youth benefit from positive role models, and American Indian children are no different. One respected elder told us about the importance of positive role models in his life. He said "there's always been somebody in my life that was a role model to me, that had the time. The basketball coach would come up and [encourage] me to work hard. Counselors and teachers would come up and pat me on the back and tell me to try a little harder.... I just look at it as I was real lucky at certain times in my life." He also spoke highly of the role modeling he received from his parents, who never drank alcohol. He attributed much of his success to those models.

A central theme of this paper is the need to support men in being involved, engaged, and responsible fathers in such a way that they will be positive role models for their children. Scholars have long recognized this need, suggesting three key areas for involvement that include a father's accessibility, engagement, and responsibility for his children (Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, & Levine, 1987). Social service agencies and other family-based support mechanisms would do well to develop and espouse supportive, proactive policies that encourage father involvement. Understanding cultural variations they may encounter, including those families who retain the "tiyospaye" perspective (see Figure 1) in which all members have important roles to play, will help those who work in such settings to be more effective and respectful. Such a perspective recognizes that several men may actually be father to a given child, providing many opportunities to identify positive male role models. Additionally, the family structure of many Dakota families includes men in a variety of circumstances. Efforts that support biological as well as step, adoptive, foster, and cohabiting father figures in providing a positive male role model are desperately needed and will be well worth the effort. Finally, we need to find ways to celebrate the positive contributions of men in their families in order to generate support and social momentum for responsible American Indian fathering and those who fill a father-figure role.

APPLIED AND EMPIRICAL WORK WITH AMERICAN INDIAN FATHERS

Work is needed that specifically targets American Indian men and identifies functional, culturally specific, adaptive fathering practices that include grandfathering and a child's tiyospaye fathers (father's brothers). Such research should explore successful life careers and trajectories that highlight true Akicita and those fathers who have chosen to live after the manner of Akicita standards, standards reflective of a generative theoretical framework. Research programs that welcome this challenge will contribute to the development of empirically based, culturally specific preventive intervention efforts that return responsible men and fathers to a place of honor within their families.

RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

Diverse Warrior Societies. While "Akicita" is specific to Dakota people, other tribes have similar terms of respect for honored warriors including Dog Soldiers (Cheyenne), Hethuska (Ponca, Omaha), and Kit Fox and Red Feather (Lakota) (Grimes, n.d.; Schultz, 2001). Additional research is needed to explore different types of current warrior societies across these tribes. This work should focus on identifying the positive aspects of those societies that could become part of a standard for American Indian fathering within that particular nation or band. While our work has focused on a specific nation (Dakota, Lakota, Nakota), we respectfully request that it not be imposed on other tribes as representative of American Indian men and families or as reflective of their current or past situations and traditions.

Theoretical Foundation. This work calls for culturally appropriate research with American Indian men using the life course perspective and generative fathering contextual frameworks. These theories provide a respectful and sensitive approach to American Indian practices and culture by recognizing the strength and resilience inherent within the culture and suggest the importance of working with and through those mechanisms that carry it forward (e.g., elders, parents, community leaders, etc.). These approaches also support accepted standards of research with American Indian people (Beals, Manson, & Mitchell, 2003; Whitbeck, Hoyt, & Stubben, 2002).

Essential Research Caveats. As researchers pursue the work of exploring American Indian fathering, a few key points that deal with family structure and language will be helpful. It is important that European American definitions of family and traditional family roles not be imposed on and framed into the way in which American Indian fathering and families are portrayed. For example, historical Dakota family life was based on a matriarchal structure. Imposing a prevention program for families that suggests the importance of a male head of house or a dual partnership may be offensive because the home was "an autocracy governed solely by the wife" (Godfrey, 1999, p. 1). This dynamic may or may not exist in a given Dakota family today, but prevention scientists need to make sure programs and research consider this type of family structure. The proposed theoretical frameworks can facilitate these structures.

Because of past experiences, many American Indians meet scientists and researchers with suspicion. Researchers who are too ambitious or curious may be met with a deliberate lie. Historically, this "acceptable lie" reflects an adaptation to encroaching outsiders. It is not only acceptable but expected in order to preserve and protect culture, values, and people (Godfrey, 1999). Efforts to study and support responsible American Indian fathering will require the assistance of cultural experts and insiders who can legitimize the work. If not, researchers, practitioners, and prevention scientists may be thwarted in their objectives. Thus, future research with other groups of American Indian fathers should explore whether generative and life course theories work or if different theoretical approaches are needed.

APPLIED RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to research recommendations, this paper provides several applied recommendations. In the spirit of "giving something back," these "talking points" may be useful for tribal leaders, teachers, law enforcement practitioners, social workers, psychologists, and other mental health professionals.

Tribal-Based Head Start. As a result of federally mandated efforts across the United States, Head Start and Early Head Start early childhood education programs have developed approaches to involve fathers in a variety of ways. Tribal-based Head Start and Early Head Start staff have expressed the importance of fathers and have had success including them in program activities. Tribal-based Head Start staff have found innovative ways to involve fathers, grandfathers, uncles, and other positive male role models in the lives of the children they serve through swimming, kickball, bowling parties, field trips, Dad and Uncle day, community readers program, and family night. Given the "traditional" family ideals that included a significant role for all extended family members, this approach reflects an important example of how Dakota service providers have adapted a program to fit culturally specific needs in a respectful way. Additionally, as many staff in these settings tend to be female, it is critical that women (mothers, grandmothers, staff, etc.) are included in the process of supporting male involvement. Women have tremendous power in transmitting culture and need to be a part of the discourse in finding culturally appropriate methods of change.

Re-enthroned Akicita. One male role model (an Akicita) told us that, if he could rank all the activities and efforts of intervention and prevention programs on a scale of one to 10, with 10 being the most important, he would give the need for promoting positive male role models a 10. In addition to promoting traditional male roles within the tivospaye, we need to re-enthroned the Akicita as a key figure in Dakota tribes. This is challenging, however, given the cultural taboo against self-aggrandizement. Bill Iron Mocassin often said "I hope my ancestors will forgive me for doing this" when he discussed things he did as an Akicita. He saw the value of promoting Akicita principles and sought respectful ways around that taboo in an effort to teach how good men, acting on those principles, could change family life for the better, in the spirit of supporting that teaching, efforts are needed that promote true Akicita principles with Dakota fathers.

What we are suggesting is that Dakota men who choose to adopt an Akicita standard in the context of fathering are actually choosing to fight the good fight of fatherhood--a fight worthy of all noble fathers. In the past there were good Dakota fathers, whether Akicita or not. Adaptation and a new definition of fatherhood among Dakota men are now required. Therefore, we suggest the perpetuation of a common Akicita vision for today's Dakota fathers. This vision may be used, for example, as a framework for practitioners and judges working with domestic violence groups. The framework could be promoted throughout tribal-based Head Start agencies both as part of their core documents and curriculum and through interactions and expectations between parents and teachers. Other places in which this vision could spread include tribal-based school systems, Indian Health Services, programs for individuals with disabilities, state social service programs, tribal council policies, and other programs under the direction of the tribal council. As leaders adopt a common vision for setting standards and providing recognition for positive community role models, such a vision will have greater impact in changing negative trends to more positive perspectives and behaviors for future generations.

Adaptation Is Key. Promoting acceptable adaptations to traditional family roles is critical given the tremendous change in American Indian family structure. Does the extended family of the father of a child who is not married but cohabiting carry the same obligation? What if the father and mother don't live together? What kind of obligations exist if the father is divorced? What responsibilities will the father's extended family be willing to accept for his stepchildren? Tribes will need to work together to answer these questions and develop functional cultural adaptations. This paper is not a plea to return to the past. It does, however, claim that understanding historical frameworks is important to retaining positive cultural components while making adjustments for current conditions. D.J. Eagle Bear Vanas (2003), a veteran Sun Dancer and former captain in the U.S. Air Force, teaches in his book *The Tiny Warrior* about looking inward for strength and about learning to use one's warrior spirit. He articulates the tradition that warriors become assets to their village but demonstrates adaptation by suggesting that the "village" can be anyone in their circle of influence (e.g., family, peers, community, company). Although he is Odawa and not Dakota, he is teaching Akicita principles about developing talents and abilities to better serve and defend others.

Cross-Nation Implications. Finally, as mentioned earlier, most American Indian cultures have their version of Akicita and have experienced similar historical loss and breakdown of family structure. We welcome their review of these recommendations and invite them to consider adapting any or all of them into their culture. However, we make no assumption that what works for the Dakota will also work for the next nation or band. We only offer this paper as a potential model for those who may be interested in adapting it in a manner specific to their tribal heritage, language, and culture.

CONCLUSION

This paper has provided important applied recommendations for those who want to begin working with and supporting American Indian fathers now through places like the local

Tribal Head Start's male involvement program and by promoting Akicita-like behaviors among fathers. Long-term preventive intervention work will benefit from the theoretical frameworks proposed herein. Much work remains to be done. This is an area of family life that has been ignored long enough. Dakota families and fathers face tremendous challenges, many of which stem from the Dawes Act, boarding schools, loss of culture, and ensuing poverty. Current parental adaptations have yielded permissive, "anything-goes" environments with little structure and guidance. Struggles to adapt have led to other family problems including alcoholism, abuse, and neglect (Coyhis, 2003; Simonelli, 2003).

This work is not meant to be an authoritative prescription of what Dakota men should do or of how to solve their problems. It is designed to start the dialogue and provide a historical context from which professionals working with Dakota men and their families can move forward in a respectful and culturally adaptive manner. Bringing balance to Dakota children of this generation will require efforts that respect cultural traditions and encourage forward-looking perspectives from fathers and grandfathers.

We recommend integrating the concepts of Akicita into the lives of Dakota men, of elevating it to a prominent status in their communities, and of helping fathers realize those standards are attainable. We recommend that Dakota tribes and organizations find ways to promote a message that raises the bar for Dakota fatherhood, a bar that illustrates what men can and should do for their children and families (Dollahite, Hawkins, & Brotherson, 1997). Women, children, and men will be better off when they reach for that bar. An important step for tribal councils, elders, and community members will be to establish what the bar is (both by discussion and example) and develop a cohesive vision of men reaching for that bar on a regular basis.

Many avenues of hope and potential success in resolving this plight exist within the cultural tradition (Rock Krech, 2002). A few traditional movements exist that work directly with men and promote those who exhibit honorable, Akicita-like behaviors (see the Native American Fathers and Families Association online). Work that promotes both Akicita and Dakota fathers may ultimately address many youth problem behaviors, including gang involvement, by providing youth a strong male with whom to identify and whom they will observe dealing with life's issues from a positive, culturally appropriate, traditionally based warrior approach. One of the most important things we can do to strengthen the American Indian family is to support men in their role as adapting, responsible fathers.

LIMITATIONS

The primary limitation of this paper is that it is theoretical in nature and based on limited qualitative data. The purpose has been to present an overview of issues related to Dakota men and families in a theoretical manner and to provide initial thought and respectful discussion about promoting functional, adaptive Dakota fatherhood. The suggested mechanism for this endeavor is the true Akicita warrior perspective with a life course and generative theoretical approach to provide a framework from which to develop the

discourse. Additional qualitative and ethnographic research is needed to empirically validate this work.

TRADITIONAL STORYTELLING

In the Dakota tradition, we conclude with a true story about a Dakota father that reflects the generative desire most fathers have in their hearts (Erikson, 1950; Hawkins & Dollahite, 1997) and how that desire reflects an Akicita standard. Mike's daughter, Nikki, was brought to him when she was two years old. She was a "failure to thrive" baby with attachment disorder, potential mental retardation, neglect, and starvation. Her mother abused drugs while Nikki was in the womb and after she was born. Mike was grateful that he was able to take full custody of her and begin providing her with the unconditional love she needed to survive. In true Akicita fashion, Mike fought to defend his baby's physical and mental life. With help from his family, grandparents, and other "tiyospaye fathers" to Nikki, he accomplished the impossible. Today, Nikki is in the eighth grade, on the honor roll, and has an active and healthy social life. Mike's unconditional paternal love both saved his baby's life and improved the total quality of life that she would experience.

Mike's efforts with his daughter reflect as much of the spirit of Akicita as anyone who served as a battlefield Akicita. He saved his daughter's life. He protected her and gave her the love and attention she needed to become a thriving member of her family, school, and society. He raised the bar for Dakota fathering in his own life and promoted an Akicita standard of fatherhood. Stories of involved Dakota fathers who adopt a true Akicita standard need to be told so that they become the standard that saves the next generation of Dakota children. The point is that Dakota men do not have to be extraordinary war heroes to make a difference. They can become men worthy of respect and honor as they adapt paternal roles for the good of their tiyospaye (children, family, and posterity) and tribal communities (Deloria, 1998).

This paper is dedicated to the memory of Bill Iron Moccasin, a true Akicita and World War II veteran. Bill lived from January 13, 1918, until February 6, 2004. He was a family man with 37 years of sobriety and was a great role model for Dakota youth. Bill participated on many panels at the Dakota Fatherhood summits and the White Bison Wellbriety conferences. White Bison founder, Don Coyhis, called him the father of the Wellbriety movement. He worked as a substance abuse counselor, and his "wellbriety story" is published in the Red Road to Wellbriety (the Indian Big Book). He was an advocate for reviving Lakota language through teaching at the Sisseton-Wahpeton Tribal College and Head Start/Early Head Start centers in Agency Village, South Dakota.

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