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American Indians and Alaska Natives in Psychology

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In the 1920s and 1930s a handful of social scientists and historians wrote about the status and future of America's indigenous population as though they were vanishing and becoming extinct. While many scholars criticized the harsh prognosis in fact America's indigenous population has not vanished as the population has increased to over 2.5 million in 2000 representing some 500 or more federally recognized tribes and villages; further demographic analysis by the US Census Bureau suggests that the number is closer to four million. Nonetheless with the rapid growth of the Indian and Native population psychology all but ignored the ethnocultural group on the grounds that the field of inquiry involves a number of academic disciplines other than psychology. Active and concerted interest in conducting psychological research with and among American Indians began in the mid 1960s. Up to that point in time Indians and Natives were woefully underrepresented in faculty ranks, federally sponsored research review programs and committees, graduate programs, and the infrastructure of professional associations and societies. Furthermore, curriculum and research themes in psychology were nearly devoid of content dealing with Indian and Native topics. To fill the gaps and make the concerns and problems of American Indians known small interest groups emerged and formed from the heated debates and turbulent controversy of the late 1960s and 1970s.

Yet, notwithstanding, the early to middle 20th century ignorance and resistance to including Indian and Native concerns and interests in psychology, significant changes for America's indigenous ethnocultural group did occur in a dramatic manner. Key historical events are presented in this article together with the voices of Indian elder psychologists who lived through and were an integral part of the changes that occurred since the 1960s. Especially important are the success of academic programs set in place to accommodate the various lifeways and thoughtways of Indian and Natives. What comes through the brief historical account is the undeniable fact that throughout the history of federal regulation and the many failures of government policy Indian and Natives survive through deep commitments to identity, traditions, customs, language, and now control over their destiny through self-determination.

The history of American Indian and Alaska Native psychology is a brief one in comparison to the rich histories of other US ethnic groups. Dating back to the late-1960s, there were probably ten or so Indians and Natives with doctoral degrees in psychology; since then that number has increased to about 350. Additionally, the field is a broad area of social and behavioral science exploration and scholarship that includes the indigenous peoples of the Americas and their descendants. The field does not imply that there is a unique American Indian and Alaska Native collective psychological style or modal personality profile. Owing to the large number of tribal affiliations and native village lifeways and thoughtways there is no common psychological character or set of personality characteristics that can be uniformly applied to all of those who identify themselves as being an American Indian or an Alaska Native. Looked at in its broadest perspective, the field represents an area of scholarly interest that attracts students and scholars from various disciplines including anthropology, psychiatry, social work, and sociology as well as psychology.

Demographic Characteristics of American Indians and Alaska Natives in Psychology

Not all Indians and Natives with graduate degrees in psychology affiliate with professional associations however those who do provide us with useful information concerning their interests and background. The APA maintains detailed records on the characteristics of their members especially those who consent to providing information concerning their ethnic or racial affiliation. Data from their files provides us with an approximation of the number of Indians and Natives who affiliate with the APA through their membership status (American Psychological Association, 2004).

According to the APA's Office of Demographic, Employment, and Education Research, in 1989, 91 members of Associate, Member, and Fellow status indicated they were of American Indian heritage. Six years later in 1995 the number who indicated they were of American Indian background jumped to 399 which represents a staggering 338 percent increase in that short period of time. In 2004, nine years later, the number dropped to 212 or a decrease of 88 percent over 1995; the 2004 number represents a 132 percent increase over the 1989 figure which also is bewildering (American Psychological Association, 2004).

The variable fluctuation in the membership numbers raises interesting questions as the rising numbers belie the actual U.S. population increases of Indians and Natives over the last decade. From 1970 to 1980, for example, the total American Indian and Alaska Native U.S. population increased by 72 percent, from 1980 to 1990 showed an increase of 38 percent. From 1990 to 2000 there was a 26 percent increase so the APA's variable Indian membership fluctuations must be attributed to some other effect or phenomena that represents more accurate accounts (Snipp, 1989).

The number of Indians and Natives also seem to vary with the educational data files maintained by the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) and the National Science Foundation (NSF). From 1976-1977 to 1993-1994 the DOE reports that 127 psychology doctoral degrees were awarded to American Indians and Alaska Natives (Pavel, Skinner, Calahan, Tippeconnic, & Stein, 1998). Furthermore, the NSF reports that 203 doctoral degrees in psychology were awarded to Indians and Natives between 1994 and 2003 (National Science Foundation, 2003). Thus, the pooled DOE and NSF data indicate that 330 doctoral degrees in psychology were awarded to Indians and Natives from 1976-1977 to 2003. Using the combined data set as a reference then the APA's 2004 membership count of 212 is not unreasonable especially since one must realize that not all who have doctoral degrees in psychology are members in APA. Nonetheless, the inconsistency between the three data sets begs several questions. No one will know for certain what the actual numbers are however there are some plausible explanations that may account for the patterns.

American Psychological Association Ethnic Demographic Patterns

In 2000, the APA began asking Indian and Native members to indicate their tribal affiliation. Hence, in 2001, 244 members listed 43 different tribes ranging from a high of 39 members indicating a Cherokee tribal affiliation to numerous instances where a single tribe such as Pima, Miami, Quapaw, Kickapoo, Ojibwa, etc. were listed; 14 members indicated that they affiliated with at least one of the three other "Five Civilized Tribes of Oklahoma" (Chickasaw, Creek, Choctaw) (American Psychological Association, 2004).

In 2004, the average age of APA's Indian members was 54 (SD = 10.8); 19 were 70 or older. In fact, slightly over 80 percent were over the age of 44, which indicates that the Indian membership is an older population. About 47 percent of the members reside in the West South

Central, Pacific, and Mountain states and 13 percent reside in the New England and Middle Atlantic geocultural regions. Close to 90 percent (194) of the members hold the doctoral degree; 36 percent indicated that it had been 25 or more years since they received their doctoral degree. Twenty-four percent (49) indicated they were in independent practice and 28 percent (59) worked in academic settings. About 84 percent (176) were Members, 10 percent (20) were Fellows, and about 6 percent (11) were Associate members. APA division affiliation varied where the majority indicated they belonged to Division 12 (Clinical Psychology) and Division 45 (the Society for Psychological of Ethnic Minority Issues). Other division affiliations included: Psychotherapy, Psychologists in Public Service, Counseling Psychology, Personality and Social, SPSSI, Psychologists in Independent Practice, and the Psychology of Women. Division affiliations indicate that the 2004 annual Indian and Native membership record showed that members held membership in more than one division; 39 percent (62) indicated they belonged to two or more divisions (American Psychological Association, 2004).

History of the Society of Indian Psychologists

The Society of Indian Psychologists (SIP) has its roots in the Network of Indian Psychologists (NIP), a group started by Carolyn Attneave in the early 1970s. Carolyn and Morton Beiser received a grant to travel to a small set of Indian communities to describe mental health services. Carolyn enjoyed meeting the various mental health providers, most of whom held Masters of Social Work degrees. She kept track of phone numbers and mailing lists. At one point she decided to formalize her "network and put the 'psychologist' label on it" (LaFromboise & Fleming, 1990).

About the same time, in the winter of 1971, Joseph E. Trimble, then at Oklahoma City University, created an American Indian Interest Group through cooperation and support from the

Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI), Division 9 of the APA. Eventually, Trimble and Attneave merged efforts to form the beginnings of SIP. "The group met catch as catch can at Indian Health Service (IHS) sponsored meetings and occasionally at APA's annual convention. The first informal meeting of Indian and Native involved in various fields of psychology was convened in Boston, MA in 1972 at the annual meeting of the Eastern Psychological Association; close to 30 people were in attendance for the two-hour session chaired by Carolyn Attneave. When the time came to formalize with by-laws, elected officers, etc., a motion to change the name to Society of Indian Psychologists was passed. According to Carolyn, NIP was believed to call to mind alcohol users, a stereotype that needed not to be supported" (Candace Fleming, personal communication, February 23, 2005).

Another group that included SIP members, came together at Utah State University (USU) in Logan, UT, in 1987, sponsored and initiated by a USU faculty member, Damian Vraniak (McShane), for the First Annual Convention of American Indian Psychologists and Graduate Students, to discuss psychological issues of Indian and Native people. Eventually, SIP held [its](#) annual business meeting and election of officers during this annual convention, while continuing to meet annually at the APA convention. SIP Presidents have been Carolyn Barcus, Sandra Bennett; [Dolores Subia BigFoot](#), Arthur Blue, John Chaney, Mary Clearing-Sky, Mark Daniels, Paul Dauphanais, Pamela Deters, Candace Fleming, [Daniel Foster](#), Rebecca Foster, [Jacqueline S. Gray](#) (current), Robin LaDue, Teresa D. LaFromboise, J. Doug McDonald, and John Peregoy. Technology was to play an important role in connecting SIP. In 1998, then president Mary Clearing-Sky, initiated a list-serve connecting the membership, and in the following year, Secretary B.J. Boyd added the Society's Web site sponsored by Oklahoma State University. As a result, SIP members are able to consult with, inform each other, and promote an almost instant

group voice on matters of importance to its communities, its profession and to the nurturing of graduate students and new psychologists. SIP has been able to facilitate research, assist students with internship or job searches and professional interests, connect institutions, foundations, agencies and individuals wanting to connect with the Indian and Native world, find speakers or authors, post positions of interest to the group, and post communications networks and resource pages during times of crisis. Perhaps most important, SIP members have been able to support each other quickly as peers and elders, somewhat ameliorating the often "lone Indian" environments Indian and Native students and professionals often occupy.

Indians into Psychology (INDPSYDE) and Indian and Native Graduate Programs

Over the years SIP activities contributed to increases in the number of Indians who chose psychology as a career; a good deal of the influence occurred through the active mentoring that many SIP members provided for Indian students interested in the profession. The "Indians Into Psychology Doctoral Education" (INPSYDE) and related programs significantly contributed to the growth in the numbers of Indian and Native psychologists

The Indians into Psychology Doctoral Education program was initiated by Arthur L. McDonald in the mid-1980s. Working with a team of public policy specialists from the American Psychological Association and congressional aids, McDonald was able to influence the support of the United States Senate to include a provision for INDPSYDE in the 1992 Indian Health Care Improvement Act. A permanent INDPSYDE program exists at the University of North Dakota. Other programs currently exist at Oklahoma State University and the University of Montana. Additionally, The *Alaska Natives into Psychology* (ANPsych) is specifically tailored to meet the cultural educational of Alaska Natives and is jointly sponsored by the University of Alaska in Anchorage and Fairbanks. In the late 1980s through the initial efforts of

Damian Vraniack (McShane) the *Indian Support Project* was established at Utah State University where numerous Indian students have received undergraduate and graduate degrees in psychology; Carolyn Barcus has been the director of the program for about 20 years and Gayle Morse has assumed co-directorship responsibilities since 2009. Similarly, Candace Fleming at the National Center for American Indian and Alaska Native Mental Health Research Center in Denver, CO provided post-doctoral training for psychologists interested in conducting research with Indian and Native communities.

American Psychological Association Governance Participation

Many Indian and Native psychologists have had a strong influence in the governance activities of the APA as well as in regional and state psychological associations. Over the years, a small number have served on several APA committees, task forces, and boards. In 1985, for example, Logan Wright was elected to the Presidency of APA thus becoming the first psychologist of American Indian background to hold that distinguished office. His Presidential address at the 1986 APA convention was titled, *The Type A Behavior Pattern and Coronary Artery Disease: Quest for the Active Ingredients and the Elusive Mechanism* (Wright, 1988). Within APA's Division 45, the Society for the Psychological Study of Ethnic Minority Issues, Indians and Natives served terms as President; they include Charles J. Pine, Teresa D. LaFromboise, Joseph E. Trimble, Stephen E. James, Elizabeth Boyd, and J. Douglas McDonald; Arthur W. Blue also was one of the founding members of Division 45 as were Charles J. Pine, Teresa D. LaFromboise, Diane J. Willis, and Joseph E. Trimble. Additionally, several Indian and Native psychologists have served on Division 45's Executive Committee and they include Candace M. Fleming, Pamela Jumper Thurman, Carolyn Barcus, J. Douglas McDonald, and Joseph J. Horvat.

Psychologists of American Indian and Alaska Native background also have held distinguished positions in other professional associations. Diane Willis was the 2005-2006 President for the American Orthopsychiatric Association. In 1975-76, Diane was the first editor of the *Journal of Pediatric Psychology* (JPP). The first issues focused on special topics that had not received much press, but were nevertheless very important. Child abuse and neglect was the focus of one entire journal issue (Willis, 1976a), and was published before the public and professionals took much interest in the topic. In 1973 Marigold Linton and others launched the Society for the Advancement of Chicanos and Native Americans in Science (SACNAS), promoting opportunities for Chicano/Latino, Indian and other under-represented students in graduate science education. She subsequently served as the SACNAS President. In 1993 and in 1995 SACNAS honored her with their Service Award and their Founders Medal.