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## Article 7

Article 2 (for Quiz 2)

# Chickasaw Native American Adolescent Mothers: Implications for Early Intervention Practices

ANNE McDONALD CULP  
Oklahoma State University

VIRGINIA MCCARTHICK  
Oklahoma State University

ABSTRACT. Twenty-four adolescent mothers completed a cultural identity questionnaire and met with an observer in their homes to complete the HOME Scale. Analyses utilizing Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients found a significant relationship between high identity with the Native American culture and lower scores on verbal responsiveness and on provision of material goods. These findings were expected given the Chickasaw values of quietness, reservation, and few worldly possessions. This study illustrates why cultural sensitivity is important for training and in practice when providing community services, such as early intervention.

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Adolescent parenting practices have been found to differ when compared to older mothers, especially in the area of responsiveness and verbal interactions (Chase-Lansdale, Brooks-Gunn, & Palkoff, 1991; Culp, Osofsky, & O'Brien, 1996), and stimulation in the home environment (see Luster & Mittelstaedt, 1993, for a review). In this regard, early interventions in home visitation have targeted first-time adolescent parents and have found effective results in better maternal perception of empathic understanding toward children and increased understanding of adult roles in parenting (Culp, Culp, Blankemeyer, & Passmark, in press). Additionally, children of adolescent mothers benefit from early intervention by nurses in the areas of reduced rate of child maltreatment, fewer accidents requiring emergency care, and better health throughout childhood (Olds & Kitzman, 1993). These findings have led many communities to implement early intervention programs for adolescent mothers. However, there is little research on cultural differences that may affect the appropriateness and effectiveness of the intervention programs. Early intervention practices could continue to be refined by assessing the cultural identity of participants and consequently engage in intervention practices within cultural contexts.

Many Native American values and beliefs define appropriate behavior by quietness, reserve, noninterference, and cooperation; and silence is a customary prac-

tice of the American Indian (Ho, 1984). The Native American relies upon indirect communication: eye contact is avoided as a means of showing respect (Burgess, 1978; Chisholm, 1983) and jumping into a conversation is considered offensive (Ho, 1984; Ryan, 1992). The Native American culture values controlling emotions. The traditional demeanor is one of poise and self-containment.

Although children are taught to observe rather than to react, they are ever present at most social gatherings, and time spent with children is more important than buying material goods for them (Burgess, 1978). Native American parents teach their children by participation and observation rather than by actual instruction and by buying materialistic goods. Verbalization of needs, wants, feelings, and intentions is not encouraged because the needs of the group are more important than one's own needs (Ho, 1984).

Very little research specific to the Chickasaw tribe is available. However, the cultural characteristics of the Chickasaw individual has been documented: (a) the individual uses nonverbal communication through body language, sign language, facial expression, silence, and respects personal space; (b) time is now and ever flowing, there is no need to hurry; (c) respect for elders and other adults (teachers) is shown not by looking into their eyes, but rather, by glancing away; and (d) lack of belief in ownership—resources are to be shared among each other, not kept from those in need; a low emphasis on personal material wealth (Chickasaw Tribal Cultural Center, 1994; Milligan, 1976).

A study of Navajo mother-infant interaction measured consistent differences in comparisons with Anglo American mothers. It was found that during the first year of life, Navajo infants vocalized less than Anglo American infants, interaction with the mother was shorter and mothers talked to and touched their infants less than Anglo mothers (Chisholm, 1983). The diverse language background and de-emphasis of verbal interaction practiced by Native Americans may hamper the development of language skills needed to succeed in the majority culture's public educational system (Ho, 1984). Early studies on achievement (reviewed in Burgess, 1978) show that the educational potential of Native American children and non-Native American chil-

75      ... is equal at the school entrance level. Around the  
 80      ... th grade, Native American children fall behind  
 non-Native American children on achievement scores.  
 Education researchers often attribute this phenomenon  
 to teaching style which encourages verbal assertiveness  
 (Burgess, 1978). This lag in achievement may be partially  
 85      ... due to speech production. Knowing a tribal language  
 and learning English as a second language may cause  
 Native American children to use shorter sentences,  
 omit adjectives, and use the English verb incor-  
 90      ... rectly (Burgess, 1978).

85      Ivey (1969) sampled 185 Cherokee, Choctaw,  
 Creek, and Seminole children in an Indian residential  
 elementary school to determine the influence of lan-  
 90      ... guage upon reading and speech development. This  
 study found a relationship between speech competency  
 and reading ability. The results showed that the stu-  
 95      ... dents were deficient in reading, and the major contrib-  
 uting factor was defective speech. Guilmet (1977)  
 found that Navajo children speak half as often as white  
 children in the classroom. This lack of speech in the  
 100      ... classroom may be related to poor academic achieve-  
 ment. Teachers reveal a bias toward children with lim-  
 ited communication abilities (Rice, Hadley, & Alexan-  
 105      ... der, 1993). When asked to assess a child's attributes  
 (intelligence, social maturity) by listening to an audio  
 110      ... tape, they judge the children with limited communi-  
 cation abilities to be less capable than children without  
 communication abilities, when, in fact, they are not.

105      In summary, adolescent mothers are at risk for poor  
 parenting practices, and many communities are pro-  
 110      ... viding early home visitation intervention services to  
 them. The expectation is that children of parents en-  
 rolled in intervention programs will experience healthy  
 development: physically, cognitively, socially, and  
 115      ... linguistically. However, adolescent mothers who iden-  
 tify with the Native American culture are likely to be a  
 challenge for intervention professionals because they  
 may be quiet, avoid eye contact, and communicate in  
 an indirect way. This kind of communication may af-  
 120      ... fect how the home visitor approaches the young  
 mother. In addition, the mother's quietness may influ-  
 125      ... ence her child's language acquisition and production,  
 which, in turn, may influence school achievement.

120      This study investigated the relationship between the  
 degree of cultural identity and the conditions of the  
 home environment of adolescent mothers. The vari-  
 125      ... ables of the home environment were verbal respon-  
 siveness and provision of materials to children. We  
 hypothesized that high identity with the Native Ameri-  
 can culture will relate to less maternal verbal respon-  
 sivity and to low provision of manufactured learning  
 materials in the home.

### Method

#### Participants

The sample consisted of 24 adolescent mothers of  
 which 16 were Native American, seven White, and one

130 African American and White. Of the Native American  
 mothers, 13 of the mothers were Chickasaw and 3 had  
 close tribal affiliations.

135 All the mothers were less than 19 years of age at  
 the time of their first child's birth. Eighty percent of the  
 sample had annual incomes of less than \$18,000; 53%  
 did not have high school degrees; 55% were not mar-  
 140      ... ried. The children were less than 3 years of age with  
 80% less than 1 year old; 58% of the children had an  
 older sibling.

#### Procedures

140 Mothers were recruited through parenting programs  
 in rural southwestern United States. A staff member  
 who worked with the families described the study to  
 the mothers and received consent for the researcher to  
 meet them for a 90-minute visit at a time convenient to  
 the mother and when the child was awake.

#### Measures

145 In addition to a basic demographic information  
 form, two assessment instruments were used: The  
 Home Observation for Measurement of the Environ-  
 150      ... ment (HOME; Caldwell & Bradley, 1984) and the Or-  
 thogonal Model of Cultural Assessment (Oetting &  
 Beauvias, 1991) were used.

155 The HOME Scale is an observation/interview  
 measure of the quality of the social, emotional, and  
 cognitive support available to the child in the home.  
 The 45-item measure was developed for infants aged  
 160      ... 0-3 years with each item scored in binary (yes-no)  
 fashion. The 45 items are divided into six subscales:  
 two of which were used in the study: (1) Emotional and  
 Verbal Responsivity of the Mother, and (4) Provision  
 of Play Materials. Reliability and validity of the  
 165      ... HOME Scale have been well documented. The scale is  
 respected as a standard measure in the field of early  
 environmental research with high predictive validity  
 with studies predicting school-age social and cognitive  
 development (Bradley & Caldwell, 1976a, 1976b;  
 170      ... 1984; Bradley, Caldwell, & Rock, 1988). While ad-  
 ministering the scale, the researcher attempted to put  
 the parent at ease and care was taken not to ask ques-  
 tions in a threatening or judgmental manner.

170 The Orthogonal Model of Cultural Assessment  
 measures the degree to which an individual perceives  
 his or her link with a particular culture. The measure  
 allows for high or low identification with a particular  
 culture, or any combination of bicultural identification.  
 175      ... Six questions each require an answer for each culture  
 that is numeric and ranges from 1 (a lot) to 4 (none at  
 all). The questions cover information on special activi-  
 ties that take place every year at particular times (such  
 as holiday parties, special meals, religious activities,  
 trips, or visits); cultural rules followed in everyday  
 180      ... family life and with the self; and if family success as  
 well as their own future success exists in the culture.  
 For the purpose of this study, only those scores relating  
 to the Native American culture were used to calculate

the single Native American culture score. A score close to 1 is very high identity; a score close to 4 is very low identity. Reliability and validity studies have been carried out by Oetting and Beauvias (1991), and they report high concurrent validity among a sample of Native American youth and another cultural identity measure.

### Results

Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were used to analyze for relationships between cultural identity and the scores on verbal responsivity and provision of play materials. The Emotional and Verbal Responsivity Score covered 11 items, 7 of which were specific to conversation and verbalizations, 5 of which reflected the child receiving positive attention while the visitor was there. The possible range of scores was 0 to 11. The data in the study ranged from 2 to 10. Recall that a low score on the culture measure signifies high identity and a low HOME scale signifies low responsivity and provision. The results show a significant positive correlation (both scores are low). High Native American cultural identity relates to low verbal responsivity  $r = .60, p = .001$ .

The Provision of Play Materials score had 9 items which related to available toys: toys for muscle activity, for music, for simple eye-hand coordination, complex eye hand coordination, cuddly or role-playing toys. This scale had a potential range of 0 to 9 points. The data in this study ranged from 1 to 9. The results show a significant positive correlation between Native American cultural identity and learning materials,  $r = .47; p = .01$ .

### Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between Native American cultural identity and the home environment of Native American adolescent parents. The results of this study show significant support for the hypothesis which related high Native American cultural identity with low verbal responsivity and the provision of learning materials. Adolescent mothers who identified with the Native American culture had homes in which verbal initiations, responsivity, and spontaneous conversation with their children were low and the provision of manufactured learning materials was low. Since the research literature had documented that Native American children do not perform as well in school, it could be suggested that the study variables may have an important influence. Because the Chickasaw Native American mothers respect the values of their culture, it is of no surprise that scores on verbal responsivity and material possessions were low. This is a reflection of their cultural identity.

These data should be given serious consideration by community providers of intervention programs for Native American adolescent mothers. As indicated by Ho (1984), Guilmet (1977), Burgess (1978), and Ivey (1969), there is a concern for Native American children's language skills and academic success in school

and how teachers perceive low-level language users. This concern puts great emphasis on the need to intervene into the children's lives early. However, the intervention should be placed in a cultural context in which cultural identity is respected. Native American parents are concerned about school achievement. The parents worry about how much to compromise their cultural values and teachings (Burgess, 1978; Ryan, 1992). To facilitate the children's success in the majority culture public education system, community agency providers, educators, and parents need to share and discuss the information gleaned from Native American research studies and early intervention studies in which the specific parent-child activities are described that positively influence school achievement. Once this information is laid out in a clear way, the community service providers should listen and reflect what the Native American parents understand the studies to say. Parents should be given the time to explain how the information fits into their belief systems and if they might have methods that could be considered for implementation. The ideas generated by the parents could be used as a guide in developing creative ways to implement an early intervention program for the community Native American families. Service providers that are culturally sensitive will help ensure the program's success.

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