


Historical trauma and its effects  
on a Ni mii puu family;  
finding story  
healing wounds

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Tow-le-kit-we-son-my  
Ni mii puu-Nez Perce



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### Historical Unresolved Grief

- ...cumulative, in that there is a collective compounding and psychic wounding over time, both over a life span and across generations.

• Braveheart Jordan (1995)



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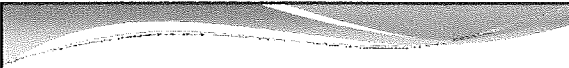
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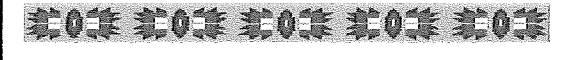
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### Symptoms

Mourning resolution is incomplete and the grief can be manifested as:

- Prolonged signs of acute grief
- Depression
- Substance abuse
- Somatization



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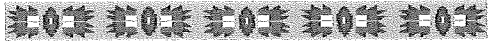
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## Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

According to the DSM-V (APA, 2013), PTSD refers to a disorder that may occur when a person has been exposed to a traumatic event.



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PTSD can stem from an event that is:

- Actual
- Witnessed
- Confronted



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The Event(s) must involve:

- Actual Death or Serious Injury
- Threatened Death or Serious Injury



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## Person's Response can involve

- Intense Fear
- Feeling of helplessness
- Horror



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## Trauma Response

The constellation of features in reaction to a traumatic event or series of events has been called the trauma response and encompasses symptomatology such as war neurosis, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and psychic trauma (van der Kolk, 1987; Krystal, 1984)



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## Intergenerational Transmission of Grief and Trauma:

The transfer of features or symptoms across generations, from the survivors to their descendants, is delineated as intergenerational transmission. This nomenclature appears principally in the trauma and Jewish Holocaust literature.



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## Trauma woven into DNA

- Science of epigenetics, literally "above the gene" proposes we pass more than DNA in our genes
- Our genes can carry memories of trauma experienced by our ancestors can influence how we react to trauma and stress

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LeManuel Bitsoi, Navajo, PhD  
Research Associate in Genetics at Harvard University

- According to Bitsoi, epigenetics is beginning to uncover scientific proof that intergenerational trauma is real.
- Historical trauma can be seen as contributing in the development of illnesses such as:
  - PTSD
  - Depression
  - Type 2 Diabetes

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## Culture

Set of beliefs, attitudes, values, and standards of behavior that are passed from one generation to the next.

Abney (in Fontes 2005)

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## Acculturation

...the practice whereby ethnic minority people come in contact with different environmental influences that have the *potential* of influencing different practice.

Terao, et al (2001)

*Potential: not everyone goes through this process to the same extent*

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## Family and Culture

- ...a carrier of conscious and unconscious values, myths, fantasies, and beliefs that may not be shared by the larger community or culture...

Danieli (1998)

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## Conspiracy of Silence

- Transmission of unresolved grief happens with the first generation who experiences the trauma
  - They either do not share the story of the trauma
  - Only bits and pieces are shared, so not a complete picture is known, but the children are aware of the omnipresent feeling that is left
  - Thus leaving the children of the survivors having absorbed the omnipresent feelings and unspoken grief
    - Danieli (1998)

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## Scholarly Personal Narrative

"I have found that personal narrative writing helps us all to understand our histories, shape our destinies, develop our moral imaginations, and gives us something truly worth living and dying for."

Robert J. Nash

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## Story Telling

- Native American author N. Scott Momaday says
  - Storytelling...is an act by which man [woman] strives to realize his [her] capacity for wonder, meaning, and delight.
  - Man tells stories in order to understand his/her experiences, whatever they may be.

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## Power of Story Telling

- To discover self
- How our lived experience contributed to silencing the story
- The process of telling story, can be the beginning of healing
- As tell the story must listen to what "I" am saying
  - Listening to the ancestors, but using my voice

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" You have to listen to  
learn and learn to listen"

Chief Burke, Umatilla  
Healing our Wounded Spirits Conference April 2003.

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How do you begin to heal the  
unresolved grief?

- "What cannot be talked about can also not be put to rest; and if it is not, the wounds continue to fester from generation to generation."
  - In Danieli (1998)

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The story begins

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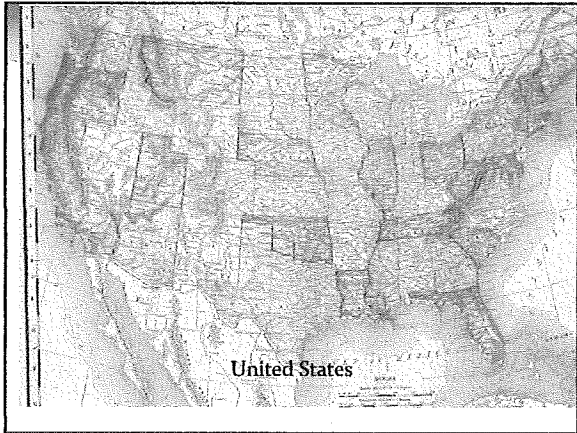
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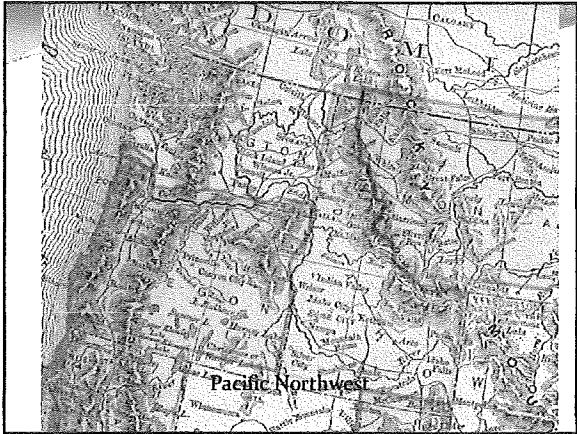
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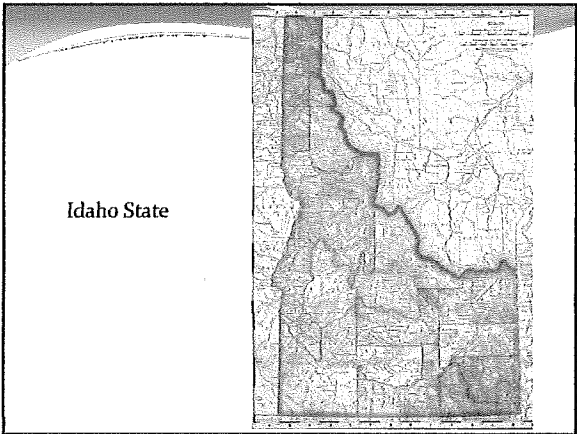
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