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She has great spirit: insight into relationships between American Indian dads and daughters

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Data from this preliminary study, the American Indian – Dads and Daughters Survey, shed light on how American Indian fathers think and feel about their relationships with their daughters. Respondents represent an array of tribal affiliations, age, occupations, socioeconomic status, and geographical/geopolitical locations, helping to ensure that these data are relevant across a broad spectrum of Indian Country. Among the many insights into the relationships revealed in these data are common themes involving spirituality, identity, and adherence to cultural values. These insights may help educators, and others, who work with American Indian families, gain a greater awareness and understanding of how the relationships between American Indian fathers and their daughters impact both traditional American Indian communities as well as more mainstream westernized American Indian communities.

Keywords: AI-DADS; American Indian; family relations; daughters; fathers

Introduction

The American Indian – Dads and Daughters Survey (AI-DADS) was developed to generate data about relationships between American Indian dads and their daughters, in an effort to inform the broader discussion on this topic, which has been largely dominated by non-Indian perspectives. This manuscript provides background on the development of the AI-DADS, highlights the results, and discusses how educators and other service providers might use the insights contained herein to better inform their policies and practices. This emphasis on father–daughter relationships is particularly important given prior research (e.g. Flouri and Buchanan 2004), which suggests early father involvement has the potential to counteract conditions that may place children at risk for lowered educational attainment levels later on in life. Lee, Kushner, and Cho (2007) also found that, “... daughters who lived with highly involved single-fathers performed better academically than ...” (149) their peers who lived in other single-parent households.

What do we know about American Indian father–daughter relationships?

Father–daughter relationships are “rarely the subject of rigorous study and research” (Dads and Daughters 2008). The limited research that has been conducted in this

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area, however, shows that the relationship between fathers and daughters can have significant impacts on the educational success of these daughters (Cooper 2009; Hodgetts 2004). Unfortunately, most of this research has been focused on father–daughter interactions in non-Native contexts. This makes it difficult to generalize these findings to American Indian dads and their daughters.

Parent involvement

What the literature does reveal is an emerging focus on parent involvement among this population. For example, Anguiano's (2004) study of the effect of parental involvement on high school completion found differential effects of parent involvement based on parents' ethnic background (including American Indian). This is an important point given the history of Indian education in the USA; a history which often discouraged parental and/or community/tribal involvement in the education of American Indian children. As a result, many American Indian parents remain reluctant to directly engage schools in ways that are deemed the norm in westernized systems of education, such as those typically found in the USA. Unfortunately, Richardson and Richardson (1986) found that some educators have a tendency to misinterpret this lack of active American Indian parental involvement in their children's education as a lack of interest, when in fact they may be interested yet unable or unwilling to participate for a variety of social, cultural, and historical reasons which may be unknown to a largely non-Indian teaching force.

As these studies point out, it is important to recognize cultural differences in conceptions and definitions of parent involvement as this may have a potentially negative effect on both practitioners' and researchers' interpretation of what they observe in terms of the parent–child relationship in school. According to Mackety and Linder-VanBerschoot (2008), American Indian parent involvement can be categorized into at least two types – school-oriented and home-oriented involvement. Within these two categories, there are a number of subcategories including the ways in which parents communicate about their children, the extent to which they attend student-focused activities, volunteerism, propensity to advocate for children's educational progress, demonstrating interest in children's educational progress, assisting with school work, encouraging children and providing incentives for them to excel in school, reading with children, meeting children's needs, and involving extended family and community in their children's education. The extent to which parents and families actively participate in their children's education is influenced in large part by their own educational experiences (e.g. Mackety and Linder-VanBerschoot 2008). For those who have had negative educational experiences or those who have not been successful in their pursuit of education, schools may not come across as particularly warm and welcoming (e.g. Mackety and Linder-VanBerschoot 2008), thus parents may be reluctant to actively participate in or engage with these schools.

Impact of substance use and abuse on parent–family well-being

Another important area of study is the effect of drug and alcohol use and abuse and its potentially detrimental effect on parent–family relationships, as well as the overall health and well-being of the larger family unit. In one study involving prevalence of drug and alcohol use among American Indians in Montana, Streit and Nicholich (1977) found evidence that many of the youth engaged in drug and alcohol abuse

had deceased fathers, and did not have a great knowledge of traditional cultural teachings. O'Neill and Mitchell (2009) also found that a strong understanding of cultural teachings and values can help American Indian teens to moderate their level and intensity of alcohol use. This finding is echoed by Beauvais (1998) who argued that, "efforts to prevent and treat alcohol problems among the American Indian population may be more effective if native beliefs and approaches are incorporated" (1).

In summary, although these studies fail to specifically address the relationship between American Indian fathers and their daughters, they do underscore the importance of both supportive parental relationships and strong Native culture in the lives of American Indian children. Similar findings are revealed in this study.

Methodology

The AI-DADS, as approved by the Colorado State University Human Research Committee, was conducted in collaboration with the Interwest Equity Assistance Center (IEAC) in partnership with the Center for Applied Studies in American Ethnicity at Colorado State University. The study was conducted online between 1 February 2007 and 15 June 2007, utilizing Survey Monkey. This allowed for the survey to be disseminated across the nation. To facilitate this process, an announcement was sent out via email to tribes, schools, Indian organizations, and other individuals. We asked that the announcement be circulated widely in order to obtain the greatest possible number and diversity of respondents. A link to the survey was also posted on the IEAC's website. All respondents were self-identified American Indian fathers 18 and older, who had at least one American Indian daughter.

AI-DADS background information

This study is based in large part on a 2004 Roper Survey conducted by a national organization, Dads and Daughters (DADS).¹ The DADS philosophy is reflected in 10 "Tips for Fathers with Daughters" which include: (a) listen to girls; (b) encourage their strength and savvy; (c) respect girls' uniqueness, urge them to love their bodies, and discourage dieting; (d) get physically active with girls; (e) get involved in their schools; (f) get involved in their activities; (g) help make the world better for girls; (h) take daughters to work; (i) support positive alternative media for girls; and (j) talk to other fathers (Kelly 2001).

The original DADS survey did not indicate the race/ethnicity of the respondents; however, Joe Kelly, president of DADS, explained that to his knowledge very few, if any, American Indian fathers responded to the survey (2006, pers. comm.). In response, the AI-DADS was developed to establish baseline data on the relationship between American Indian fathers and their daughters. Research questions were developed based on a combination of the original question set of the 2004 Roper Poll, a review of 31 research questions and inputs/outcomes developed by the Dads and Daughters Research Advisory Group, the research interests of the IEAC and the Center for Applied Studies in American Ethnicity, and feedback from the American Indian Advisory Council for the IEAC. Our original research questions are noted below:

- (1) How do demographic factors such as age, income, residential status, fatherhood status, educational attainment, number and age of daughters, profes-

- sion, citizenship, and marital status impact American Indian father–daughter relationships as compared to the general population?
- (2) How does diversity in tribal affiliation impact American Indian father–daughter relationships?
 - (3) How does tribal cultural connectivity and adherence to tribal cultural traditions impact father–daughter relationships?
 - (4) How involved and aware of are American Indian fathers in their daughters' education?
 - (5) How comfortable are American Indian fathers in discussing HIV/AIDS with their daughters?
 - (6) How would American Indian fathers compare with the general population in their responses to questions originally asked in a 2004 Roper Poll concerning father/daughter relationships in the areas of:
 - (a) The nature of the relationship.
 - (b) Protecting our daughters.
 - (c) Talking about sexuality.
 - (7) How are American Indian father/daughter relationships impacted by gender stereotypes and male bias?

The AI-DADS was designed to incorporate questions that were the same as, or similar to, those asked on the Roper Poll. The survey contained 50 questions (e.g. open ended, rank ordered, Likert scale). Age groupings were modified to show a more disaggregated picture of the ages of the daughters. Some response categories were also modified in an effort to better align the possible responses with the questions. Additional survey questions included demographic data germane to the population surveyed. For example, American Indian dads were asked about their tribal affiliation, as well as the tribal affiliation of their daughter, and of their daughter's mother. Another unique demographic question was added pertaining to residence (i.e. living on or off a reservation). The survey also included questions regarding the influence of American Indian culture on fathers' handling of situations encountered as they raised their daughters.

Although the total number of individuals who accessed the survey was 174, there were only 158 (91%) who completed at least one question on the survey. The AI-DADS data was filtered after the preliminary results were reported to better control for missing data, errors based on respondents' obvious misunderstanding of the question, and mechanical errors/survey design flaws (based on technology not working properly, or question parameters set up incorrectly, i.e. allowing two answers where it should have allowed only one). After filtering the data for the errors described above, a total of 60 respondents (35%) were retained in the pool for the final analysis. Although a few of the respondents who were retained in the filtered pool did not answer all of the non-demographic questions, they did answer all of the demographic questions.

Discussion of findings

For the purposes of this paper, we report the findings most closely related to father–daughter relationships as they relate to education and Indian/non-Indian interactions.

Respondents represent a diverse cross-section of American Indian fathers, including tribal affiliation, variations in income, levels of educational attainment, age, location (i.e. urban, rural, suburban, reservation/non-reservation), and occupations.

Educational attainment and current profession

The largest number of respondents in any one category of educational attainment (see Figure 1) were those who had attained a four-year degree (4yr). The second largest were those with some college (coll). The third largest were those with a master’s degree (MA). All other categories combined totaled 21 respondents. This included those with less than a high school degree, a general education diploma, a professional certificate, a two-year college degree, or a doctoral degree.

The largest group of respondents in any one profession included those involved in education. Twenty-one respondents indicated they were an educational administrator, professor, K-12 teacher, or counselor. There were also two respondents who reported their current profession as “student.” The second largest group was composed of public safety workers, with a total of five. This group included police, security, and fire. The third largest group included managers and supervisors outside of education, with a total of four. The three largest groups combined totaled 32 respondents. All other professions combined totaled 28 respondents.

Tribal diversity and fathers’ place of residence

Sixty-three tribal affiliations were reported by respondents overall, with the highest number affiliated with the Navajo (Diné) Nation. Other tribal affiliations included Nez Perce, Cherokee, Crow, and Northern Cheyenne. Forty-nine (82%) of the respondents reported that their daughters had the same tribal affiliation as themselves. Ten (17%) reported that their daughters were not affiliated with the same tribe as themselves. Of these 10, all of the respondents were biological fathers. While six (10%) of the respondents lived with their daughters full-time, their daughters assumed their mothers’ tribal affiliation. Two (3%) lived with their daughters part-time and the daughters shared their mothers’ tribal affiliations. One

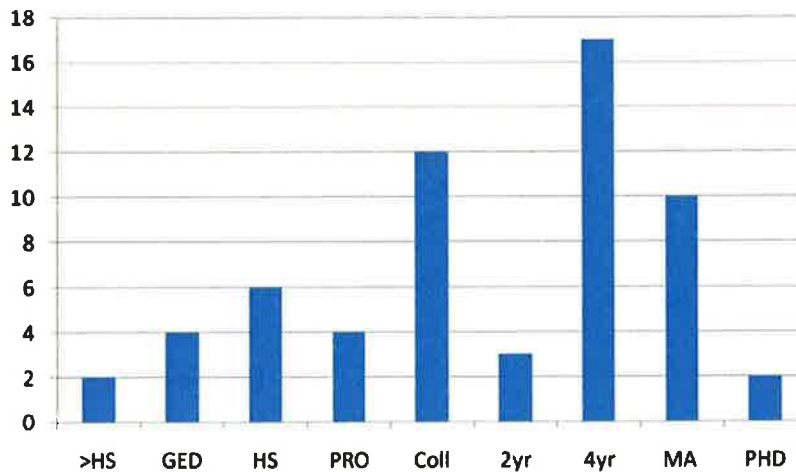


Figure 1. Educational attainment of respondents.

(2%) did not live with his daughter at all and she shared her mother's tribal affiliation. Fathers' place of residence is important, in part, because it relates to the fathers' ability to actively and meaningfully parent. According to a review of literature conducted by Allen and Daly (2007), the quality of the parent-child relationship is particularly important when one parent does not live in residence with the child on a full-time basis.

One (2%) participant, who lived with his daughter full-time, shared that his daughter did not have enough blood quantum to be affiliated with either his tribe or that of her mother. This raises an important question regarding the extent to which children are able to establish or maintain cultural ties to a tribe when that child is not eligible for tribal membership. This is a question beyond the scope of this current study; however, it is a question that should be addressed by future studies in order to better understand the relationship between tribal membership/affiliation, children's home and school life, and their subsequent academic outcomes.

Comparison of AI-DADS with Roper Poll

Although all of the comparisons between daughters' age groups showed significant differences between AI-DADS respondents and Roper Poll respondents, the individual age categories were not aligned and could account for some of the variance. The AI-DADS age categories were modified from those used in the original Roper Poll in order to obtain a greater breakdown of ages, and to more closely align the categories with school grade levels for the daughters.² The age categories used for fathers are reported in Figure 2. Respondents represented the entire age range, with the bulk of respondents between the ages of 31-40 (32%) and 41-50 (33%). Although a few of the respondents were below the age of 20, their data were not included in the analysis because they did not complete the entire survey. The age ranges for the daughters are reported in Figure 3. There were 109 daughters represented in this study, with the largest percentage between the ages of 7 and 9 (14%). More than half (64%) were between the ages of 0 and 18.

Although the reordering of age ranges decreased intersurvey reliability (Roper Poll aggregated/clustered data vs. AI-DADS disaggregated data), it was hoped that it would increase external validity, potentially allowing us to compare data from this study to data from other studies specific to ages and grade levels in the future.

Roper Poll key findings indicated that 74% of fathers in general described their relationship with their oldest or only daughter as *excellent* (e.g. *no issues come to mind* (45%), or *very good but with a few minor issues* (29%). The AI-DADS

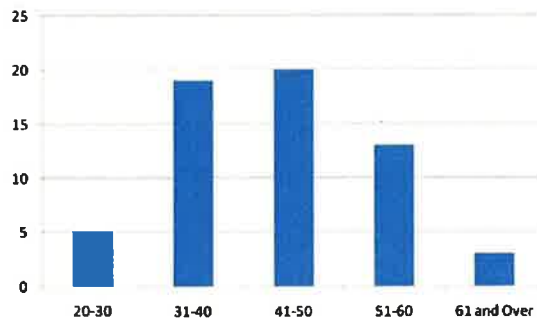


Figure 2. Age of respondents (percentages).

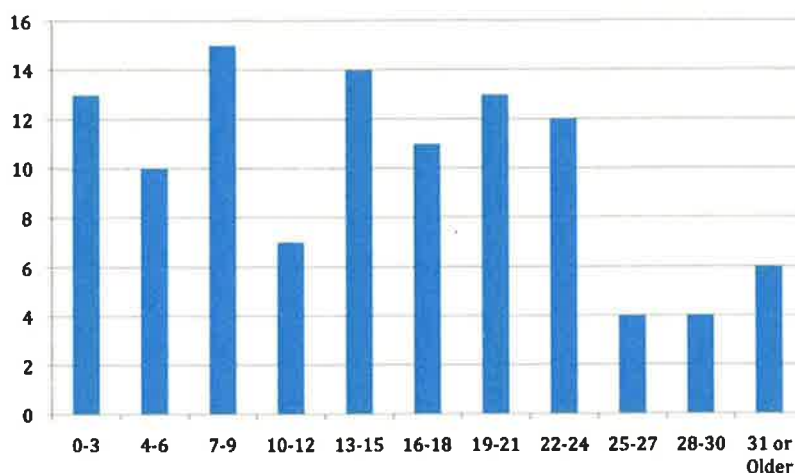


Figure 3. Age of respondents' daughters (percentages).

findings were similar, with approximately 77% of fathers responding in the same categories; however, there was a significant difference in the disaggregated data for the response categories. On the AI-DADS, the percentages were almost exactly opposite, with 28% responding *excellent*, and 48% responding *very good*.

Both the Roper Poll and the AI-DADS survey included a set of questions that dealt with fathers' concerns about their daughters in regard to sex and sexuality. Some of the differences in responses are worth noting in that they reveal disparities in what American Indian females are facing in our society. For example, the Office of Women's Health (n.d.) cites a propensity towards eating disorders which are associated with emotional stress, alcohol and tobacco use, suicidal ideation, and physical and sexual abuse; and the Centers for Disease Control (2009) cite high rates of sexual and physical violence among American Indian females.

In response to the question, "Which of the following do you think are the greatest obstacles to a girl's happiness? Rank the top three," the greatest percentage of respondents to the AI-DADS chose "Unequal Treatment and Discrimination." This finding was similar to the Roper Poll. However, the second and third greatest percentages were different, with AI-DADS respondents indicating "Physical or Sexual Harassment or Abuse" (second) and "Popular Culture" (third). In contrast, the Roper Poll respondents cited "Popular Culture" (second) and a tie between "Pressure to be Thin" and "Physical or Sexual Harassment or Abuse" (third). One factor that may account for this difference is that American Indian females tend to experience sexual violence at a higher rate than non-Indian females (Harrell 2007). A 1998 national survey showed that approximately 34% of American Indian females experience some form of sexual violence during their lifetime (Tjaden and Thoennes 1998). More recently, a 2010 study (Bachman et al. 2010) indicated American Indian and Alaska Native women are more likely to experience rape and sexual assault than their peers.

The respondents on both the AI-DADS and the Roper Poll indicated that their greatest fear regarding their daughters was that "she may be physically or sexually assaulted." However, AI-DADS and Roper Poll respondents differed in their second and third most common fears. AI-DADS cited the fear that "she won't have a loving and equitable relationship" as their second choice, and "she will get pregnant too young" as their third choice, whereas Roper Poll participants cited the fear that

“she won’t find a good man who will take care of her” as their second greatest fear, and “she won’t have a loving and equitable relationship” as their third greatest fear. This is a key difference in American Indian fathers’ concerns vs. non-Indian fathers, and has serious implications for Indian education. This is a particularly interesting distinction given recent reports of significant increases in teen pregnancy among American Indians and Alaska Natives. According to Hamilton, Martin, and Ventura (2009), the teen pregnancy rate among American Indians increased by 12% between 2005 and 2007. In 2007, there were approximately 59 births per 1000 American Indian/Alaska Native girls between the ages of 15 and 19.

Unfortunately, the issue of teen pregnancy is not new for American Indian families and communities. Bowker’s (1992) study of American Indian female dropouts indicated, “Fifty-one percent (51%) of the girls in the study reported dropping out due to pregnancy ...” (Results of the Study section, para. 12), compared to the national average of 40%. Bowker went on to write that for many of these girls, “... factors such as child neglect, abuse, inattentive parents, alcohol and drugs led to premature sexual experimentation” (Results of the Study section, para. 12). Bowker also argued that fathers who are concerned about their daughters getting pregnant at a young age may be battling against “an acceptable norm within many reservation communities” (Results of the Study section, para. 12). If this is in fact a societal norm, fathers and mothers alike have a responsibility to talk with their children about ways in which to push back against this norm.

When asked, “Generally speaking, how comfortable or uncomfortable do you feel talking to your daughter about matters of sex and sexuality?” responses indicated that some American Indian fathers were less comfortable than their non-Indian counterparts. Another similar question asked, “Which of the following, if any, would most help you be more comfortable talking to your daughter about matters of sex and sexuality?” Once again the greatest percentage of respondents in both studies selected the response, “Having her mother participate in the conversation with me.” However, their second and third responses varied. The AI-DADS’ second response was, “Having a better understanding of what girls her age know about sexuality” and the third response was “Access to age-appropriate talking points.” In contrast, in the Roper Poll, the second response was “Having the ability to talk about other issues before talking about it” and the third response was “Having a better understanding of what girls her age know about sexuality.”

As these findings suggest, educators and other social service professionals should be aware of the very real concerns that American Indian fathers have regarding their daughters in the area of sex and sexuality. The impact of sexual violence, teenage pregnancy, societal and cultural norms, and the comfort level of American Indian fathers in addressing these issues with their daughters all have a significant bearing on these fathers and their daughters. At the school level, it is important to work with parents and families to address these issues. Although there are many ways that schools have approached sex education, it is important to consider how these approaches may or may not have been developed to deal with American Indian specific issues. It is also important to note that research indicates fathers have an important role to play in reducing issues such as teen pregnancy. According to Ellis et al. (2003), the absence of fathers in their daughters’ lives is linked to increased risk of early sexual activity and adolescent pregnancy; thus, it is imperative that families, schools, and communities seek ways to meaningfully engage fathers in their daughters’ upbringing.

AI-DADS and tribal culture

As discussed above, societal and cultural norms and values play a critical role in the lives of children and their families. To better understand this phenomenon, the AI-DADS incorporated questions about tribal culture that were not included in the original Roper Poll. As described below, the responses to these questions provide important insight regarding American Indian fathers' perceptions about Indian identity, spirituality, and adherence to traditional cultural values. Included in this paper are representative samples of the types of responses submitted by the fathers in this study.³

Special times reflective of tribal cultural background

Participants were asked to respond to the question, "What was the most special time that you have spent with your daughter(s) that reflected your tribal cultural background?" A summary of responses is presented in Table 1. Twenty-four (40%) responses included some type of involvement in spiritual ceremonies as their most special time spent together that reflected their tribal cultural background.

In response to this question, one Goshute father replied, "When my daughters come out to the reservation, they learn that they are Indian children." Another similar response from a Navajo father focused on the time spent in a reservation community: "Living on the reservation for 20 years. My two daughters went to K-11 on the reservation." Both of these responses are indicative of the idea that Indian reservations are often perceived as centers of American Indian tribal cultures, and as such serve to reify Indian identity (e.g. Ragsdale 1991).

Connected to tribal community

Another finding of the AI-DADS is that 56%, or 9 out of the 16 participants who reside in a reservation community indicated that they felt extremely connected to their tribal culture, as compared to their rural (29% of 17), suburban (13% of 16), and urban (0% of 11) counterparts. This is an interesting finding given the demographic diversity of American Indians across the nation. According to Ogunwale (2006), approximately 33% of the total American Indian/Alaska Native population in the USA is under the age of 18. Most American Indian children attend public schools (90%), while a smaller percentage attend schools operated or funded by the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) (7%) or tribes (Alliance for Excellent Education

Table 1. Father–daughter activities reflecting tribal culture.^a

Activity	Number of respondents
Spiritual ceremonies	24
Pow Wows	23
Other family or community gatherings	7
Educational conferences or meetings	5
Dance socials/activities other than Pow Wows	5
Traditional ecological knowledge activities	2
Culture camps	2
Native language learning	1

^aOne respondent indicated that this is private information. One said his daughter was too young to participate in cultural activities and two did not respond at all.

2007). And, approximately 64% of the total American Indian population live outside of tribal areas (Ogunwole 2006). The respondents to the AI-DADS are a bit more representative of the off-reservation community, with 73%, or 44, of the respondents reporting that they do not live in a reservation community.

Spirituality

Spirituality-related activities were also identified as important father–daughter activities. The most common type of response for this question, as demonstrated in the following quote from a member of the Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate, focused on family involvement in spiritual ceremonies: “I think when my entire family participated in our sacred sun dance and participated for the entire 4 days of sacrifice. My daughter made it all 4 days without food and water, that impressed me highly and shows her mettle.”

The strong link between Indian education and spirituality is again reflected in the following response from a Navajo father:

At one time, my eldest daughter came to me about the stresses of school work. I explained to her that her strength had always been inside her because she successfully went through 4 days of her Kinaalda ceremony and that she should apply her understanding of her strength to her school to overcome her difficulties. She graduated [with honors] from High School and just completed her freshman year at [the University] with a [high] GPA.

This strong connection to spirituality is also reflected in Cajete’s (1994) *Look to the Mountain: An Ecology of Indigenous Education*, Deloria and Wildcat’s (2001) *Power and Place: Indian Education in America*, and Reinhardt and Maday’s (2006) *Interdisciplinary Manual for American Indian Inclusion*, in which American Indian scholars underscore the centrality of spirituality in traditional forms of American Indian education.

Furthering this finding of the importance of spirituality, the following response from a Menominee father was one of 23 (38%) that included the time fathers spent with their daughters at pow wows as the most special time reflective of their tribal culture: “Watching them dance at Pow-wows and receiving honorings for educational, athletic and musical achievements at native controlled schools (tribal and public).” Given the nature of this question, it is likely that the award ceremonies indicated here had at least some element of tribal culture. It is not uncommon, for instance, to see such activities include traditional drum “honor” songs or even mini pow wows for the youth.

It is also important to note that pow wows are often viewed as spiritual gatherings or at least include some aspects that honor the importance of spirituality in local tribal contexts. Examples include sacred fires and eagle feather ceremonies. Taken together, the responses that included pow wows and spiritual ceremonies account for a total of 78% of the respondents. Given the number of responses in these two categories, and the nature of the question, it is asserted here that the more closely American Indian education efforts are aligned with tribal cultural activities such as pow wows and spiritual ceremonies, the more likely it is that American Indian fathers will perceive these efforts to be relevant to their tribal cultural background, and the more likely it is that they will participate in these activities with their daughters.

This assertion is supported by the responses to another question on the survey that asked which type of educational functions respondents are most likely to attend. Seventy percent of the respondents ranked *traditional cultural gatherings about education* as their first, second, or third choice (32% as their first choice). This was second only to *parent-teacher conferences* at 82% of the respondents.

Tribal culture and trouble with daughter

In response to the question, "Have you ever had an instance where you were having trouble with your daughter(s) and your tribal culture seemed to help you deal with the situation? If yes, explain," the answers are summarized as follows: 14 (23%) mentioned tribal culture or tribal family members as providing direction for a way to live, 13 (22%) suggested that prayers, ceremonies, or faith helped, 3 (5%) mentioned tribal cultural affiliation as a responsibility, 16 (27%) responded no or none, and 4 (4 or 7%) did not respond at all. In response to this question, one father, belonging to the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, explained that:

We found out that my older daughter has been lying about her activities. I reminded her that as Anishinaabe Ojibway she carries our culture with her and she is often the only Native person that some people ever meet. It seemed to impact her.

This type of character education draws on the child's pride in her Native culture to address her behaviors. This is similar to a response from a Cheyenne Arapaho father who shared, "we always reminded her that she was Cheyenne and Arapaho and what she did in public or her actions reflected on the tribes as a whole by the public." Both of these examples are reflective of how traditional cultural teachings reinforce civic responsibility.

In response to the question, "Have you ever had an instance where you were having trouble with your daughter(s) and your tribal culture seemed to make the situation more difficult? If yes, explain," 65% (39) responded that they had never had such an instance. There were nine (15%) instances where the respondents indicated that racial/ethnic or cultural identity issues had a negative impact. There were two (3%) instances where negative behaviors associated with being Indian were mentioned. There were two (3%) instances where tribal enrollment was mentioned as an issue, and one (2%) instance where daughters pointed out that their dad was not acting responsibly based on traditional cultural teachings. There were also four (7%) who did not respond at all.

The following response from a father belonging to the Cherokee Nation suggests that perceptions of American Indian identity have negatively impacted his and his daughters' relationships with school personnel:

being mixed there were and have been times when explaining issues to school administrators and teachers especially regarding certain issues has been difficult. I attribute this to the fact that where we live now has a low number of folks with Native ancestry.

A similar response was offered by an Osage father:

As mixed bloods we have both been told that we are too white to be welcome to some things, and ironically we have both been told we are too Indian to understand and participate in others. Both of these attitudes caused a little bit of trouble with some of her middle school teachers when she was younger.

Yet another response from a Turtle Mountain Chippewa father focused on racial or cultural differences between his daughter and her teachers:

My daughter has cultural issues when it comes to school. She is dark, testing is more difficult, the way she is taught sometimes does not get through to her because of cultural differences. She ... is mainly taught by white teachers.

All three of the above responses are illustrative of how negative interactions between non-Indian educators and Indian children may be perceived as tied to racial or cultural differences.

Unfortunately, American Indian families that participate in traditional ceremonial activities sometimes feel torn between honoring their traditions and meeting the requirements of public school attendance (e.g. Reyhner 2001). When asked about the relationship between school attendance and cultural traditions in her work with the James Bay Cree, Cynthia Bjork (2011, pers. comm.), a principal consultant with Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL), indicated that her:

first thought goes to what lies deeper than the actual traditions – that is, it is critical to really have a heart for (at minimum to be aware of) a child's community's values because they are infused in decisions regarding such things as school attendance.

She went on to say that:

when a child's life is centered in, or influenced by Native values they may choose to miss school to honor the life/death of family members, or miss to support needs at home, or to play hockey (which may be more than a sport to them).

Finding ways to support these families' interests in maintaining or revitalizing their tribal cultural traditions is very important in establishing reciprocal relationships with the school. Often times, educators see involvement as a one way street and expect parents, families, and communities to support schools by getting involved in the Westernized education of their children while not reciprocating the support for their traditional educational activities.

Fathers' roles in traditional ceremonies

In response to the question, "Has your daughter(s) been involved in a traditional tribal female ceremony? If yes, what was the ceremony and what was your role in the ceremony?," eight (13%) of the respondents were willing to share that their daughters have gone through a new woman ceremony, three (5%) mentioned that their daughters had gone through naming ceremonies, two (3%) said their daughters have attended women's sweat lodges, one (2%) had a daughter go through a long house ceremony, one (2%) had a daughter who played a significant role in a repatriation ceremony, one (2%) daughter had participated in a sunrise dance, and one (2%) had attended a ghost feast. Over half of the respondents said that their daughters had not been involved in any traditional tribal female ceremonies. Three did not respond at all.

This response from a Navajo father illustrates a great deal of involvement as a helper surrounding his daughter's womanhood ceremony:

During my daughter's traditional Navajo womanhood ceremony I assisted with everything from gathering the firewood and water, traveling to and from the grocery store for supplies, preparing the ground where the traditional cake was to be baked, and simply being available to any family requests.

A similar response was provided by a father belonging to the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians who stated:

Both of my daughters have gone through a new woman ceremony. My role was to help prepare the area and make sure they had their sacred herbs, firewood, etc. During their ceremony, my job was to pray and support my wife by doing things that needed to be done while she worked with my daughters. After the ceremony my job was to help celebrate and to clean the area up.

Both of these fathers were obviously very supportive of their daughters' involvement in traditional female cultural activities.

Unfortunately, many educators may not be sensitive to the fact that there are many different tribes and subsequently many different tribal traditions regarding male participation in female ceremonial activities. What is true for one tribe or family may not be true for another. Because there is such limited information about this subject available for public discourse, it is difficult for educators to increase their awareness of issues surrounding male involvement in female ceremonies without direct experience. Thus, they may find themselves in a position that may appear disrespectful or insensitive to local tribal traditions. Alternately, they may assume that Indian fathers know something that in reality they have little familiarity with.

Father–daughter relationships from tribal cultural perspectives

Responses to the question, “Do you and your daughter(s) talk about the relationship between fathers and daughters from a tribal cultural perspective? If yes, what are some of the things you have discussed?,” included 10 (17%) instances where clan and family roles and relationships were mentioned, 12 (20%) instances where the respondent focused on traditional family values, and 3 (5%) instances where respondents indicated it is simply a way of life. Thirty (half or 50%) of the respondents indicated that they do not talk, or have not yet talked, about the relationships between fathers and daughters from a tribal cultural perspective. Three did not respond at all.

One respondent, a father belonging to the Cherokee Nation, said he and his daughter have discussed, “The traditional leadership of women in clan relationships.” This response again shows how traditional cultural teachings reinforce civic responsibility. Given what Frances Rains (1998) has referred to as the “historical amnesia” of American Indian women in public school education, and the sparse amount of literature regarding American Indian female leadership in general (National Indian Education Association 2008, 33), it is extremely important that these types of conversations take place across the nation.

Raising a daughter: primary tribal cultural references

Responses to the question “Who or what was your primary tribal cultural reference for information about raising a daughter?” included 25 (42%) instances where the father's own mother (15 or 25%) or grandmother (10 or 17%) were mentioned

specifically. This is in contrast to the five (8%) instances where the father was mentioned specifically, and there was no mention of a grandfather specifically. There were 10 (17%) instances where a parent, or parents, were mentioned in general, and six (10%) instances where grandparents were mentioned in general. There were 19 (32%) instances where family or community members other than parents or grandparents were mentioned, and two (3%) instances where the father mentioned his wife specifically. Four of the respondents (7%) indicated that they had no tribal cultural reference for information about raising a daughter, and one (2%) did not respond at all. The preponderance of mother or grandmother references is consistent with the percentage of respondents (45%) who indicated that they were primarily raised by their mother or grandmother.

The following response is a rather important one for educators to consider given the locus of the primary reference for this Northern Cheyenne father who was raised mostly by his father. This respondent wrote that he, "Didn't have any other than what we were taught in school by our culture advisors within the school system." This response says a lot about the importance of Indian education workers who are often the only Indian person in many of the schools serving Indian children.

Females not allowed in traditional practices

The most common response to the question, "Are there traditional tribal practices in your community that females are not allowed to participate in? If yes, what are they and why are they not allowed to participate?" was 15 (25%) instances where the respondent suggested that females are not allowed to sit at or strike the drum. The second most common response was that females were not allowed to participate in certain ceremonies because they are women, or because they have their own like ceremonies. Seven (12%) responses indicated that females are not allowed to hunt, fish, or handle weapons. Six (10%) respondents suggested that females were not allowed to do something because of their moon time or menses. One respondent shared that in his tribe women are not allowed to touch eagle feathers, and another respondent indicated that women are not allowed to be spiritual leaders. There were 10 respondents (17%) who said that there were none, 6 (10%) that did not know if there were any, 3 (5%) that preferred not to say in a public forum, and 4 (7%) that did not respond at all.

Cultural taboos regarding females and menses are common among many tribal groups. Educators should be aware of how these taboos could impact social relations and educational activities. For example, a simple nature hike can turn into an alienating experience for girls who are on their moon time and are taught that they should not handle certain plants. They may feel like they are being pressured to either break with tradition or reveal their condition to others who may not understand it the same way. As with any cultural taboo, it is also important for educators to increase their knowledge of the taboos by working with culturally competent contacts in the community. This will help them to be more sensitive and to avoid having students pull the wool over their eyes.

Best examples of American Indian female leaders

According to the National Indian Education Association (2008, 32), the National Congress of American Indians reported that in 2006, 133 of the 560 federally

recognized tribes were led by a female. Although American Indian women have figured prominently in positions of leadership in Indian tribes and communities, there is a lack of literature specific to American Indian female leadership (National Indian Education Association 2008, 33). While the AI-DADS is not specific to American Indian female leadership, it does provide some data that reflects fathers' perspectives on such leaders.

In response to the question, "Who is the best example of an American Indian female leader that you would want your daughter(s) to learn about or from?" 12 (20%) fathers indicated that Wilma Mankiller would be the best example. The only other leaders that were mentioned specifically, and more than once, included three (5%) responses for Winona LaDuke, and two (3%) responses each for Ada Deer and Anne Wauneka. Eight (13%) fathers said that their own mother was the best example, and six (10%) said that their daughter's mother was the best example. Ten (17%) indicated a family member, friend, or other role model besides their own mother, or that of their daughter. There were also six (10%) that responded that there are none or they do not know of any, and three (5%) did not respond at all.

If you could say only one thing

Responses to the last question on the survey provided simple, yet powerful, reminders of what messages American Indian fathers hope their daughters are receiving. The question was: "If you could say only one thing to your daughter(s) besides you love her, what would it be?" One father responded, "Know and be proud of your heritage and treat all people with respect as you would want them to respect you." Another suggested, "Remember who you are." Yet another shared, "Remember to remember that you are a spirit being having a human experience." And lastly, "That she has great spirit."

Limitations

Although this is an important exploratory study, we acknowledge that there are a number of limitations that prevent us from generalizing these findings to the larger population of American Indian dads. Based on the lessons learned from this study, we recommend that the results of this study be interpreted cautiously. One of the major limitations of the AI-DADS involved the participants' access to a computer and the ability to complete the survey online via the Internet. In contrast to the Roper Poll survey which was administered over the telephone and allowed for a larger number of usable completed surveys, the AI-DADS survey was administered online and no steps were included to prevent participants from skipping questions or ending the survey before completing all of the questions. Other limitations included the construction of some of the questions. Options for questions 17–20 allowed for only a "yes" response, which was to be further explained. For instance, one question on the survey asked, "Has your daughter(s) been involved in a traditional tribal female ceremony? If yes, what was the ceremony and what was your role in the ceremony?" Leaving these questions blank was interpreted to be a "no" response, not allowing for a definitive "no" to be indicated. On future versions of this survey, a response choice for "no" should be added. Questions 23–36 used a Likert scale. The respondents were instructed to treat the number 5 as comfortable, totally agree, very confident, very aware, or very often, depending on the wording

of the question, but were left to their own interpretation of what the numbers 1–4 meant. The assumption was that “1” was very uncomfortable, totally disagree, no confidence, or unaware, with “2–4” falling somewhere in between “1 and 5.”

Questions 39–42 and 44–47 contained ranked ordered options of first, second, and third. A mixed mechanical and logical limitation occurred if the response of “don’t know” was checked for any one of the three categories. The assumption was if “don’t know” was checked it applied to all parts of the question and not a specific section. Future versions of the AI-DADS should dispense with the assumptions and provide more definite response category choices.

To address these and other limitations evident in this study, our goal is to revise the survey instrument, paying careful attention to the limitations discussed above, before administering the survey to a larger, more representative sample of American Indian dads. In the revised survey administration, participants would have the option to complete the survey in one of three ways, including pen and paper, online, or in a face-to-face manner.

Conclusions

One of the key findings from this study was that American Indian fathers have concerns about their daughters in the area of sex and sexuality that differ from the mainstream. They are more concerned about their daughters becoming victims of sexual violence and/or becoming pregnant at a young age. These concerns are well founded given the disproportionate rates of violence against Indian females, and the dramatic rate of teenage pregnancy among Indian females. Teenage pregnancy is reported by American Indian girls as a top reason why they drop out of high school (e.g. Faircloth and Tippeconnic 2010). In this study, American Indian fathers further indicated that they are uncomfortable talking about sex and sexuality with their daughters, but that having mothers there to participate in the conversation is helpful. Given the number of single-parent homes in the USA (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2009⁴), having mothers available for such conversations may be more difficult than it sounds. In response, sex education initiative planners need to consider the unique characteristics of Indian fathers’ perspectives and tailor their programs accordingly.

Another key finding was that American Indian fathers are concerned about social identity issues that are unique to American Indian populations. Mixed-blood/full-blood, traditional/non-traditional, reservation/non-reservation, enrolled/not enrolled, and other possible divergent aspects of Indian identity play a role in how Indian fathers and their daughters interact with each other and the world around them. These aspects of Indian identity have been shown to have serious impacts on American Indian educational success and other lifestyle considerations (Reyhner 2002; Snipp 1988).

Perhaps the most significant findings in this study were those related to the place of spirituality and traditional tribal cultural values in the relationships between American Indian fathers and daughters. Fathers who had strong cultural ties with their tribal communities indicated that they were more likely to be involved in their daughters’ lives by participating in traditional ceremonies, pow wows, Native language learning, traditional ecological activities (e.g. plant gathering), Indian educational conferences, and visiting Indian relatives. Even fathers who did not indicate strong cultural ties seemed to long for such opportunities to learn about their tribal cultures with their daughters.

The findings in this study support the outcomes of previous studies such as Richardson and Richardson (1986) by showing that Indian fathers are involved in the education of their daughters, but largely in ways that may not be acknowledged by educators who lack a similar cultural orientation. Little's (1996/1997) and Ramirez's (1998) findings regarding Native language loss and culturally appropriate instruction are also supported by this study, in that the fathers in this study indicate a willingness to be involved in cultural activities such as Native language learning, but schools are often ill-equipped to deal with Native languages and cultures, let alone parental involvement in the same. Finally, Robbins, Tonemah, and Robbins' (2002) Project Eagle outcomes are supported by these findings in that many of the AI-DADS respondents show a tendency toward father–daughter bonding through sharing Native heritage.

In sum, the results of the AI-DADS provide important insights into the relationships between American Indian fathers and their American Indian daughters. These insights can help us think, or rethink, how we approach the ways in which we work with American Indian fathers and their daughters in ways that are more culturally and individually relevant. This is particularly important for educators, and other service providers, as we work to improve the educational conditions and subsequent outcomes of American Indian students. According to Reyhner (1992), “The best way to get schools to reflect parent and community values and to reduce cultural discontinuity between home and school is to have real parent involvement in Native education” (More parent and community involvement section, para. 2).

Notes

1. For additional information on Dads and Daughters, see <http://www.thedadman.com/dad-sanddaughters>.
2. In the Roper Poll, the age ranges for fathers were: 18–24, 25–34, 35–49, 50–64, and 65+. For daughters, the age ranges were below 12, 13–17, 18–25, and 26+.
3. The open-ended nature of the responses created such a bulk of answers that we were simply unable to include them all herein.
4. According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation (2009), approximately 53% of American Indian children reside in single-parent families.

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