

# Acculturation and Wellness of Native American Adolescents in the United States of North America

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## Abstract

Cultural conflicts and the process of acculturation contribute to feelings of boredom, anxiety, depression, isolation, stress, self-doubt, alienation, and rejection among Native American high school students. Further, acculturation may have a negative impact on the identity development and wellness of these students. The purpose of this pilot study was to: (a) assess and compare the levels of acculturation of Native American and non-Native American 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th grade students; and (b) examine the relationship between level of acculturation and wellness for the Native American students. Results indicated significant differences between Native American and non-Native American students' levels of acculturation; and significant differences between the Native students' three levels of acculturation on some of the 17 scales of wellness.

## Resumen

Conflictos culturales y el proceso de aculturación contribuyen a sentimientos de aburrimiento, ansiedad, depresión, aislamiento, presión, desconfianza, alienación, y del rechazo entre estudiantes de escuela superior que son indios americanos. Aún más, la aculturación puede tener un impacto negativo en el desarrollo de identidad y bienestar de estos estudiantes. El propósito de este estudio piloto fue: (a) evaluar y comparar los niveles de aculturación de estudiantes que eran indios americanos y no-indio americano en los grados académicos del noveno, décimo, décimo primero y de duodécimos; y (B) examinar la relación entre nivel de aculturación y bienestar de los estudiantes indio americanos. Los resultados indicaron diferencias significativas entre estudiantes indio americanos y estudiantes no-indio americano en los niveles de aculturación; y diferencias significativas entre los estudiantes indio americanos en tres niveles de aculturación en la parte de las 17 escalas del bienestar.

Key Worlds: Acculturation, Wellness, Native Americans

Palabras Claves: Aculturación, Bienestar, Indio Americano

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Research regarding the formal education of Native American students suggests that the traditional value orientation of these students remains in constant conflict with the value orientation upon which United States' school systems function (Charleston, 1994; Garcia & Ahler, 1992; Little Soldier, 1992; Marsiglia, Cross, & Mitchell, 1998; Shutiva, 2001; Simmons & Barrineau, 1994). Thus, these students often experience poor academic achievement, poor self-concept, low self-esteem, and higher rates of educational attrition (Brandt, 1992; Colodarci, 1983; Deyhle, 1992; Hornett, 1990; Marsiglia et al, 1998; Mitchum, 1989; Radda, Iwamoto, & Patrick, 1998; Swisher, Hoisch, & Pavel, 1991). Native American students have drop-out rates twice the national average—the highest rate of any U.S. ethnic or racial group (Capriccioso, 2005; Radda, Iwamoto, & Patrick, 1998). Also, boredom in school and difficulty with teacher and peer relationships are among a few of the reasons for Native American high school students dropping out before graduation (Brandt, 1992; Capriccioso, 2005; Colodarci, 1983; Deyhle, 1992). These statistics suggest that both the quality of relational interactions in schools, and the content and presentation of curricula, play important roles in the degree of cultural conflict experienced by Native American high school students.

Cultural conflict or discontinuity can be better understood in terms of the cultural discontinuity characterized by incompatible value orientations (Charleston, 1994; Garrett, 1995; Little Soldier, 1985; Sanders, 1987; Sue & Sue, 2003; Whitbeck, Hoyt, Stubben, & LaFromboise, 2001; Yamauchi, & Tharp, 1995). For Native American students, the discontinuity among cultural values seems to have its greatest impact around the fourth grade, at which point academic performance has a tendency to steadily decline, eventually leading to academic failure and the dropout of numerous students during the high school years (Cummins, 1992; Deyhle, 1991; Hornett, 1990; McLaughlin, 1994; Sanders, 1987; Swisher et al., 1991). The goals, purpose, value and behavioral expectations, and sequence of learning processes in a traditional Native American approach to education and socialization are differ vastly from and are in direct conflict with the mainstream U.S. educational approach (Charleston, 1994; Garcia & Ahler, 1992; Marsiglia et al, 1998; Okagaki, 2001; Shutiva, 2001). The additional stress associated with achieving a meaningful sense of personal/cultural identity during the adolescent years presents many Native American students with the constant challenge of reconciling cultural differences in personal values and educational expectations (Garcia & Ahler; Little Soldier, 1985; Sanders,

1987; Yamauchi, & Tharp, 1995). Therefore, the period leading up to and during grades 9-11 is critical because the majority of Native American students drop out of school around the tenth grade (Colodarci, 1983; National Center for Education Statistics, 2004; Swisher et al., 1991) when Native adolescents' traditional choices and values are tested.

Studies have shown that despite the between- and within-group diversity that exists among Native American tribes, there is a common core of traditional values that characterize Native American traditional culture across tribal groups and geographic regions (DuBray, 1985; Heinrich, Corbine, & Thomas, 1990; Herring, 1992; Sue & Sue, 2003; Thomason, 1991). In general, Native American *traditional values* (Table 1) consist of the importance placed upon community contribution, sharing, cooperation, being, noninterference, community and extended family, harmony with nature, a time orientation toward living in the present, preference for explanation of natural phenomena according to the spiritual, and a deep respect for elders (Charleston, 1994; DuBray, 1985; Garrett & Garrett, 1994; Garrett, 1995, 1996; Good Tracks, 1973; Heinrich et al., 1990; Herring, 1994; Little Soldier, 1992; Locust, 1988; Marsiglia et al, 1998; Sanders, 1987; Thomason, 1991; Trimble & Jumper-Thurman, 2002). Comparative value studies revealed that Native American traditional values differ from American *mainstream values* (illustrated in Table 1) which consist of importance placed on self-promotion, saving, domination, doing, competition and aggression, individualism and the nuclear family, mastery over nature, a time orientation toward living for the future, a preference for scientific explanations of everything, as well as clock-watching, winning as much as possible, and reverence of youth (Charleston, 1994; DuBray, 1985; Garcia & Ahler, 1992; Garrett, 1995; Little Soldier, 1992; Sanders, 1987; Sue & Sue, 2003).

The conflict in cultural values between traditional Native American values and mainstream American values represent the varying degrees of acculturation experienced by Native Americans (Garrett & Garrett, 1994; Heinrich et al., 1990). Not all Native Americans experience the same level of acculturation, as evidenced by levels of acculturation which include traditional, marginal, bicultural, and assimilated (Garrett & Pichette, 2000). Although the values of Native American culture and mainstream American culture differ, the result of those differences may be mediated by level of acculturation. The combined effect of cultural value differences and level of acculturation is reflected in the personal and social functioning of Native Americans (Garrett & Pichette, 2000). Indeed, researchers have reported the enormous personal difficulties many Native American students experience due to the process of acculturation (see Figure 1), often characterized by cultural conflicts between their home and school environments (D'Andrea, 1994; Little Soldier, 1985; Whitbeck et al., 2001).

Table 1

*Comparison of Cultural Values and Expectations (adapted from Sanders, 1987)*

Traditional Native American American	Contemporary	Mainstream
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Harmony with nature</li> <li>• Cooperation</li> <li>• Group needs more important than individual needs</li> <li>• Privacy and noninterference; control self, not others</li> <li>• Self-discipline both in body and mind</li> <li>• Participation after observation (when certain of ability)</li> <li>• Explanation according to nature everything</li> <li>• Reliance on extended family</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Power over nature</li> <li>• Competition</li> <li>• Personal goals important</li> <li>• Need to control and affect others</li> <li>• Self-expression, self-disclosure</li> <li>• Trial and error learning, new skills practiced until mastered</li> <li>• Scientific explanation for</li> <li>• Reliance on experts</li> </ul>	

- Emotional relationships valued
  - Patience encouraged (allow others to go first)
  - Humility
  - Win once, let others win also
  - Follow the old ways
  - Discipline distributed among many; no one person takes blame
  - Physical punishment rare
  - Present-time focus
  - Time is always with us
  - Present goals considered important; future accepted ahead as it comes
  - Encourage sharing freely and keeping only enough acquisition of to satisfy present needs saving for the future
  - Speak softly, at a slower rate
  - Avoid speaker or listener
  - Interject less
  - Use less "encouraging signs"; (uh-huh, head nods)
  - Delayed response to auditory messages
  - Nonverbal communication
  - Concerned mostly with facts
  - Aggressive and competitive
  - Fame and recognition
  - Win first prize all of the time
  - Climb the ladder of success;
  - Blame one person at cost to others
  - Physical punishment accepted
  - Future-time focus
  - Clock-watching
  - Plan for future and how to get
  - Private property; encourage material comfort and
  - Speak louder and faster
  - Address listener directly (by name)
  - Interrupt frequently
  - Use verbal encouragement
  - Use immediate response
  - Verbal skills highly prized
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The cultural discontinuity hypothesis offered by many authors as an explanation for the high rates of school dropout and adjustment problems of Native American students, assumes that "culturally based differences in the communication styles of the minority students' home and the Anglo culture of the school lead to conflicts, misunderstandings, and ultimately, failure for those students" (Ledlow, 1992, p. 23). According to Sanders (1987), the incompatibility of the traditional Native American value system with that of the mainstream American educational system is a source of great difficulty experienced by many Native American students, and may directly affect their wellness. Little Soldier (1985) reported that the formal education of the

public school system requires the adoption of unfamiliar ways of acting and thinking by Native American children, while rejecting, minimizing, and even ridiculing the Native American traditional education and learning style that shows children how to live in the "Indian way." Many Native American students experience feelings of boredom, anxiety, depression, isolation, stress, self-doubt, and "being unwanted" (Barney, 2001; Brandt, 1992; Charleston, 1994; Clarke, 2001; D'Andrea, 1994; Deyhle, 1992; Little Soldier, 1992; McCarty, Wallace, Lynch, & Benally, 1991). These feelings represent a disruption in the mental, physical, and spiritual wellness of Native American students through the possible impact of cultural value differences and the process of acculturation on their personal, social, and environmental spheres of functioning (Sanders, 1987).

### *The Wellness Experience of Native Americans*

One of the primary goals of counselors is to facilitate optimum human development and functioning (American Counseling Association, 2005). For Native Americans, this goal is affected by cultural discontinuity in values and expectations, differentially experienced by the individual Native American as a function of his or her level of acculturation. To positively impact the mental health of Native Americans, a focus on wellness is desirable because of its emphasis on a holistic approach (Constantine & Sue, 2006). This emphasis is consistent with traditional Native American values and beliefs concerning health and wellness which focus on the harmony and balance between all aspects of the individual and his or her social and environmental surroundings (Garrett & Garrett, 1996; Locust, 1988; McCarthy & Benall, 2003).

A wellness approach incorporates concern for the individual in context, illustrated by Myers, Sweeney, and Witmer's (2000) emphasis on the five life tasks of *spirituality* (oneness, purposiveness, optimism, and values); *self-direction* (sense of worth, sense of control, realistic beliefs, spontaneous and emotional responsiveness, intellectual stimulation, problem-solving, and creativity, sense of humor, physical fitness and nutrition, self-care, gender identity, and cultural identity); *work and leisure*; *love* (trust, caring, and companionship); and *friendship* (sense of connection with the human community). Many of these components (e.g., sense of identity and purpose through belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity) not only parallel a traditional Native American emphasis on wellness, but have also been identified in the

literature as being critical to the healthy functioning of Native Americans (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & Van Bockern, 1990; Garrett & Garrett, 1994; Garrett, 1995; LaFromboise & Rowe, 1983; LaFromboise, Trimble, & Mohatt, 1990; Locust, 1988).

Due to the paucity of research and literature focusing on Native American high school students' experiences of acculturation and wellness, the purpose of this pilot study was to: (a) assess and compare the levels of acculturation of Native American and non-Native American 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th grade students, using the *Native American Acculturation Scale* (Author, 2000); and (b) examine the possible relationships between levels of acculturation and wellness for Native American 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th grade students.

## **Method**

### *Participants*

Today there exist many definitions of the term "Native American." The U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs (1988) legally defines a "Native American" as a person who is an enrolled or registered member of a tribe or whose blood quantum is one-fourth or more, genealogically derived from Native American ancestry. The U.S. Bureau of the Census [USBC] (2001), meanwhile, relies on individuals' self-identification to determine who Native Americans are. Oswalt (1988) points out, however, that "if a person is considered an Indian by other individuals in the community, he or she is legally an Indian . . . [in other words], if an individual is on the roll of a federally recognized Indian group, then he or she is an Indian; the degree of Indian blood is of no real consequence, although usually he or she has at least some Indian blood" (p. 5). Within this article, the term Native American refers to any individual who self-identifies as Native American and maintains cultural identification as a Native American through membership in a Native American tribe recognized by the state or Federal government or through other tribal affiliation and community recognition.

Specifically, participants in this pilot study consisted of Native American and non-Native American 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th grade students from two rural areas of North Carolina

(Graham and Swain Counties). These two areas were chosen because of their fairly even representation of Euro American and Native American students in the public schools (Neely, 1991), and the final participants were considered to be a sample of convenience. These particular geographic locations potentially included Native American students who varied across the acculturation continuum from very traditional to assimilated, (Neely, 1991). The choice of 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th grade was intended to include students both younger and older than the mandatory school attendance age of 16 (NCES, 2004), while also examining an age range considered to a period of identity development during adolescence and early adulthood in which an individual's personal values are established.

The resulting total sample of 142 participants consisted of 16 classrooms of Native American and non-Native American 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th grade students. There were 121 students (85.2%) who identified as white or Euro American, 1 African-American student (0.01%), 1 Latino student (0.01%), and 19 Native American students (13.4%) in the sample; three cases included incomplete demographic data. The following tribes were represented by the Native American students in the sample: Cherokee Nation, Eastern Band of Cherokee, Lumi, Mewoke, Mydue, Seminole, and Lakota (Sioux).

### *Instrumentation*

*Native American Acculturation Scale.* The authors used the Native American Acculturation Scale (NAAS; Author & Pichette, 2000), the primary author's adapted version of the Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican-Americans and the Suinn-Lew Asian Self-Identity Acculturation Scale (Atkinson, Lowe, & Matthews, 1995; Cuellar, Harris, & Jasso, 1980; Suinn, Ahuna, & Khoo, 1992), to investigate the levels of acculturation of Native American high school students. Recognizing the multidimensionality of acculturation and taking into account the issue of bicultural development, these instruments were created as an assessment of cognitive, behavioral, and attitudinal areas (Atkinson et al., 1995; Cuellar et al., 1980; Suinn et al., 1992). The NAAS was an adaptation created by rewording items on the Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican-Americans and the Suinn-Lew Asian Self-Identity Acculturation Scale in order to reflect appropriate references to Native American culture. The purpose of this instrument is to assess an individual's level of acculturation along a continuum ranging from "*traditional Native*

*American” to “assimilated mainstream American.”*

The NAAS can be administered individually or in groups, and has a 9th grade reading level. The instrument consists of 20 multiple choice questions covering language (5 items), identity (2 items), friendships (3 items), behaviors (4 items), generational/geographic background (5 items), and attitudes (1 item). Scores range from a low of 1 = *low acculturation* (or high Native American identity) to a high of 5 = *high acculturation* (or high mainstream American identity), with a score of 3.08 indicating "bicultural" (Suinn et al., 1992). The alpha coefficient for the NAAS in this study was 0.91, based on the sample size of 142.

*Wellness Evaluation of Lifestyle.* Integrating research and theoretical concepts from a variety of disciplines including anthropology, education, medicine, psychology, religion, and sociology, Witmer and Sweeney (1992) proposed a holistic model of wellness which considers the healthy functioning of the individual in the context of family, religion, education, business/industry, media, government, and community. According to this model of wellness, the five major life-tasks are *spirituality*; *self-regulation* (sense of worth, sense of control; realistic beliefs; emotional responsiveness and management; intellectual stimulation, problem-solving, and creativity; sense of humor; nutrition; exercise; self-care; stress-management; gender identity; and cultural identity); *work, recreation, and leisure*; *love*; and *friendship*. Based on this model, the Wellness Evaluation of Lifestyle (WEL; Myers, Witmer, & Sweeney, 1995) assesses an individual on each of the five life tasks (17 total subscales).

A special version of the WEL, the WEL-G, which has a 7th grade reading level, was used in this study (Myers et al., 1995). The WEL-G has 95 total items, on which participants rate each statement according to a five-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*. The alpha coefficients representing the reliability of the WEL-G in this study based on a sample size of 142 ranged from 0.50 to 0.81. These reliabilities were fairly consistent with reports in the literature of alpha coefficients, with adults, ranging from .58 to .89 for the scales.

## *Procedures*

This pilot study involved a descriptive research design examining Native American and non-Native American 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th grade students from rural areas of North Carolina. After receiving permission from school superintendents, principals of participating schools, and students' parents/guardians, appointments were scheduled with the coordinating school counselors in order to explain the procedures and distribute the questionnaires. Each of the schools preferred we enter into intact classrooms versus identifying Native American students and pulling them out of class. A written set of instructions for the administration of the instruments were given to the schools' coordinating school counselors. The coordinating school counselors and teachers of participating classrooms supervised the completion of the NAAS and the WEL-G by each of the students. A Demographic Information Form was completed by all students indicating: the name of their school, date of administration, their initials and date of birth (for coding purposes), age, gender, grade level, primary ethnic designation, tribal affiliation, family background, and current living situation.

## *Data Analysis*

Once the data were collected and scored, we calculated factor models and estimates of reliability for each scale on the NAAS and the WEL-G. In addition, we implemented multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVAs) to test the hypotheses. The dependent variables were participant scores on the NAAS and on the WEL-G and the independent variables were cultural/ethnic background (Native American and non-Native American) and grade level (9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th). A series of MANOVAs were performed on each of the dependent variables to examine the comparison of levels of acculturation by ethnicity and grade level; and the effect of level of acculturation on wellness. Univariate analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were utilized to examine group differences on individual scales. An alpha confidence level of .05 was used for acceptance of research hypotheses.

## Results

In order to examine the first hypothesis that there would be significant differences in the levels of acculturation between Native American and non-Native American 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th grade students as measured by the NAAS, MANOVA analyses were conducted. The results of the MANOVA on acculturation by ethnicity and grade level are presented in Table 2. As illustrated, there was a statistically significant difference between Native Americans and non-Native American students on acculturation, as measured by the NAAS. On average, Native American students scored lower on acculturation than non-Native American students, but still scored above the 3.08 cut-off point, indicating that the Native American students were somewhat culturally identified with a mainstream American identity (see means in Table 3). Therefore, hypothesis one was supported: there were significant differences in the levels of acculturation between Native American and non-Native American 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th grade students. However, no significant differences were revealed between Native American and non-Native American students on acculturation given differences in grade level.

Table 2

*MANOVA Results for Acculturation Scale by Ethnicity and Grade Level*

Factor	df	$\Delta F$	$p$
Ethnicity	1 142	11.84	.001
Grade Level	3 142	1.41	.242
Ethnicity by Grade Level	3 142	0.41	.745

\* $p < .05$

Interestingly, the Native American students' acculturation mean scores designated them as primarily bicultural, with neither a completely traditional Native American cultural identity, nor a completely assimilated mainstream American identity (see Table 3). Meanwhile, the acculturation mean scores of the non-Native American students designated them as mostly assimilated. Both of these findings were consistent with the current literature, which indicates a movement of many Native American youth away from traditional values, beliefs, and practices due to the effects of acculturation in the school environment (Cummins, 1992; Garcia & Ahler, 1992; Hornett, 1990; Ledlow, 1992; Mitchum, 1989; Sanders; 1987).

Table 3

*Means and Standard Deviations of Participants' Scores on the Native American Acculturation Scale by Ethnicity and Grade Level*

Ethnicity/Grade Level	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
Non-Native American	4.29	0.50	123
9th	4.20	0.47	38
10th	4.21	0.61	22
11th	4.41	0.32	40
12th	4.41	0.54	21
Native American	3.22	0.62	19
9th	3.23	0.50	5
10th	3.10	0.00	1
11th	3.16	0.68	12
12th	4.05	0.00	1

In order to examine the second hypothesis that there would be significant differences in the 17 subscales of wellness by level of acculturation (Traditional, Bicultural, Assimilated) between 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th grade students, as measured by the NAAS and the WEL-G, we conducted a series of MANOVA analyses. The sample (142 participants) was divided into the lower quartile (23.9%, Traditional), middle two quartiles (50.0%, Bicultural), and upper quartile (25.4%, Assimilated), according to scores on the NAAS. The means and standard deviations for each of the three groups are presented in Table 4. A MANOVA was performed on the scales of wellness by level of acculturation, indicating significant differences between the three acculturation groups, Wilks' Lambda  $F(2, 142) = 1.67, p < .05$ . Therefore, the second hypothesis was supported. Follow-up univariate ANOVAs on the individual wellness scales, illustrated in Table 5, indicated that there were significant differences between the three acculturation groups on Sense of Worth and Control, with Assimilated students scoring higher on Self-Worth, and Bicultural students scoring higher on Control.

Table 4

*Means and Standard Deviations of Participants' Scores on the Wellness Evaluation of Lifestyle by Level of Acculturation*

Wellness Scale		Traditional ( <i>n</i> = 34)	Bicultural ( <i>n</i> = 71)	Assimilated ( <i>n</i> = 36)
Spirituality	<i>M</i>	3.80	3.88	3.78
	<i>SD</i>	0.64	0.65	0.67
Sense of Worth	<i>M</i>	3.54	3.93	3.98
	<i>SD</i>	1.07	0.60	0.63
Control	<i>M</i>	3.43	3.87	3.80
	<i>SD</i>	0.75	0.64	0.58
Realistic Beliefs	<i>M</i>	3.43	3.55	3.40
	<i>SD</i>	0.71	0.66	0.59

Emotional Responsiveness				
	<i>M</i>	3.72	3.80	3.65
	<i>SD</i>	0.70	0.65	0.58
Intellectual Stimulation				
	<i>M</i>	3.61	3.71	3.81
	<i>SD</i>	0.78	0.66	0.71
Sense of Humor				
	<i>M</i>	3.74	3.97	3.97
	<i>SD</i>	0.83	0.59	0.61
Nutrition				
	<i>M</i>	3.08	3.54	3.42
	<i>SD</i>	0.98	0.76	0.84
Exercise				
	<i>M</i>	3.68	4.02	3.92
	<i>SD</i>	0.71	0.78	0.88

Table 4 (continued)

Wellness Scale		Traditional ( <i>n</i> = 34)	Bicultural ( <i>n</i> = 71)	Assimilated ( <i>n</i> = 36)
Self-Care				
	<i>M</i>	3.56	3.80	3.85
	<i>SD</i>	0.93	0.79	0.79
Stress Management				
	<i>M</i>	3.49	3.54	3.57
	<i>SD</i>	0.87	0.68	0.49
Gender Identity				
	<i>M</i>	4.12	4.09	3.90
	<i>SD</i>	0.76	0.64	0.76
Cultural Identity				
	<i>M</i>	3.97	3.93	3.62
	<i>SD</i>	0.74	0.63	0.69
Work, Rec., & Leisure				
	<i>M</i>	3.42	3.50	3.38
	<i>SD</i>	0.79	0.73	0.54

Friendship	M	3.81	3.98	3.90
	<i>SD</i>	0.66	0.63	0.53
Love	M	3.73	3.85	3.89
	<i>SD</i>	0.69	0.67	0.49
Perceived Wellness	M	3.93	4.04	4.02
	<i>SD</i>	0.92	0.65	0.6

Table 5

*Univariate ANOVA on Wellness by Level of Acculturation*

Effect	df	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Spirituality	2 142	.300	.741
Sense of Worth	2 142	3.36	.038
Control	2 142	4.59	.012
Realistic Beliefs	2 142	.735	.482
Emotional Resp.	2 142	.612	.544
Intellectual Stim.	2 142	.644	.527
Sense of Humor	2 142	1.34	.267
Nutrition	2 142	2.92	.058
Exercise	2 142	1.74	.179
Self-Care	2 142	1.17	.313
Stress Management	2 142	.127	.880
Gender Identity	2 142	1.01	.367
Cultural Identity	2 142	2.89	.060
Work, Rec., Leis.	2 142	.348	.707
Friendship	2 142	.713	.492
Love	2 142	.590	.556
Perc. Wellness	2 142	.222	.801

\* $p < .05$

The mean scores of the Bicultural and Assimilated students tended to be higher on the WEL-G than the mean scores of the Traditional students (see table 6). Results from the MANOVA and univariate ANOVA analyses on wellness by acculturation revealed significant

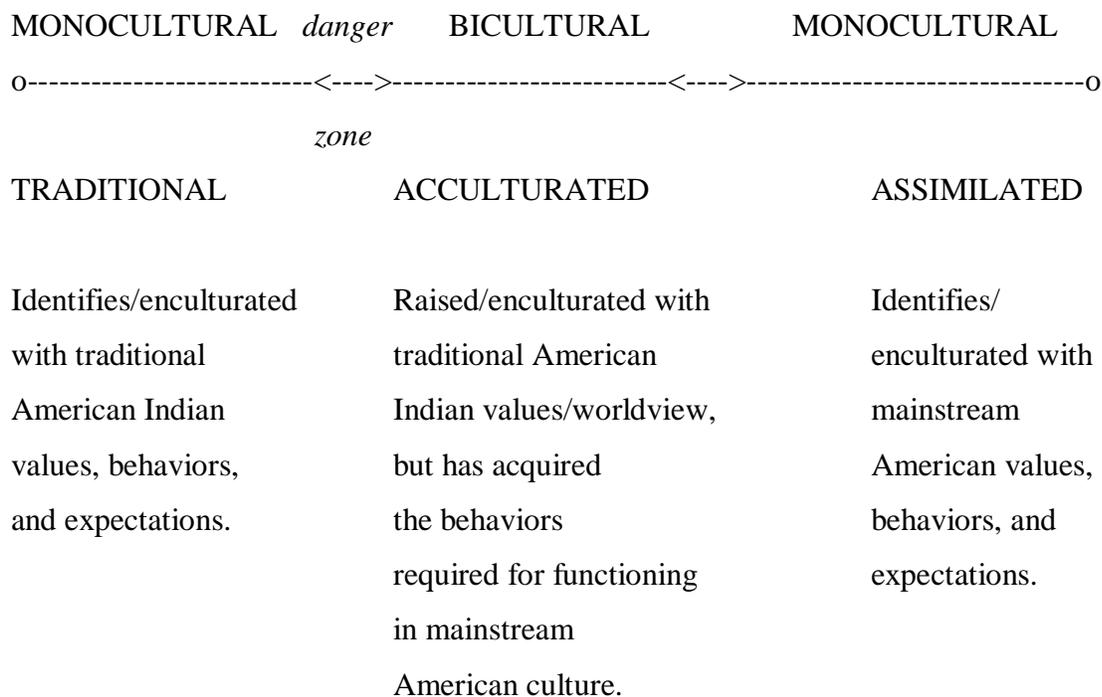
differences between the three acculturation groups on Sense of Worth and Control. The Assimilated group demonstrated a higher sense of self-acceptance, genuineness, and realness within themselves and in relation to others (Myers et al., 1995) than did members of the other two acculturation groups. Meanwhile the Bicultural group demonstrated feeling a greater sense of competence, confidence, and mastery (Myers et al.) than did members of the other two acculturation groups. This supports the assertion in the literature that bicultural students are often identified as having fewer personal, social, and academic difficulties because of their ability to effectively utilize a greater range of social behaviors and cultural communication in a variety of contexts and situations (LaFromboise & Rowe, 1983, Little Soldier, 1985).

Table 6

*Means and Standard Deviations for Participants' Score on the Wellness Evaluation of Lifestyle-G by Ethnicity*

	Non-Native American ( <i>n</i> = 123)		Native American ( <i>n</i> = 19)	
Wellness Scale	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Spirituality	3.82	0.66	3.88	0.65
Sense of Worth	3.83	0.77	4.10	0.57
Control	3.71	0.69	3.78	0.52
Realistic Beliefs	3.44	0.64	3.81	0.47
Emotional Resp.	3.70	0.64	4.02	0.53
Intellectual Stim.	3.70	0.70	3.88	0.50
Sense of Humor	3.89	0.66	4.15	0.63
Nutrition	3.35	0.88	3.33	0.73
Exercise	3.87	0.82	3.92	0.73
Self-Care	3.64	0.87	4.07	0.71
Stress Management	3.49	0.66	3.80	0.71
Gender Identity	4.00	0.70	4.28	0.56

Cultural Identity	3.78	0.68	4.19	0.46
Work, Rec., Leis.	3.42	0.71	3.66	0.51
Friendship	3.90	0.61	3.99	0.45
Love	3.82	0.61	3.96	0.62
Perceived Wellness	3.99	0.73	4.10	0.62



*Figure 1.* The acculturation continuum (adapted from Little Soldier, 1985).

Overall, the results of this study highlight the notion that an individual’s level of acculturation has an impact on specific areas of wellness. The wellness mean scores for Traditional students, overall, were significantly lower than those of the Bicultural or Assimilated students. This adds credence to the current literature which suggests that many students with traditional cultural values experience difficulties related to the incompatibility of cultural value

systems and the pressure associated with acculturation (Little Soldier, 1985; Sanders, 1987). By contrast, the wellness mean scores of Bicultural and Assimilated students, overall, were significantly higher, indicating that these students experience fewer personal, social, and environmental difficulties.

## **Discussion and Implications for Culturally-Responsive Counseling**

The results of this study with Native American and non-Native high school students have a number of implications for the training of culturally-responsive professional counselors and for culturally-responsive counseling practice. First, it is important to revisit the construct of acculturation as

“the cultural change that occurs when two or more cultures are in persistent contact. In this process, change may occur in each of the cultures in varying degrees... A particular kind of acculturation is assimilation, in which one culture changes significantly more than the other culture and, as a result, comes to resemble it. This process is often established deliberately through force to maintain control over conquered peoples, but it can occur voluntarily as well” (Garcia & Ahler, 1992, p. 24)

As we evaluated the study’s results, we took into account that the participants made up a public school sample of convenience, and because the students were in N.C. schools that maintain integrated racial/ethnic populations, we believed it was important to compare results of acculturation scores attained by Native students as well non-Native students. Specifically, we believed this was critical because the Native American participants spend their school days in mainstream culture environments with a larger number of non-Native students

As expected, Native American students scored significantly lower on acculturation levels than non-Native American students, although the Native American students were somewhat culturally identified with a mainstream American identity. The non-Native students reported higher acculturation levels, which signifies their cultural connections with the mainstream American society, and suggests that they would experience far less cultural discontinuity that

Native students. These findings support the notion that despite their participation in mainstream schools, Native American students continue to have differing levels of acculturation exist if compared to non-Native American students, and that level of acculturation is a major variable in understanding and counseling with Native Americans (Little Soldier, 1985; Thomason, 1991). Therefore, it is important for counselors working with Native American adolescents to assess each individual's level of acculturation in order to better understand his or her worldview and cultural frame of reference. Ultimately this will allow for professional counselors to create and implement culturally-responsive strategies for effectively working with Native persons, including the involvement of their traditional values, families/extended families, and tribal supports.

A somewhat surprising finding in this study involves the number of participants who scored in the “traditional” level on the NAAS. Based on the premise of the NAAS to measure individuals’ levels of acculturation along a continuum ranging from “traditional Native American” to “assimilated mainstream American,” it was unexpected that the number of participants who fell in the “traditional” level was greater than the number of Native American respondents in the study. We believe it is likely that there may have been random responding by some participants and/or socially-desirable responding (Paulhus, 1991) given the purpose of this study, which was described to the students before they participated.

As mentioned previously, cultural discontinuity is one explanation for the personal and social difficulties that many Native American adolescents experience, including feelings of anxiety, rejection, depression, isolation, boredom, and self-doubt (Charleston, 1994; D'Andrea, 1994; Ledlow, 1992; Sanders, 1987). The results of this study lend support to the cultural discontinuity hypothesis insofar as differences in wellness due to level of acculturation were demonstrated, with a Traditional group tending to score significantly lower on wellness than either Bicultural or Assimilated groups. Conversely, Bicultural and Assimilated groups scored significantly higher on wellness on average. In addition, Assimilated students demonstrated a significantly higher sense of worth, compared to Traditional and Bicultural students. Bicultural students, however, demonstrated a significantly higher sense of control, compared to Traditional and Assimilated students. These findings emphasize the need for counselors to assess the level of

acculturation of the student/client, regardless of race/ethnicity, by assessing a student's/client's cultural identity. This assessment may include attention to variables such as values, beliefs, language, friendships, customs, behaviors, generational/ geographic background, and attitudes (Atkinson et al., 1995; Cuellar et al., 1980; Suinn et al., 1992). These findings also emphasize the need for counselors to utilize culturally-grounded and culturally responsive interventions which promote, among other areas of wellness, a sense of self-acceptance, and a sense of competence and confidence in one's abilities to exercise imagination, knowledge, and skill to achieve goals and exercise individual choice (Myers et al., 1995).

Past literature indicates that individuals who demonstrate higher levels of spirituality, sense of worth, sense of control, realistic beliefs, emotional responsiveness, intellectual stimulation, sense of humor, nutrition, exercise, self-care, stress management, gender identity, cultural identity, satisfaction with work, recreation, and leisure, connection through friendship, and connection through love are the people who tend to demonstrate higher levels of wellness (Myers et al., 1995). One of the important implications of the results of this study is that, regardless of race/ethnicity, bicultural and assimilated individuals demonstrate higher levels of wellness than those who are not as acculturated. Bicultural competence, as the ability of an individual to effectively utilize "dual modes of social behavior that are appropriately employed in different situations" (LaFromboise & Rowe, 1983, p. 592), may be an important goal for working with Native American adolescents, particularly those who are more traditional. By developing realistic ways for helping students with traditional cultural value systems deal with personal, social, and environmental difficulties resulting from cultural discontinuity and the process of acculturation, professional counselors can focus on wellness and promote identity development, while also emphasizing culturally appropriate methods and communication styles. This might be accomplished, for example, through counseling interventions designed to enhance identity development and bicultural competence in traditional Native American adolescents using techniques such as values clarification, self-awareness exercises, stress management, and communication skills enhancement.

As mentioned earlier, one of the primary goals of counselors is to facilitate the optimum human development and functioning of the client (ACA, 2005). The results of this study point to

the importance of assessing Native American adolescents' cultural identity and level of acculturation, taking gender differences into consideration, and utilizing developmentally appropriate interventions with adolescents in order to facilitate wellness through identity development. Understanding students' cultural frame of reference is essential in utilizing appropriate counseling interventions and modes of communication to promote the wellness of both Native American and non-Native American youth during this critical period of development.

### *Limitations of the Study*

Although this study yields important information about the levels of acculturation of Native American and non-Native American 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th grade students; and the relationship between level of acculturation and wellness for a sample of Native American students, there are limitations that should be mentioned. First, this study involved limitations that either existed or were imposed for reasons of practicality, therefore affecting the generalizability of the results. The geographic region being considered in the study was limited to a rural setting in one location of the country. Therefore, the focus of the study was limited primarily to one major Native American tribe (the Eastern Band of Cherokee, although members of other Native American tribes were present) in one geographic region, thereby limiting the generalizability of the results to Native American high school students in rural N.C. Other geographical settings, suggested by the literature as being indicative of varying levels of acculturation, include urban and reservation areas (Garrett & Garrett, 1994). The choice of rural areas resulted from the need to capture a range of acculturation levels which would include the very traditional value orientation of the Cherokee people in Graham County, as well as the varying levels of acculturation of the large number of students from the Cherokee Indian Reservation attending the schools we entered.

Overall, when attempting to generalize the current results, counselors and researchers must take into consideration the limited number of Native American participants, and limited number of tribes represented in the study. In addition, student participants were solicited for *voluntary* participation through their schools. Those individuals who choose to volunteer in

research studies may respond in skewed manners (whether positive or negative) based on socially-desirable responding (Paulhus, 1991). Finally, the NAAS was adapted specifically for this study, and although it was based in theory, future studies could further define the reliability and validity of this self-report acculturation measure.

## **Conclusion**

The results of the current study, along with existing literature, suggest the importance of counselor training that incorporates a developmental focus, and provides counselors with information concerning Native American cultural values, beliefs, and practices; the impact of acculturation, and differences in levels of acculturation; developmental issues of Native American adolescents in a cultural context; and culturally responsive and relevant goals and interventions in the counseling process. These issues might be addressed through readings, observation, critical incidents, interviews, modeling, role-play, and supervised practice in counselor education courses such as counseling theories and techniques, career development, group counseling, school counseling, counseling adolescents, counseling children, and multicultural counseling, in which the emphasis is on promoting the development of the client/student through appropriate methods of communication and intervention.

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