Foster Youth’s Cultural Identity

An Overlooked Piece of Foster Youth Success

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The Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978

Historical Background
90% of the AI/AN children placed in an out of home placement were placed in a non-Native home.

Source: Association on American Indian Affairs
Disparities in Child Welfare

White/Caucasian Children

- 200 Reports
  - Results:
    - 50 investigations
    - 25 substantiated
    - 8 children placed in foster care

American Indian/Alaska Native Children

- 200 Reports
  - Results:
    - 100 investigations
    - 50 substantiated
    - 32 children placed in foster care

Source: Center for the Study of Social Policy, CSSP (2007)
Disproportionality Rate of AI/AN Children in Foster Care

What are the elements of ICWA?

Sets **federal requirements** that apply to state child custody proceedings involving an Indian child who is a member of a federally recognized tribe. Key components are:

1) **Notice** to Tribe with right of intervention

2) Presumptive **transfer to tribal court** at the request of parent or tribe (if no parental objection)

3) **Active efforts** to keep the family together

4) **Higher standard of evidence** prior to removal or termination of parental rights supported by a **QEW**

5) Following **placement preferences** for foster care and adoption
Under ICWA, who is an Indian child?

Element 2: Involving an “Indian child”

– Unmarried
– Under 18 years of age
– Who is either:
  • A tribal member, or
  • The biological child of tribal member and eligible for membership
What are Active Efforts?

affirmative, active, thorough, and timely efforts intended to keep an Indian child with his or her family

Active efforts are:

- required from the moment the possibility of removal arises (including investigation and provision of family services)
- made to maintain and reunite a child with his or her family
- required while a state or agency investigates whether a child is ICWA-eligible

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<tr>
<th>Reasonable</th>
<th>Active</th>
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<tr>
<td>Referral</td>
<td>Arranging services, transportation, helping family (extended family) engage</td>
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<tr>
<td>Managing Case</td>
<td>Proactively engaging in diligent casework, follow-up, visits, service provision</td>
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<td>Meeting minimum policy standards</td>
<td>Creatively meeting the needs of the family involved (e.g., more face-to-face contact than required by policy)</td>
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<td>Mainstream service provision</td>
<td>Culturally appropriate service provision</td>
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<td>Updating tribe/tribal social worker</td>
<td>Seeking service and case management suggestions and actively co-case managing where tribe has available personnel</td>
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Culture as a Protective Factor

Source: National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention

Source: Asinawaa Bi'kwe
Supporting Culture in a trauma-informed way
“L.A.’s One and Only Native American Foster Mom”

CREDIT: Isabel Avila; Lisa Smith at her Diamond Bar home.
Source: The Chronicle of Social Change
What is Cultural Identity? Is it *actually* important?
What is Cultural Identity? Is it *actually* important?

- Cultural identity is a significant part of who we are; it plays a key role in our everyday lives. ...core values and adopts their sociocultural practices and rituals.

- Proven important in general and immigration literature
What about foster youth?

- Cultural Identity
- Outcomes
Cultural Identity and Foster Youth

- State-wide survey in California

- Open to all, those with foster care experience and those without

- Questions about social well being, demographics, and foster care experience
Example of Questions- Social Well Being

On an average day….

- Do you have 3 or more good friends on whom you can depend on?
- On an average day, do you have someone you trust, who you could reach out to when you are having a hard time or a bad day?
- On an average day, are you part of 2 or more communities or organizations? (ex: gym, club, volunteer group, sports team, church, etc.)

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements...

- I have stable, consistent, housing
- I regularly have access to 3 full meals every day
- I feel like my life as a whole is stable
The Usborne Scale is used to measure culture identity strength. Cultural identity and ethnic identity, in this survey, are interchangeable.

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements...

- My beliefs about my cultural group often conflict with one another
- On one day I might have an opinion of my cultural group and on another day I might have a different opinion
- Sometimes I think I know the other cultural groups better than I know my group
- My beliefs about my cultural group seem to change very frequently
- If I were asked to describe my cultural group, my description might end up being different from one day to another day
- In general, I have a clear sense of what my cultural group is
Foster Care Experience Questions
1. When thinking about your culture are there certain foods that you associate with it?
   - Yes
   - No
Foster Care Experience Questions

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   - Yes
   - No

1.1. When thinking about your culture, how important is it to you that you are able to eat or cook your culture’s foods?
   - Very Important
   - Important
   - Indifferent
   - Not Very Important
   - Not Important at All
Foster Care Experience Questions

1. When thinking about your culture are there certain foods that you associate with it?
   ○ Yes
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   ○ Very Important
   ○ Important
   ○ Indifferent
   ○ Not Very Important
   ○ Not Important at All

1.2. In foster care, when thinking about your culture, and being able to eat or cook your cultures food, do you feel that you were:
   ○ Able to as much as I wanted
   ○ Able to almost as much as I wanted
   ○ Not able to nearly as much as I wanted
   ○ Not able to as much as I wanted
   ○ Not able to at all
Foster Care Experience Findings

Not able to at all….

- 25% eat or cook their culture’s food
- 31% hear or speak their culture’s native language
- 23% attend or participate in their cultures holiday or age milestone events
- 75% experience or participate in traditional cultural dress
- 22% experience, participate, or listen to cultural dancing, and music
Overview of Findings

The control group (non former foster youth) and former foster youth were comparable.

Allows findings when comparing the two groups to have validity.
Overview of Findings

Those who are former foster youth have significantly lower cultural identity strength than those who were not in foster care.
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Overview of Findings

When foster youth have access to aspects of their culture that are important to them as much or nearly as much as they wanted to…

ey had a higher cultural identity strength
Overview of Findings

Cultural identity strength is positively correlated with well being

The stronger the cultural identity strength, the higher the well being score
## Summary of Findings

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<th>Assumed</th>
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<td>☑ Cultural identity strength is positively correlated to social well being</td>
<td>☑ Foster youth have weaker cultural identity strength than non foster youth</td>
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<td>☑ When foster youth have access to their culture, they have a stronger sense of their cultural identity</td>
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Summary of Findings/ Further Steps

Cultural Identity Strength is tied to...
- Higher self-esteem
- Higher education levels
- Better psychological adjustment
- Better coping abilities
- Lower levels of loneliness and depression
- Higher levels of overall well-being

Foster Youth Have Lower Cultural Identity Strength and...
- Foster youth are not always allowed access to parts of their culture
- When they have access to their culture, their cultural identity is strengthened

What exists
- Indian Child Welfare Act

What can exists
- Policy and Practice Changes
Practice Tips
Bibliography


Questions? Comments?