

Coming Home: Ecoculture and Suicide Prevention

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Presenter



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Dr. Cheryl Fisher is a certified trauma specialist with over 20 years of clinical experience and has deployed locally and nationally with the American Red Cross Disaster Mental Health Team and Maryland Responds Medical Corp. Her research interests include the role of spirituality in overall well being, and the therapeutic benefits of engaging in nature. She is an international speaker, columnist for Counseling Today Online, and author of ***Mindfulness and Nature Based Therapeutic Techniques for Children.***



Objectives

- ▶ Participants will
 1. Define Eco-culture.
 2. Discuss ways to assess for eco-culture.
 3. Identify practical nature-based techniques to promote resiliency.
 4. Apply eco-culture to a case study.

Meditation





Sensory Awareness Inventory (SAI)- George W. Burns, Australian psychologist

Sight	Sound	Smell	Taste	Touch	Activity

Connectedness to Nature Scale


(Mayer & Frantz, 2009)

- ___ 1. I often feel a sense of oneness with the natural world around me.
- ___ 2. I think of the natural world as a community to which I belong.
- ___ 3. I recognize and appreciate the intelligence of other living organisms.
- ___ 4. I often feel disconnected from nature.
- ___ 5. When I think of my life, I imagine myself to be part of a larger cyclical process of living.
- ___ 6. I often feel a kinship with animals and plants.
- ___ 7. I feel as though I belong to the Earth as equally as it belongs to me.
- ___ 8. I have a deep understanding of how my actions affect the natural world.

Time in Nature Journal

- ▶ How much time do you spend in nature?
- ▶ How much time do you want to spend in nature?
- ▶ What types of things do you like to do in nature?
 - ▶ Eco-tourism
- ▶ What gets in the way of you doing those things?
 - ▶ TakeBackYourTime.org





Eco-cultural Assessment: Nature and Me

- ▶ Childhood
 - ▶ Grew up in hot places- tropics (San Antonio, Philippine Islands)
 - ▶ Camp, walked trails, pet dogs, cane pole fishing, exotic flower gardens, fruit trees, built forts, climbed trees and hung from limbs
 - ▶ Grandmother had a vegetable garden, peach orchard and guinea chickens
- ▶ Adult
 - ▶ Live on Weems Creek near Chesapeake Bay
 - ▶ Hike, bike, kayak, vegetable, tea and herb gardens, Golden Doodle Therapy dogs
 - ▶ Mason Bees, Bats and raise Monarch Butterflies, compost, rain barrel, and recycle
 - ▶ Dabble with medicinal botany
 - ▶ Suburban backyard forager and steward
- ▶ Researcher/Author
 - ▶ Mindfulness and Nature Based Therapeutic Techniques for Children



Is that all?

- ▶ Nature is healing
 - ▶ Green space provides us with phytoncides (terpenes)
 - ▶ Earth provides an ionic exchange (lowers BP, increases serotonin and NK cells)
 - ▶ Promotes mindfulness by offering novel experiences with varied stimuli.
- ▶ Reductionist approach to our relationship with nature?
 - ▶ Example: Crabcake vs. boiled chicken and rice

Digging Deeper

- ▶ Accupuncture questions
 - ▶ Sun or Moon?
 - ▶ Favorite Season?
 - ▶ Rain or Sunshine?
 - ▶ Hot or Cold Climate?

Ancestral Connection to Land

- ▶ Celtic musings
 - ▶ Bodhran and Dulcimer
 - ▶ Ancestry research
 - ▶ DNA test
- ▶ Scotland
- ▶ Stirlingshire
- ▶ Witch Memorial





Why is this important?

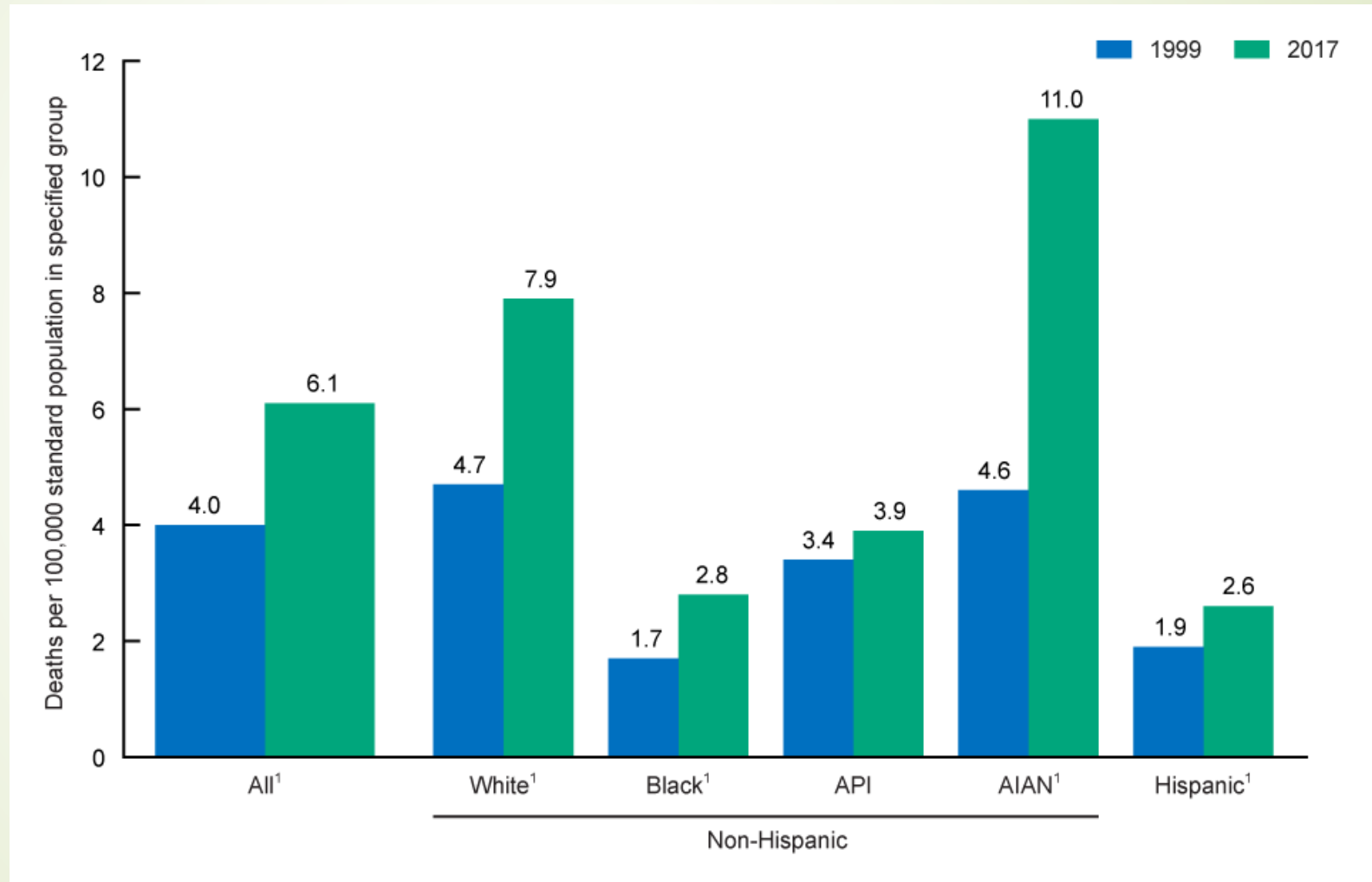
- Identify development is the “process of dialogue between the person and the host culture. The individual appropriates meaning from the culture in the form of important attachments to people, events, valued objects, environments and even orientations to our bodies (i.e., embodied identity).”~ McAdams, Josselson & Lieblich



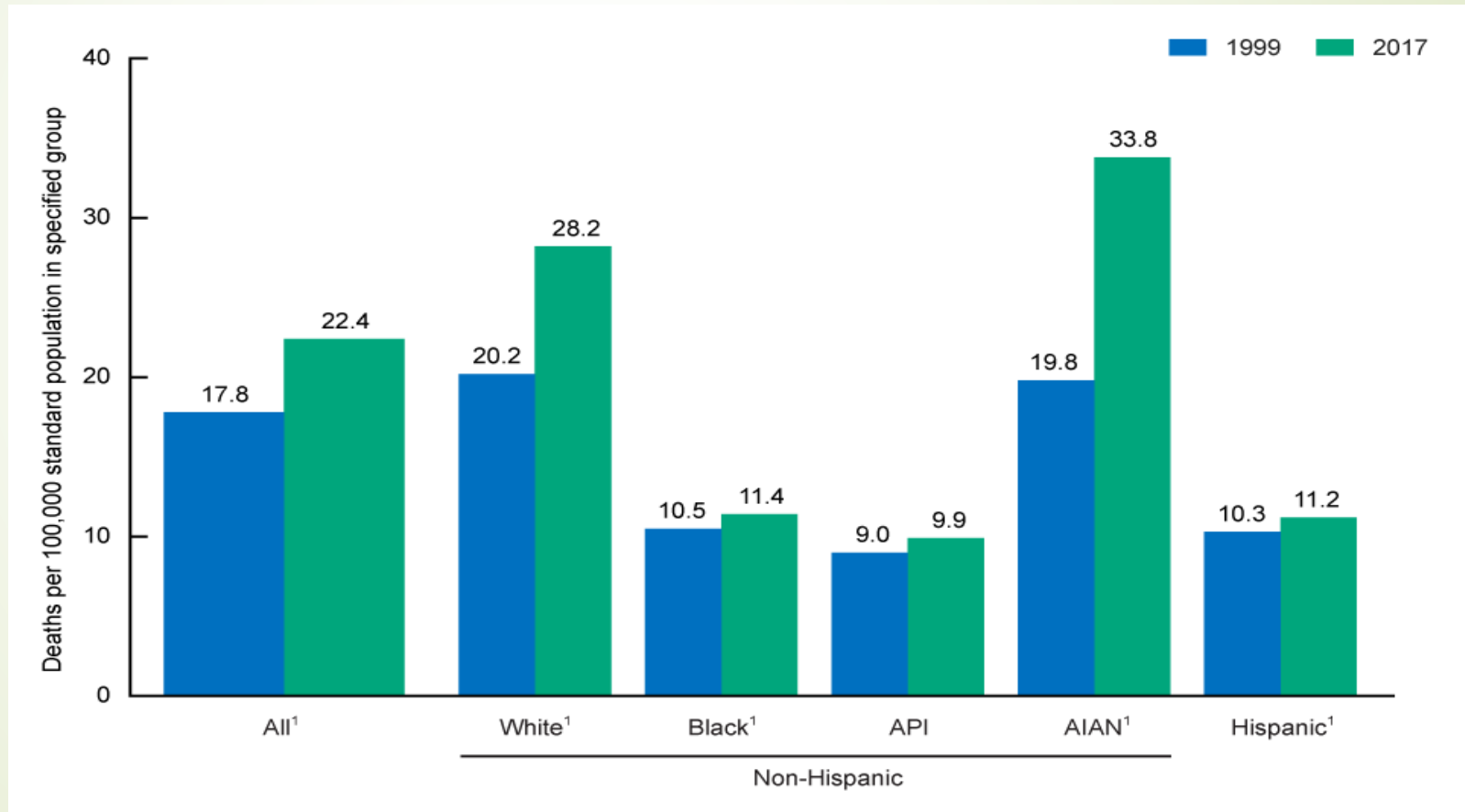
Why is this important?

- ▶ The history of humanity is held in the context of the ecosystems.
- ▶ Conflict leaves marks on the earth and with the people and animals who reside in that setting.
- ▶ Although most of us do not rely on cues from the sea or sky to determine our fate or next move, we still rely on the global ecocommunity to provide food, clean water, medicine and oxygen.
- ▶ We remain interconnected, and our connection is just as important to our overall well-being as it was centuries ago.
- ▶ Many marginalized communities have been stripped of their narratives and the lands their stories occurred.
- ▶ **Research indicates that connecting to our ancestral stories and landscapes promotes a sense of belonging and contributes to resiliency and has demonstrated reduction in suicide rates in communities.**

Suicide Rates and Ethnicity For Females



Suicide Rates and Ethnicity For Males



Research

- ▶ Anungu (Australian indigenous) with disabilities are cared for on ancestral land with family and friends in community .
 - ▶ *“This is my home. My ngura (homeland), my own community. I was born here a long time ago, right here. (Person with disability 7)”*
 - ▶ *“I can, you know, stay out here and look at the Rock and the sun shining and smell the free air, whatever, you know, like, I am finally here. I can walk somewhere. I can go out bush. (Carer 25)”*



Dew, A., Barton, R., Gilroy, J., Ryan, L. , Lincoln, M., Jensen, H., Flood, V., Taylor, K., McCrae, K. (2019). Importance of Land, family and culture for a good life: Remote Aboriginal people with disability and carers. *Wiley Online Journal*

Sharing Culture: The Importance of Land <http://sharingculture.info/the-importance-of-land.html>

Understanding Culture

- ▶ Surface Culture
 - ▶ Food, dress, music, holidays
- ▶ Shallow Culture
 - ▶ Unspoken rules
 - ▶ Attitudes toward elders
 - ▶ Nature of friendships
 - ▶ Concepts of time
 - ▶ Personal space
 - ▶ Social violation at this level results in mistrust, distress or social friction



Understanding Culture

- Deep Culture
 - Unconscious assumptions
 - Cosmology(good/bad)
 - Ethics
 - Spirituality
 - Health
 - Theories of group harmony (e.g. competition or collaboration)

Mental models(schema) are encoded at this level.



Culturally Responsive Concepts

- Collectivism vs. Individualism
- Oral vs. Written History
- Cyclical vs. Linear Time
- Earth Centered





Narratives

- ▶ “As a child I had a very intimate relationship with the creek and woods in the valley, one that despite my young age, I now understand was ancient in its nature. A few new people moved into the area, drawn by its beauty, and in the tradition of the suburban dream, trampled all over that beauty with gaudy uncreative architecture, hideous grass lawns, and infernal lampposts that stay lit around the clock, alienating the nocturnal creatures they claim to love and marring the night sky.
- ▶ Regardless of my observations of their intrusion, I was dedicated to maintaining my relationship with the creek much like I had been, visiting her, cheering her up, bringing her gifts, telling her my stories and listening to hers.”~Acquimin from Black Land Project
- ▶ <http://www.blacklandproject.org/stories/get-off-my-property>

Narratives

- ▶ *“The ongoing effects of colonialism is one reason why people in our communities are suffering from a wide array of mental health issues. Colonialism continues to decimate Indigenous Peoples’ identities via many tactics, including assimilation, education, the economy, land dispossession, violence and land degradation.*
- ▶ *One of the biggest assaults on our identity is the assault on our lands. We’ve been removed from our lands. They’ve been decimated by the resource extraction industry. The land and our use of it formed our identity for thousands of years.*
- ▶ ***When we’re removed from our lands, we’re removed from understanding how we exist as a distinct people. We lose our ancestors’ teachings, and the teachings of the land itself and how all creation exists with one another”*** (Sanchez, 2018).



Narratives

- "I anticipated a park in a natural pristine state. Like any other park, it would have trees, grass, water," said Louise McDonald (Native name Wa'keraktste), a member of the Bear Clan from Akwesasne, N.Y. "I was frozen for a minute because I felt it had been choked and that it wasn't a true representation of the original intentions of the space. It just seemed to be purposely buried with a cover-up **narrative**. There certainly seems to be a feeling of erasure intended to remove any spirit that would imply that we were once there."

Narratives

African Americans did not just have land taken from them...they were removed from land...

oppressed on the land

and then removed from the land they were tending.

Black Land Project works to help African Americans reconnect to the land in an empowering way.

Restorative Narrative Themes

- **Identity/Self-** embrace a shared group identity whose substance is formed not just by one's relationship to the community but also to the land and one's ancestors, which may include plants, animals and other elements of nature.
- **Historical Trauma-**suffer not only traumas of emotional, physical and sexual abuse and/or family violence but also from intergenerational trauma inherited via shared experiences of genocide, colonization, and alienation
- **Culturally Specific Mental Health and Well-being Practices-**have traditional psychological systems and healing practices, often based in spirituality, ceremony and ritual (e.g., "limpias" or spiritual cleansings among Mayans in Guatemala), but also relevant are language, harmony with the community and the environment, and cultural practices.
- **Cultural Mistrust-** address the mistrust inherent in the therapeutic relationship
- **Empowerment-**Empower them with the necessary tools to develop evidence- based culturally relevant mental health constructs and paradigms .
- **Political Action-**stand up for the dispossessed but also support political movements that preserve the existing way of life of traditional Indigenous communities.

➤ Ocampo, 2010, pp IV-V

Nature as Culturally
Responsive
Co-Therapist

*Nature itself is the best
physician~ Hippocrates*





Culturally Responsive Eco- Therapy

Assess

Assess for Eco-culture

- Dig deep
- Ask about ancestors

Engage in

Engage in natural settings

- Outdoors
- Indoors
- Technology

Help

Help clients create their OWN Eco-cultural Narrative

Engage in Natural Settings

- Nature walk
- Bring elements in
- Nature Photos
- Nature Journal
- Medicine bag
- If I were tree?
- Transitional Object
- Nature drumsticks
- My Rock Tale
- Circle Talks



Action



Final Thoughts



May the raindrops
fall lightly on your brow.

May the soft winds
freshen your spirit.

May the sunshine
brighten your heart

May the burdens
of the day rest
lightly upon you.

And may God enfold you
in the mantle of His love.

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