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An Integrated Model of Family Strengths and Resilience: Theorizing at the Intersection of Indigenous and Western Paradigms

In this article, we theorize a new conceptual framework of family strengths and resilience emerging at the intersection of indigenous and Western approaches to family systems. Our work acknowledges that there are universal tenets pertaining to family and family relations within many cultural paradigms, yet few family theories have included or integrated an indigenous lens. Here, we draw on ecosystemic and “wheel of life” worldviews to guide our work, recognizing that much of Western family science and indigenous ways of knowing view family life as relational, interdependent, and connected to larger ecosystems. To explicate our integrated framework of family strengths and resilience, we delineate five domains: family as a living organism, family connectedness to nature, family centering processes, family rituals, and transgenerational family relations. Last, we discuss implications of our conceptual framework for research and clinical family practice.

Viewing family systems, family strengths, and resilience processes from a platform on which several worldviews meet has the potential to uncover new and alternative perspectives that

expand our understanding of families and our collective potential to promote healing and healthy functionality. Yet within family and other social sciences, few frameworks on family strengths and resilience exist that integrate indigenous thought and Western cultures at their intersections (Lucero, 2011; L. T. Smith, 2012). Historically, European crusades to colonize indigenous peoples through genocide, forced migration, forced integration, forced family separation, and the seizure of ancestral lands and resources resulted in the marginalization, oppression, and near erasure of indigenous voice (Deloria, Silko, & Tinker, 2003; L. T. Smith, 2012). That near erasure also influenced research and theory involving indigenous families and communities. Extant research on indigenous populations has too often been framed using deficit perspectives and focused on family problems while also ignoring or decontextualizing the influence of larger societal forces and social-made traumas (e.g., anti-indigenous and racist laws, policies, practices) on family outcomes (Kovach, 2010; Letiecq, 2019; L. T. Smith, 2012).

Today, work to acknowledge, redress, and repair past atrocities, institutionalized racism, and resultant health disparities, and to establish authentic, just, equitable, and valued relations between cultures is growing (Simonds & Christopher, 2013; Wilson, 2007). The acceleration of changes in global migration, technological advances, and the increasing accessibility of digital communication,

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information, and transportation has likewise propelled encounters between diverse cultures and societies. These changes have lessened the distance between indigenous and Western cultures and provide increased opportunities for cross-cultural contact, Western reparations, and resilience building across individuals, families, and systems. In our view, the strength of our multicultural society relies not only on coexisting in diversity but also on how we as people integrate, understand, and operate within representational frameworks that uphold and respect universal tenets and the diverse ways of knowing that affect our lives and families within complex social systems (Warner & Grint, 2006).

In this article, we theorize about family strengths and resilience at the intersections of indigenous and Western cultures to inform future research and clinical practice. Our work centers on a strengths-based perspective and recognizes that family strengths and resilience may manifest and operate differently within diverse groups, cultures, and/or across contexts (Ungar, 2011). We define family strengths as the core processes and relationships that serve as coping mechanisms and resources during times of stress and adversity (Schrodt, 2009). We define family resilience as the ability of family systems to employ their collective strengths to withstand, grow, and rebound from adversities (Masten, 2018; Orthner, Jones-Sanpei, & Williamson, 2004; Walsh, 2002). Adversities can emanate from within families or externally, such as traumatic exposures to violence or institutional betrayals (e.g., forced family separation).

But before we engage in the work of integrating indigenous and Western paradigms, it is imperative to recognize and reconcile the existing uneven cultural playing field that is built on the basis of White, Western cultural supremacy (Leonardo, 2004; Letiecq, 2019). Western ways of knowing (WOKs) and knowledge generation have been advanced through established Western-dominated structures (e.g., universities, libraries, publishing houses) designed for knowledge transfer. Indigenous WOKs, in contrast, have been historically, systematically, and institutionally subjugated to the margins (Kovach, 2010; L. T. Smith, 2012). Therefore, in this article, we first situate indigenous WOKs in the context of cultural and structural inequality and Western domination. Next, we examine indigenous WOKs and discuss how they relate to or diverge from Western understanding of

family strengths and resilience processes. We then introduce a new framework that builds on universal truths to guide our understanding and advancement of family strengths and resilience. This framework includes five domains: family as a living organism, family connectedness to nature, family centering processes, family rituals, and transgenerational family relations. Last, we discuss implications of our conceptual framework for research and clinical family practice.

Our theorizing reflects the integration of our scholarship and experience. As a Native Peruvian of Inkan descent, the first author grew up learning about the interconnectedness of family, community, and nature. As a mental health professional and cross-cultural group facilitator, Sánchez has collaborated with and been influenced by indigenous elders, scholars, and Native healers in Cuzco, Peru, and more recently, with the Lakota Sioux on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota. The second author, a family scholar of European American descent, draws on her research on resilience processes among Native American families, Mexican and Central American immigrant families, and grandparents rearing grandchildren. The third author, also of European American descent, is both a family scholar and a clinician who has worked most recently with Roma peoples in Eastern Europe. Together, the authors integrate indigenous and Western WOKs while theorizing about family strengths and resilience.

RATIONALE FOR A NEW, INTEGRATED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A Call for Cultural Reparations

In countries such as the United States where the dominant culture is Westernized and individualistic, alternative worldviews, such as those of indigenous populations, are too often marginalized, ignored, or discounted (Burnette & Figley, 2017). Yet failure to recognize, value, and promote alternative perspectives from historically and presently marginalized cultures hinders our collective ability to explore solutions to complex social problems. The resulting disconnect continues to negatively affect individuals and families not only from marginalized and indigenous communities, but also from dominant cultural communities, given our connectedness and our diminished human

potential as a collective. Integrative conceptual work is critically needed to repair or mend ongoing cultural harms and expand strengths-based frameworks that include indigenous sources of knowledge (Burnette & Figley, 2017; Garrett, Brubaker, Torres-Rivera, West-Olatunji, & Conwill, 2008; McCubbin, McCubbin, Thompson, & Thompson, 1998; Sherman, 2014; Wilcox, 2002).

The tragic history of genocide and extermination of Native cultures and the oppressive policies of forced family separation and assimilation have suppressed opportunities for equal collaboration for centuries. As a result, the WOKs of Western culture became essentialized, instantiated into laws, policies and practices, and promoted as best while indigenous WOKs were made invisible or irrelevant. This dominance of Western ideals and hegemonic supremacy over non-Western peoples has had and continues to have dire consequences for indigenous families globally, as evidenced by their disproportionately high rates of poverty and infant and adult mortality, among numerous other indicators of poor health (Simonds & Christopher, 2013). Although much research has focused on which behavioral choices and changes indigenous people can make to improve their health outcomes devoid of systems change, indigenous health outcomes likely will not improve radically until systems center on indigenous family strengths and resilience building while also redressing centuries of indigenous oppression (Bailey, Letiecq, Visconti, & Tucker, 2019; Burnette & Figley, 2016; L. T. Smith, 2012).

Studies conducted on marginalized populations in the past have often contributed new knowledge that benefited the dominant culture alone or were used to justify majority cultural dominance (DiAngelo, 2018; Lucero, 2011). This type of Western-based knowledge creation served to oppress, deny, and marginalize knowledge creation generated from people of color about people of color and White people alike. Within the family science field, Western knowledge creation served to mythologize the Standard North American Family (SNAF) as best while also problematizing and pathologizing families that did not conform to SNAF configurations, including indigenous family systems (Letiecq, 2019; Walsh, 2015). The fundamentalism of “SNAF as best” was based on the “typical” White, middle-class, suburban, nuclear families who ascribed to patterns, such

as “proper” gender roles, which were viewed as universal and essential for healthy child development (Parsons & Bales, 1955; D. E. Smith, 1993). Indigenous communities as well as communities of color whose families represented their cultural ways of knowing; upheld their cultural traditions, mores, and norms; and reflected individual and familial adaptations to institutionalized racism and historical trauma were pathologized and othered for their lack of adherence to SNAF and their deviance from the majority culture (Letiecq, 2019; L. T. Smith, 2012).

As a result of such hurtful legacies, it is perhaps unsurprising that indigenous people became and, in many circumstances, remain distrustful of Western science. As Linda Smith (2012) and others (Bermúdez, Muruthi, & Jordan, 2016; Lucero, 2011) have noted, indigenous people often perceive studies about them as misappropriations of their cultural knowledge due to cultural insensitivity (or worse) in data collection, analytical approaches, interpretation of findings, and dissemination of results. As part of the work of cultural reparation, a growing number of scholars have called for more collectivistic, democratic, and multidisciplinary approaches to scientific investigation, intervention, and practice, especially when working cross-culturally and in partnership with indigenous and other marginalized communities (e.g., Burnette & Figley, 2016; Letiecq & Schmalzbauer, 2012; Simonds & Christopher, 2013; Wilson, 2007).

A Call for the Integration of Universal Knowledge

Cultures from around the globe hold knowledge that can be grouped in two types. One type is the knowledge and cosmology particular to certain populations (i.e., culture-specific); another type is universal, consisting of contributions to humankind (Simonds & Christopher, 2013). Some culture-specific knowledge within the Western paradigm—such as the concept of the American family—has been used to measure family well-being among indigenous communities over time (Kovach, 2010; D. E. Smith, 1993), often with adverse and problematic outcomes to those communities. Cultural-specific knowledge is important to delineate, but it should not be used to justify the advancement and domination of certain cultures over others.

Universal knowings can be found among the many scriptures and ancient indigenous teachings shared around the world. Universal knowledge derived from multiple sources—Western, indigenous, other cultures—should be translatable and serve the interests of all human beings, in this case, to promote family strengths and resilience. As noted by the Native American Health Center (NAHC), a Bay Area organization serving urban Native populations, indigenous traditional practices are more than complementary forms of healing. Rather, they are stand-alone practices that can be of benefit to all, including Westernized populations (Lucero, 2011). Many North American Indian cultures, for example, provide psychological and emotional support for deploying and returning warriors (soldiers) within the familial and communal context. Before departure, Lakota war soldiers often participate in culture-specific ceremonies in which each soldier receives a prayer song designed to guide and protect him or her during combat. Meanwhile, family members and the community participate in a tribal farewell ceremony (O’Neill, 1999; Wilson, 2007). Upon return, “coming home” ceremonies led by elders, older veterans, and family members welcome war veterans and provide crucial emotional support for healthy reintegration. Recognizing the benefit of “coming home” rituals to non-Native American war veterans, a growing number of intercultural psychotherapy programs have started to apply these practices—derived from universal “truths”—collaboratively with Native North American elders and medicine people. These programs can provide healing particularly to those war veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder and related problems. In such interventions, family members are actively involved in homecoming rituals, storytelling, and releasing war-related traumas (Tick, 2005; Wilson, 2007).

The essence of these universal knowings and practices, understood as both ancient and “living,” have protected and brought healing to cultures across time and place (Simonds & Christopher, 2013). To build our framework, we draw on a strengths-based philosophy, which assumes that all families have strengths and resilience processes they can build on and use to meet their own needs, accomplish their goals, overcome hardships, and promote the well-being of their family systems (Powell,

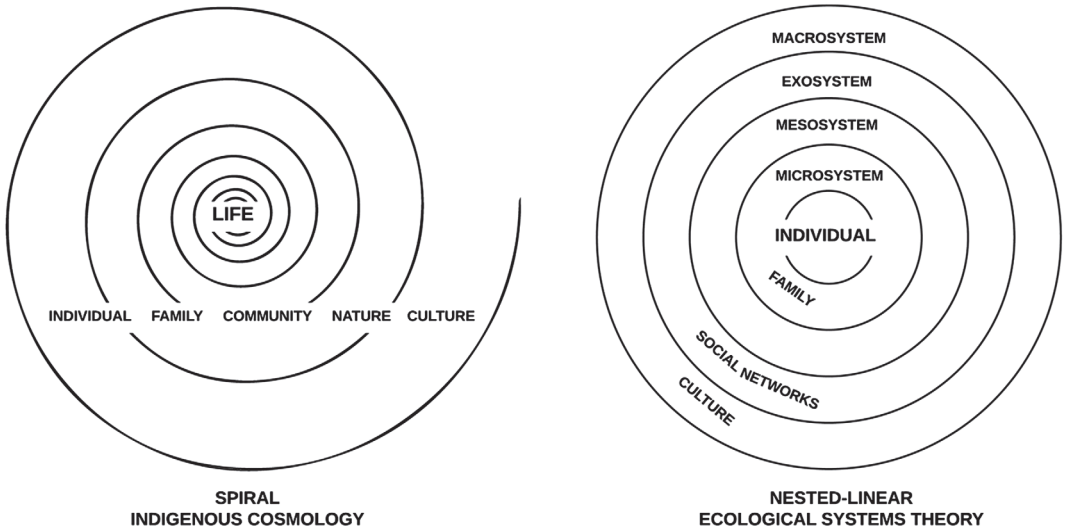
Batsche, Ferro, Fox, & Dunlap, 1997). These strengths may be embedded in the family’s beliefs, cultural and ethnic heritage, and/or socioeconomic background (Bailey, Letiecq, Erickson, & Koltz, 2013). These strengths may also be informed by experiences of historical oppression, marginalization, and historical trauma, as well as the abilities of individuals, families, and communities to overcome societal inequities and injustices, build resilience, and thrive despite their social-made circumstances (Burnette & Figley, 2016).

Although we explore the areas of complementarity to surface universal truths shared among indigenous and Western worldviews, we also acknowledge that marked differences exist among these worldviews that may be incompatible. For example, historical differences remain in the way both worldviews conceptualize and experience the natural world. For instance, in the Western worldview, knowledge is considered human centered; as such, humans are considered stewards of nature allowed by Providence to manage land and natural resources for economic gain and progress (Lucero, 2011). Indigenous worldview, in contrast, understands nature and land as home. Ownership of land or natural resources among indigenous people is inconceivable because the relationship with nature is considered sacred (Deloria et al., 2003; Kovach, 2010). Although these contrasting worldviews may present incompatibilities, we believe that there remain commonalities that can be identified and integrated to advance family well-being.

AN INTEGRATED MODEL OF FAMILY STRENGTHS AND RESILIENCE

In this section, we discuss five domains that undergird our understanding of family strengths and resilience at the intersection of indigenous and western WOKs: (a) family as a living organism, (b) family connectedness with nature, (c) family centering processes, (d) family rituals, and (e) transgenerational family relations. To describe the commonalities and particularities among cultures of the Americas, we use the term *indigenous cultures*; to describe regional thoughts or differences, we use *North American* or *South American*. To provide culture-specific examples, we primarily reference the Inka culture (of western South America, currently Peru, Bolivia, Argentina, and Ecuador) and

FIGURE 1. FAMILY AS A LIVING SYSTEM: INDIGENOUS AND WESTERN PERSPECTIVES.



the Lakota Sioux culture in the United States (of present-day South Dakota, North Dakota, Nebraska, and Wyoming). Before delving into the five domains specifically, we first ground our work in ecosystemic and wheel-of-life worldviews. We use the term *wheel of life* to represent the core characteristics of the diverse indigenous cosmologies around the concept of a sacred hoop of life that embodies the four directions (Lajo, 2007; McCabe, 2008; Neihardt, Deloria, & Deloria, 2014).

Theoretical Foundations: Ecosystemic and Wheel-of-Life Worldviews

In family science, scholars have long acknowledged the salience of ecosystemic perspectives when studying family relations and family resilience (Trzcinski, 1995; Ungar, 2011; Waller, 2001; Walsh, 2002). Such perspectives recognize that individuals and families influence and are influenced by forces external to them. Such forces (e.g., laws, policies, institutional practices, social mores and norms) can both facilitate and hinder family adaptation and functioning (Trzcinski, 1995). Extant ecosystemic perspectives are aligned with indigenous worldviews, which hold that elements in an ecosystem are fully relational and interdependent, and the relocation or absence of one element in the system has an ecological effect on everything

else. The ecosystemic frame often used among contemporary Western family scholars places the individual at the epicenter (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986). However, at the epicenter of indigenous ecosystems—or the wheel of life—is the source of life, which transcends individuals.

Figure 1 presents a representation of some of the key tenets of the indigenous paradigm and its commonalities and variances with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model. The following concepts are transmitted via the wheel of life: (a) Everything is made of living energies and has life on its own terms; (b) the wheel of life revolves around the great source of life—the centering concept; (c) life is relational, moving, and ever expanding and ascending (transcending); (d) the cycle of life connects the kingdoms of nature, the mineral world, and elements of nature (i.e., earth, water, air, fire), ancestral and modern, children and elders, across time; (e) the individual and community are one—all living organisms are relatives; and (f) because a relational and familial connection exists, all living organisms are treated with dignity, deserve to be respected and honored, and exist for a specific purpose. In critically examining and comparing the ecosystemic model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986), family resilience theories (Masten, 2018; McCubbin et al., 1998; Waller, 2001; Walsh, 2016), and the wheel of life (Deloria et al., 2003;

Garrett et al., 2008; Neihardt et al., 2014; Pfurturi, 2012; Wilcox, 2004), we developed the following integrated model of family strengths and resilience.

Domain 1: Family as a living organism. Indigenous and Western WOKs about the family as a living organism are distinct, yet both offer the possibility of identifying multiple sources of family strength and resilience. For the Inkas, life is at the center of the system and is known as *kawsay pacha* (living vibrations in time and space, in which *living* is synonymous of movement and change); it is multidimensional and found in everything. For millennia, life was understood as a system made up of living, evolving, and cooperating energies that included the harmonious interaction of three worlds: *hanaq pacha*, the spiritual, sublime dimension; *kay pacha*, the three-dimensional world; and *uju pacha*, the unseen and internal (often unconscious) dimension that includes our psyche and emotions (Jenkins, 2009; Wilcox, 2002). These three inseparable worlds “live” simultaneously within the individual, families, and larger communities. The study of any of the parts is intrinsically linked to context, and the findings must reflect the impact on all the other parts in alignment with *kawsay pacha*. Fields such as agronomy, hydrology, engineering, or spirituality are not stand-alone disciplines but rather are interconnected. This is why Inka farming lands used sophisticated irrigation technology for their terraces, as these farming spaces simulated symbology, linked to *kawsay pacha*, that were also used simultaneously as spiritual temples (Wilcox, 2002). In this way, spirituality, medicine, or engineering were not competing fields; instead, they complemented one another.

In the modern Western world, fields of study such as anthropology, religion, biology, and microbiology are often siloed by discipline and offer contrasting views of life. For some, life is primarily metaphysical, something that exists independently from matter; for others, it is a period of experience; and for still others, life is a set of properties and systems of organisms (Akkerhuis, 2016). Thus, it can be challenging to find consensus on fundamental definitions such as life and family. In the 1970s, within the family field, Minuchin (1974) proposed viewing the family as one that is constantly developing and adapting to a changing environment. In this

perspective of the living organism, individual members of the family play roles in the overall functioning of the organism (Minuchin, 1974). Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems theory increased awareness about the influence of external environments on the functioning of families in the context of human development. These ecological living systems are conceptually nonlinear, bidirectional, nested subsystems, and they locate the individual at the epicenter.

As Western thinking within the family and social sciences attempted to explain and understand family as a living organism—one that adapted and reacted to ecosystemic pressures and forces, the definition of “the family” and what was in the best interests of the child remained surprisingly static (Trzcinski, 1995). The traditional Western definition of family in the United States came to mean two married, heterosexual parents and their children, with family ties and values linked to their European heritage. Since the preindustrial period, this view of family was idealized as the nuclear and normal family (Walsh, 2015) and rooted in the SNAF ideology (D. E. Smith, 1993). Changes in US demographics during recent decades have called for revisions on the conceptualization of family. The shift from European to non-European immigrants in the past half century, and the acknowledgment of other family arrangements, such as transnational, stepfamilies, grandparent or kin-headed, or LGBTQ families, have contributed to calls for the redefinition of the concept of a family in Western societies (Wiesemann, 2010). Laszloffy (2002) and others (Walsh, 2015; Wiesemann, 2010) worked to redefine family as a complex, ever-changing, multidimensional unit, whose development and functioning depended greatly on the capacity of individual family members to provide mutual care, personal affection, and bonds of love to manage stress and to change and adapt during times of adversity. This conceptualization acknowledges the variety of family arrangements based on function, care, love, and kinship (Wiesemann, 2010). Yet SNAF fundamentalism still undergirds much of Western theorizing about family life, which remains inconsistent with notions of living, dynamic, and adapting family systems (Letiecq, 2019).

For indigenous peoples, family is viewed as an extension of the individual and intrinsically connected to the larger community and

the natural environment. Family is defined by its relation, connection, and alignment to life (i.e., *kawsay pacha*). Unique to indigenous cultures is that family bonds transcend biological and human dimensions, such that family members include all living organisms, as defined by *kawsay pacha*. For example, in the context of a collectivistic society, when a child is born, the biological parents are the primary caretakers, united by bonds of love, not ownership. A mother is not likely to say “my” child because that would contradict her view of life. The concept of extended family, *Tiyospaye* in Lakota and *Ayllu* in the Inka language, encompasses bonds among people in the community, but also extends beyond human relations to include the natural environment (Sherman, 2014; Wilcox, 2002). Among indigenous cultures, it is understood that we are all children of Mother Nature. Thus, we are connected, cared for, and loved by a greater loving dimension called Mother Earth or Pachamama by the Inkas; and Unci Maka, Grandmother Earth, by the Lakota people (Robbins, Robbins, & Stennesson, 2013; Sherman, 2014; Wilcox, 2002).

From this perspective, family represents a living entity in which humans and nonhumans have a familial relationship (e.g., Father Sky, Mother Moon, Brother Bear). The Lakota people use greetings and salutations to remind us that we are members of a macrofamily, by saying *Aho mitakuye oyasin*, which means “We are all related.” All relations are considered kin, and kinship implies accompanying reciprocal obligations (Wilcox, 2002). In both the Inka and the Lakota examples, the focus is on maintaining a harmonious life within kinship networks. Harmonious community life is what drives decisions, actions, and behaviors in a family. Parents, guardians or elders guide and teach children by modeling these ways of knowing (Burnette, 2018).

As we conceive family as a living organism within ecosystems built on unequal and unjust grounds (e.g., based on laws, policies, practices favoring SNAF over all others), we must reconsider definitions of family as well as notions of family function and dysfunction, family bonadaptation and maladaptation, family strengths and deficits, and what family resilience looks like (Bailey et al., 2013; Letiecq, 2019). From indigenous and ecosystemic lenses, family diversity should be expected and upheld as representation of life.

Domain 2: Family connectedness with nature. An important aspect shared by many indigenous cultures is the view of nature as an inseparable part of life, the common denominator that links all living organisms. Rather than seeing nature as something to observe or study, or something that happens around us, the indigenous worldview considers itself an intricate part of nature, as an eye or mouth is to the human body—part of the whole, not separate from it. Life is a conglomerate of lives, just like the members of a family are part of the family unit. Each is unique and equally important; and each has a specific purpose. Each is present to teach the others something and to learn from the others—to transcend challenges on individual and collective levels.

Inka philosophy considers life (*kawsay pacha*) the main source of strength and renewal (Pfuturi, 2012). Sources of life are found in the cosmos (i.e., the stars, the sun), in the natural environment (Maller, Townsend, Pryor, Brown, & St. Leger, 2006; Pfuturi, 2012), in communities, and within the individual person (i.e., core values that arise from physiological, cognitive, emotional, and spiritual centering; Sherman, 2014; Wilcox, 2002). When one realizes that she or he is simultaneously surrounded by countless living organisms (i.e., a community, natural environment), one is recognizing multiple sources of life’s strength. For instance, on a hiking team, the presence of each hiker as well as the nature trails, water streams, and breeze (i.e., all living organisms) contribute to the overall team life, which holds the potential to embody a healthy “team spirit.” In return for each living organism’s contributions to the team, each hiker receives the psychological and emotional benefits of the collective source of life, in the form of camaraderie, a sense of security, oneness with nature, and inner confidence.

A preliminary epistemological observation of the meaning of the construct of nature from the indigenous and Western worldviews has the potential to cast new light on how families interact and benefit from nature. On the one hand, an increasing body of literature suggests that relating and connecting with nature enhances the well-being of individuals and families (Bowler, Buyung-Ali, Knight, & Pullin, 2010). On the other hand, the indigenous perspective of being one with nature (i.e., Pachamama) exemplifies the lack of separateness in the first place. Thus, our oneness with nature does not vary over time, but our awareness does.

The Western perspective of nature sought the harmonious integration of the landscape with people providing their food, energy, shelter, and other material and nonmaterial needs in a sustainable way. This integration is believed to be part of the stewardship allowed by Providence to manage land and natural resources for economic gain and progress. Corporate financial gains over the harmonious nature stewardship during the past century have resulted in serious imbalances in our relationship with nature. Some research has shown that too much artificial stimulation and an existence spent in purely human environments cause exhaustion and produce a loss of vitality and health (Maller et al., 2006). Modern society, by its very essence, insulates people from outdoor environmental stimuli and regular contact with nature. In recent decades, the healing effects of a natural view are increasingly being understood in stressful environments such as hospitals, nursing homes, and remote military sites. In these environments, as well as for people who work in windowless offices, studies show that seeing nature is important to health and is an effective means of relieving stress (Maller et al., 2006). Public health strategies have yet to maximize the untapped resources and grounding (or biophilia) effect (Clemens & Marc, 2018) that nature provides, including the benefits of nature contact as an upstream health promotion intervention for individuals, families, and communities (Maller et al., 2006). Many find strength and recovery through soulful connection with nature (Walsh, 2002), and such human–nature connections may also be essential for family centering processes.

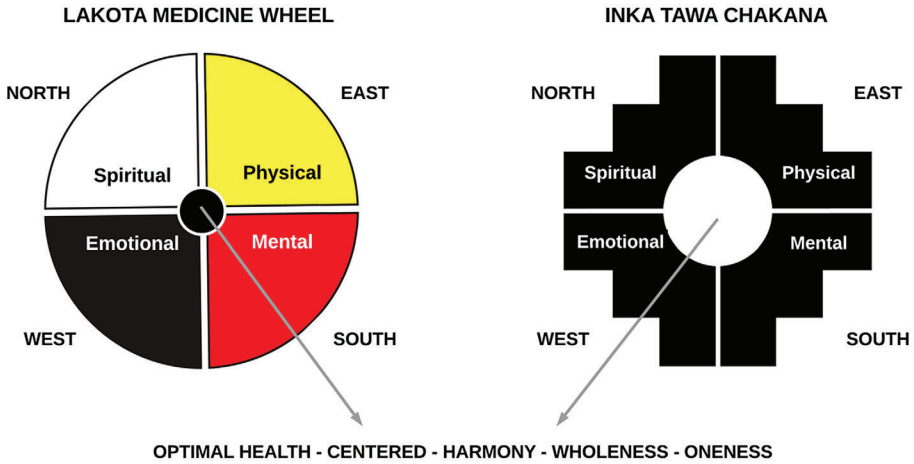
Domain 3: Family centering processes. A key concept that underlies indigenous rationality is the notion of centering. Centering in the Native American sociocultural context is referred to as the centripetal force that brings awareness and aspires an alignment to the sources of strength that support and maintain the main source of life. Black Elk, a nineteenth-century Lakota Sioux holy man, spoke eloquently about centering (Neihardt, 1972):

The first peace, which is the most important, is that which comes within the souls of men when they realize their relationship, their oneness with the universe and all its Powers, and when they realize that at the center of the universe dwells Wakan Tanka, and that this center is everywhere, it is within each of us. (p. 198)

One of the simplest ways to comprehend this concept is to visualize the intersection of the four cardinal directions on a compass. Each of the four quadrants is equally important to the whole; and they all are intricately connected and joined at the center of the four. Likewise, regardless of where we go in the planet, we are always at the center of the four directions. According to indigenous WOKs, native peoples do not conceive of themselves or of humanity as being of central importance; rather, human beings are an intrinsic part of the wheel of life, which also includes the earth, sun, animals, plants, rivers, air, and so on. From an indigenous standpoint, it is inconceivable to think of life as taking place outside of this wheel, known also as the “sacred hoop” (McCabe, 2008). This epicenter equals oneness with the creator (i.e., source of life), and when a person assumes or is assigned a central role within the family, the community, or an organization, that role carries great responsibility as it becomes the embodiment of great honor and humbleness. For example, in the Inka tradition, when family members get together with the intention of honoring a child or an elder, they form a circle. The person being honored literally becomes the center of attention, and in this context he or she is both a model of well-being (implicitly associated with *kawsay pacha*) and the recipient of well-being from the relatives from the circle, who will offer blessings, positive anecdotes, and meaningful advice. It is hoped that the person being honored experiences emotional, psychological, and physical strength while staying humble and appreciative, as represented in the teachings of the Inka Tawa Chakana (a symbol of centering) (Lajo, 2007).

The Lakota medicine wheel is also a symbol of centering and balance. It is one way of expressing tribal principles, laws, and values. It teaches the cycle of life, from infancy through youth, adult, and elder, and relates to the four seasons: spring, summer, fall, and winter. It also teaches that there are four directions of human growth (emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual) as well as four aspects of human society (the individual, family, community, and nation). When we go off balance or become uncentered, natural laws let us know through feedback in the form of tension, anxiety, or stress that we must come back into balance once again (Coyhis & Simonelli, 2008; Garrett et al., 2008; Neihardt, 1972). A belief that is common among most indigenous cultures is that all people live within

FIGURE 2. REPRESENTATION OF SIMILARITIES BETWEEN LAKOTA AND INKA SACRED SYMBOLS.



the confines of the wheel of life, and life is about staying centered within the knowledge and wisdom that each of the four directions represents (Garrett et al., 2008; see Figure 2). In the context of families, the centering principle holds that every member of the family is inherently valuable, equally respected, and the concerns of each are honored and considered. The act of coming to center is a sign of willingness, hope, and resilience. It is the centripetal and centrifugal force that works to restore physical, emotional, and psychological health to all (Garrett et al., 2008).

Centering in the Western worldview can best be understood by examining strengths-based practice, which emphasizes individuals' self-determination, strengths, resourcefulness, and resilience in the face of adversity (Oliver & Charles, 2015). Individual and familial sources of strengths can include love among family members, family unity, family harmony and solidarity, spiritual and religious faith, cultural identity, and heritage education (Koutrelakos, 2013). These sources of strength can act as protective factors and help shield families from experiencing the negative consequences of adversities and systemic barriers to family empowerment (Bailey et al., 2013). Likewise, Powell et al. (1997) have indicated that a strengths-based philosophy provides families with the knowledge and strengths that they can build on and use to meet their own needs, accomplish their own goals, overcome hardships, and promote the well-being

of family members. Strengths-based approaches build on the belief that all individuals and families already have strengths and resources present (Powell et al., 1997; Walsh, 2015).

Both worldviews, centering (indigenous) and strengths-based (Western), provide ways to recognize and tap into core values and sources of strength and resilience for individuals and families in their ecosystems. Additional sources of strength can result from tapping into the complementary (and expansive) indigenous WOKs that connect human beings to nature and the potentiality of generating new strengths from existing but disconnected and less understood sources (Pfuturi, 2012; Webb, 2012). Family centering processes and resilience may be enhanced by cultivating familial and cultural identities via heritage education and ethnic language participation (Burnette, 2018; Koutrelakos, 2013) and by establishing and sustaining family rituals and other forms of meaningful engagement.

Domain 4: Family rituals. Family rituals provide family systems and individual members with a sense of identity by creating feelings of belonging. Rituals are the events that serve to facilitate social interaction among family members so that families can transmit cultural and normative information as well as beliefs and values across generations (Homer, Freeman, Zabriskie, & Eggett, 2007; Viere, 2001). For indigenous cultures, most rituals and ceremonies reflect their alignment with

life's transcendental goals: staying connected to creator (i.e., source of life), nature, and staying centered and aligned with their most deeply held values and principles. These rituals are done because there is an underlying belief that they bring good health, wellness, and healing to families and communities. Rituals sustain harmony in life on the individual, family, and community levels. For example, *Inipi*, or the sweat lodge, is a place where kinship-based rituals are performed by the Lakota people and many other North American Native cultures. It is used to regain or strengthen the connection with nature and creator by means of purification. These rituals are intended to purify the mind, body, and spirit as a prelude for larger, community-based ceremonies, such as the Sun Dance and rite-of-passage ceremonies (Garrett et al., 2008). Led by an authorized elder, the sweat lodge honors the relation with nature through sung prayers with drumbeats, strengthening kinship bonds, respect, compassion, and humility; the heat within the chamber serves as physical and psychoemotional cleanser (Garrett et al., 2008).

The Inkas have a ritual called Yuyaymanay (meditation), which is designed to reconnect with the inner self. As the Lakota elder Black Elk explained, the Inkas also believed that the oneness of the universe is also within us. This inner connection is called *tinkuy* (connection within) and involves memory and reflection (Pfuturi, 2007). This particular family ritual takes place after dinner, with the eyes closed, under the guidance of the elder of the household. The meditation starts with the youngest family member, who recalls each event of the day aloud, from the moment she or he wakes up in the morning to the present, as if by a narrator in a movie in which the narrator doubles as the main actor. After the youngest family member has finished, the next youngest member does the same, and so on, until every person has a turn. Throughout this process, the self-correcting nature in each person provides feedback in the form of short realizations of right and wrong or correct and incorrect deeds and aha moments. For example, if during the day, I took advantage of my partner's generosity and let her do most of the chores at home, or if I had used an inappropriate tone of voice and caused some resentment in my spouse or child, the postmeditation feedback will make me realize the best way of behaving in both situations (Pfuturi, 2007). These realizations are

shared among family members to help the entire family grow while also keeping them centered and connected.

Western literature on family rituals has shown that family rituals and routines are important for enhancing child health and family well-being (Homer et al., 2007). The meaning and significance of the rituals appears to be central to their value to the family. Their value depends on the ritual's meaning, which measures the symbolic significance of the rituals to the family, attenuates negativity related to anxiety, and accentuates positivity related to love among family members. However, highly routine rituals that are performed frequently or habitually but have little meaning have positively been associated with anxiety and negatively related to feelings of love (Homer et al., 2007; Yoon, Newkirk, & Perry-Jenkins, 2015). Thus, it is the sense of meaning that rituals bring to families that is protective.

Studies on family dinnertime rituals, such as conversations among family members, show that such rituals increase family connections and create a sense of family identity and group membership (Yoon et al., 2015). Rituals among indigenous people tend not only to be to family members' well-being; they also strengthen communal relations, connection with nature, and centering with values and principles (Burnette, 2018; McCubbin et al., 1998). Although Western family rituals may adequately respond to the needs of the nuclear family formed by individual units, they likely strengthen family members' community kinship. For example, family rituals may connect families to community organizations such as faith communities, recreational organizations, academic organizations, and social clubs. Meaningful ritual engagement within families and communities seems to be increasingly challenging to sustain given dwindling resources (e.g., time, energy) and technological advances that spur disconnections and habituated routines (e.g., social media). Yet family rituals appear critical to the health and well-being of family, community, and larger ecosystems (Masten, 2018). Family rituals also foster transgenerational family relations, through which members can cultivate collective experiences and develop and share resources that are essential for family resilience.

Domain 5: Transgenerational family relations. Family members coexist and learn to interrelate,

despite the individuality of each member. There is multidimensional diversity within families, as well, according to members' gender, identity, temperament, age, personality type, tastes, and so on. From a Western perspective, interactions within a family simulate dynamic encounters of microcultural paradigms. Family members cannot act entirely independently because such behavior would result in interfamilial dysfunction (Bowen, 1966). At the same time, it is imperative that family members respect one another's individual dignity, rights, and needs (Wall, Needham, Browning, & James, 1999). Having healthy interdependent relations and respecting the dignity and rights of each family member not only gives families a healthful benchmark (growth as a family) but also prepares each member to interact constructively with extended kin and the larger community (e.g., schools, governments, society at large). Thus, the growth or maturity experienced by a family gradually is reflected in their intergenerational relations and with their extended family and community circles (Wilcox, 2002), thus potentially magnifying the family's sense of strength while building resilience when faced with adversity (Bailey et al., 2019).

Aligned with a Western ecological systems notion of interconnectivity and interdependence (Walsh, 2002), family and community relations take place simultaneously and at multiple levels, creating a circular and ever-interacting environment. This wheel of life should encourage and sustain the notions of giving back and reciprocating as a natural human process (via the system's feedback loops and adjustment processes), connecting generations in various ways, including the moral obligation of passing knowledge and strength within the family from elder to child in the coming-to-full-cycle dynamic. Although children, parents, and grandparents can and do feed off one another's strengths, they also can unintentionally transmit mental distress to one another. For example, in a study of 1,175 youths, researchers found that there is a significant transmission correlation and associated reciprocity in measures of mental distress and subjective well-being between parents and their children, as when parents sometimes bring home work-related stress. The study also pointed out that there can be transmission of well-being from a child to a distressed parent. For example, a happy child can positively influence his or her

father's mental health (Powdthavee & Vignoles, 2008).

In some Westernized family systems that adhere to and promote SNAF ideology, intergenerational ties can be curtailed in favor of nuclear family independence. For example, the promotion of family values within the nuclear family typically reinforces self-reliance, individualism, and autonomy among family members, with less emphasis on the intergenerational familial experiences and practices sustaining extended kin ties (Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2016). Recently, family scholars have also suggested that the transmission of benefits among families also include financial, social, and racial privileges that bestow members societal benefits such as better treatment for being White and of European descent as compared to other ethnic/racial minorities (DiAngelo, 2018). These transmissions of privilege diverge from such universal truths as valuing all human beings and all living organisms with respect and dignity and recognizing that the erosion of well-being or health in one part of the ecosystem (e.g., families suffering from social-made disadvantages) has a negative impact on us all.

Among indigenous cultures, elders play a significant role in the transmission of strengths and resilience processes within family systems (Burnette, 2018). Elders are recognized in several ways, by age, by knowledge, by spiritual commitments to their tribe or community, by the family, and by the people. Pfuturi (2012) explains that within family development, everyone grows (physically, psychologically, and spiritually, including parents and grandparents). Although the growth is nonphysical among parents or grandparents, their reciprocating capacity with younger generations in their kinship network also expands as part of the family development. This reciprocity is expressed in the form of teachings, leading family or community-based rituals such as *Inipi* or *yuyaymanay*, and storytelling. This intergenerational transmission helps ensure the continuation of a healthy family development and connection with the source of life.

Another form of transmitting strength intergenerationally comes from the Inka notion of *yanantin*, the strength resulting from tapping into the complementary benefits of opposite energies (Webb, 2012). Opposite or dissimilar personality types among parents or family members are considered synchronized gears

that interact with one another in distinctive ways, with the potential of generating an outcome greater than the sum of the parts. For example, families may have one member who takes care of taxes and finances, and another who sees the big picture and is creative. Children's personalities and skills may also be "opposite" those of their parents, siblings, or grandparents. A grandmother who is technologically challenged, for example, may recognize and rely on her granddaughter's technological complementary strengths. Recognizing dissimilarities between, for instance, parents and children, grandparents or elders can play a role in brokering understandings, decreasing conflicts, and/or supporting child-rearing goals.

Through their circular style of life and emphasis on community, indigenous elders' storytelling traditions naturally create a system for transmitting strengths among families and communities (Burnette, 2018; McCabe, 2008). As the basis of indigenous oral traditions, storytelling enables elders to instill resilience and strength in communities in ways that celebrate their identity, affirm their cultural WOKs, and emphasize the importance of spirituality and connection to life, nature, family, and community. It is a tradition that links generations and provides an understanding of the need for cultural and spiritual authenticity (Warner & Grint, 2006). Some indigenous cultures also use storytelling as a form of therapy to effect behavior change and promote health (Simonds & Christopher, 2013). Transmitting stories across the generations can serve as a guide for overcoming challenges, to include historical traumas and institutional betrayals enacted through Western laws, policies, and practices.

Drawing on both indigenous and Western WOKs, the salience of strong kinship systems as a potential source of family strength and resilience is clear. To be sure, not all ties are healthy and productive. Indigenous perspectives regarding family systems promote and uphold the transmission of intergenerational strength through values of connection, family ritual, respect and deference for elders, and traditions of storytelling. Western WOKs and the laws, policies, and practices promoted through values of SNAF fundamentalism, capitalism, and work can interfere with building and sustaining strong intergenerational bonds. Family scholars should continue to study the transmission of transgenerational family strength and resilience,

particularly among indigenous populations and extended kinship systems, as well as the ways in which larger ecosystemic forces promote or weaken such familial ties.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

In this article, we present an integrated model of family strengths and resilience emerging at the intersection of indigenous and Western WOKs. Our work acknowledges that there are universal tenets pertaining to family relations within many cultural paradigms, yet few family theories have integrated an indigenous lens. We draw on both ecosystemic and wheel-of-life worldviews to guide our work, recognizing that much of Western family science and indigenous WOKs view family life as relational, interdependent, and connected to larger ecosystems. We delineate five domains: family as a living organism, family connectedness to nature, family centering processes, family rituals, and transgenerational family relations. Though not exhaustive, taken together, these domains offer an integrated model for family researchers and practitioners seeking to understand and promote diverse family strengths and resilience processes, particularly among indigenous and other families who have been historically oppressed, marginalized, and viewed through a deficit lens (Burnette & Figley, 2016).

Indigenous peoples do not claim to know the truth, nor do they engage in a relentless pursuit of truth. Instead, they view themselves as part of the whole living knowledge; and they view the world through the wheel-of-life lenses (McCabe, 2008). In exploring the commonalities of living organisms, the indigenous approach tends to take the shape of asking reflective questions rather than attempting to construct factual statements. Among topics of particular relevance to family life are (a) the multidimensionality of life, meaning how aligned or centered our body, mind, heart, and spirit are with the source of life; (b) nature connectedness, or how strong our connection is with the rest of creation; (c) growth, meaning where we are on the ascension-of-consciousness spectrum; (d) morals and principles, or whether our words and actions are congruent with our values and WOKs; and (e) relational quality, or how much reciprocity and transmission of strengths exist among family and community.

Family researchers and practitioners might explore these questions with students or clients or community partners to generate new and/or untapped sources of strength and resilience. The exploration of indigenous WOKs in a culturally responsive manner may promote understanding of each student's or client's social, cultural, and historical upbringing and positionality in the world before attempting to prescribe standard or Western-centric interventions.

Family researchers and practitioners seeking to expand their own WOKs and practice might consider further exploration of indigenous and Western WOKs at their intersections. As delineated in the *Competencies for Counseling the Multiracial Populations* (American Counseling Association, 2015), to work effectively with diverse populations, counselors and family educators should cultivate in themselves and in others an awareness of multicultural and social justice issues. It is likewise imperative that family scholars work to advance justice ends and repair harms associated with historical oppression and institutional betrayals (Letiecq, 2019).

Integrating indigenous worldviews into Western family-based research and practice has the potential to expand our understanding of family relations, sources of strength, and family resilience. For instance, in both the Inka and Lakota cultures, maintaining a harmonious life within families and in the natural world is critical. Intervention researchers and practitioners should work to understand the ways in which decisions, behaviors, thoughts, and feelings about families and larger ecosystems influence family outcomes. More attention is needed to understand how parents, guardians, kin, and elders guide and center family members, model cultural WOKs, transmit family strengths, and build resilience across generations. More research is needed to understand resilience processes among indigenous and other families who have endured and thrived despite historical and systemic oppression and marginalization. However, such work should be generated in partnership with families for the benefit of their communities.

Our integrated model of family strengths and resilience is not culture-specific; rather, it draws on indigenous and Western WOKs to generate what may be considered universal tenets of family well-being. This integrative model offers an expanded view of diverse families in relation to their members and larger ecosystems.

When a family is understood as a multidimensional living organism (i.e., in motion, adapting, centered with the life source, unique, expanding and ascending), new sources of strength and resilience can be identified and studied. Family researchers, practitioners, and policy makers alike should not only accept and promote the uniqueness of families as living organisms but also protect them, value them, and strive to uplift their many strengths and resilience processes. If families are to be resilient, so, too, must all the ecosystems that are intertwined with them.

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