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Metoyer, Cheryl
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# Leadership in American Indian Communities: Winter Lessons 

CHERYL A. METOYER

## INTRODUCTION

Winter lessons, or stories told in the winter, were one of the ways in which tribal elders instructed and directed young men and women in the proper ways to assume leadership responsibilities. Winter lessons stressed the appropriate relationship between the leader and the community. The intent was to remember the power and purpose of that relationship. Hence, leadership in American Indian communities then and now is rooted in culture. Leadership as a cultural activity has been and continues to be a powerful force in shaping tribal communities. The stories remain, and contemporary tribal leaders continue to struggle with the communal responsibilities inherent in their positions. The concept of winter lessons, in this article, illustrates the importance of considering a specific tradition and ways of knowing when studying and developing indigenous leaders. This article, based on an analysis of existing literature, identifies three models of Native leadership: traditional, co-creators, and educational environments.

In mainstream American research, leadership is a field of study usually examined independent of cultural realities. Many definitions of leadership consist of a list of qualities or skills such as creativity, judgment, intelligence, integrity, and compassion. For purposes of this discussion, Sharon Daloz Parks's definition of leadership, from her text Leadership Can Be Taught: A Bold Approach for a Complex World, is the most relevant. Parks states, "Leadership is a way to describe the activity of persons engaging in the mobilization of people around them to make progress on the most important challenges of their place and time." ${ }^{1}$

Cheryl A. Metoyer is an associate professor and associate dean for research at the University of Washington Information School in Seattle. She is currently the director of the Indigenous Information Research Group at the Information School. Her research interests include indigenous systems of knowledge and information-seeking behaviors in tribal communities.

Leadership education has become a major force in business schools, information schools, and the departments of psychology, philosophy, and economics. Scholars whose work exemplifies a positive approach to leadership include Warren Bennis, Burt Nanus, Daniel Goleman, and Richard Boyatzis. ${ }^{2}$ These authors focus on values, vision, cooperation, commitment, and other emotional and spiritual resources. Although these texts consider the study of American leadership, there is very little discussion of the cultural dimensions of leadership. Bennis, noted in the Financial Times as the "eminence grise of leadership studies," does not address cultural dimensions of leadership in his studies. ${ }^{3}$

The designation of "American leadership" does not account for possible differences represented by culturally diverse leaders in America. This distorted view is evident in Bernard Bass and Ralph Stogdill's limited and erroneous discussion of leadership and American Indians. In the 1990 third edition, the authors wrote, "Little can be said about this country's most impoverished minority, whose members are undereducated and live mainly under tribal councils that discourage participatory democracy and collaborate with state bureaucracies to maintain the status quo. The leadership of their many famous chiefs of the past is only a memory." ${ }^{4}$

This article seeks to counter the aforementioned statement and argues that leadership is a vital and contemporary concern in American Indian communities. Tribal leaders are responsible for matters related to sovereignty, economic growth and stability, land claims, and environmental concerns, to name a few. The existence of erroneous views such as the one quoted above is due not to a lack of leadership but a lack of knowledge and paucity of research concerning leadership in contemporary American Indian communities. Winter lessons, as traditional teachings, represent a vital means for the instruction and development of indigenous leaders. Native American leadership models may differ significantly from mainstream models. Because of this, research on Native American leadership broadens and informs mainstream leadership conversations concerning accountability, shared vision, influence, and sustainability.

Despite the critical nature of leadership, a search of the published leadership literature from 2003 to 2008 revealed only thirteen articles and four book chapters concerning American Indians and leadership. Given the coherence of American Indian ways of leading, and the endurance of traditional leadership values despite fluctuating governance policies, one wonders why there isn't more consideration of Native leadership in the mainstream leadership research. The purpose of this article is to analyze leadership in American Indian communities, as reflected in the leadership literature. ${ }^{5}$ An analysis of the literature reveals three domains in which leadership has been studied: traditional models of American Indian leadership, contemporary American Indian women as leaders, and leadership as reflected in educational institutions.

## TRADITIONAL MODELS OF AMERICAN INDIAN LEADERSHIP

An accurate and meaningful discussion of traditional models of leadership may be gleaned from consideration of the term traditional in relation to culture. Tradition comes from the Latin traditio, which means "a handing over" or "a delivery." In this sense, some scholars appropriately examined Native leadership in the context of tribal worldviews, thereby including consideration of language and the spoken word (including stories) that have been handed down in the communities. The theme of volume 10 of the American Indian Quarterly is the history of American Indian leadership. In the introduction to this volume, Frederick Hoxie states that "most scholars have ignored the variety and complexity of Native leadership systems." As a result, the erroneous conclusion regarding Native leadership has been that "either there was none (Indians were so quickly defeated) or that what existed was so obscure that non-experts wouldn't be able to grasp the structure."6

The confusion and misunderstanding of Native leadership is exemplified in discussions of the term chief. Leadership within tribal communities was frequently equated to the identification of one chief for each tribe, who acted as leader in perpetuity with unlimited power. Therefore, studies of leadership among American Indians were often limited to biographies of tribal chiefs and other American Indian leaders. In his study of Native American indigenous leadership, Brian Calliou cites these in a series of references published as early as 1929.7 Helen Rountree and E. Randolph Turner, writing about the chiefs in Virginia, rectify the mistaken notion of control by stating that the "Powhatan chiefs, like other chiefs in societies not approaching the state level, had limited judicial power with which to control the behavior of their subjects." ${ }^{8}$ Likewise, the term sachem was used to identify political leaders and became the title Europeans used to designate the civil chiefs of the Iroquois League. 9 Although the above-referenced studies are historical in nature, the term chief-and to some extent on the East Coast, the term sachem-is still in use today. With the development of tribal councils, their communities sometimes, but not always, designate tribal leaders as chiefs. Research that treats chief as a synonym for leader does not always represent the Indian community's understanding of the role, influence, power, and responsibility of their leaders. Sometimes in contemporary accounts of tribal leadership, there is little mention of the proper relationship between the leader and the community-a relationship that is grounded in culture and is necessary in order to understand what it means to be a Native leader.

A notable exception is Linda Warner and Keith Grint's study, "American Indian Ways of Leading and Knowing." Based on hundreds of interviews conducted during a period of twenty years, Warner and Grint present a leadership model based on a Comanche worldview. The written and the spoken word are considered in the framing of the Tahdooahnippah/Warner Model. The strength and prominence of the spoken word are reflected in the model, and persuasion emerges as the central and requisite leadership characteristic. The model is discussed within the context of previous research on American Indian leadership, particularly in the field of education. In their extensive
literature review, ranging from the 1960s to 2006, Warner and Grint discuss Western definitions of leadership (for example, Bass and Stogdill's Handbook of Leadership) and contrast them with American Indian leadership traditions and practices. ${ }^{10}$

The authors state that before contact with Europeans, American Indian people had complex, dynamic, and diverse methods for developing, assigning, and asserting leadership within their communities. Spirituality is the core of traditional Native leadership and finds expression in the concept of leading the community through service. Unlike mainstream concepts of leadership, which stress the characteristics of the individual leader, traditional Native leadership has an individual and a collective form depending on the community's needs at any given time. These varying approaches, which include considerations of space and time, are often interpreted as an inability to lead rather than a different way to lead. For example, traditional models of Native leadership are based on persuasive techniques as opposed to Western models, which are based on positional approaches. Native leadership is tied to oratory, and fluency with the spoken word is recognized as one way of defining traditional leaders. The Tahdooahnippah/Warner Model includes "four primary modes of persuasion that facilitate leadership, with a fifth mode that embodies all the others." They are as follows: (1) the Social Scientist/Tvboopv Puni Wapv-observation; (2) the Elder/Pvbvetv—tradition; (3) the Role Model/Mahimiawapv—experience; (4) the Author/Scootitekwa—narration; and (5) Tekwanipapv-one who speaks for us at all times. ${ }^{11}$

Although Clara Sue Kidwell and Alan Velie studied Native languages, and not leadership per se, their work complements that of Warner and Grint through its emphasis on the importance of the spoken word. The authors state that "the oral traditions of Native cultures are the major repositories of tribal knowledge and values" and note that stories remind people of what constitutes appropriate behavior. ${ }^{12}$ Stories point out that sharing the responsibility to care for and protect the community is the appropriate behavior for tribal leaders. Thus, leadership in a Native community is embodied in a relationship between the tribal leaders and the community and is a shared responsibility.

This collaborative nature of Native leadership was explored in a study of the Nez Perce community. Writing in the Journal of Management History, John Humphreys and colleagues conducted a historical examination of the nontreaty Nez Perce leadership council during the conflict of 1877.13 Humphreys cites sources interpreting Chief Joseph's leadership position from an industrial perspective, which sees him as a supreme leader of the Nez Perce. The authors argue that the leadership of the nontreaty Nez Perce was a shared responsibility of the leadership council and other collaborators. This view of the nontreaty Nez Perce postindustrial leadership style, like that of Warner and Grint, emphasizes the collaborative nature of American Indian leadership models.

Although Humphreys and colleagues and the Warner and Grint models focus heavily on the shared responsibility of tribal leadership as a strong historical and cultural element, Calliou's work looks at Native leadership
through the contemporary lenses of business and governance. In the chapter "The Culture of Leadership: North American Indigenous Leadership in a Changing Economy," he examines the nation-building model that evolved from the research of Stephen Cornell, Joseph Kalt, and Manley Begay Jr. as part of the Harvard Project. The author argues that the nation-building model is one approach in which leaders lead their nations by taking control of their own strategic direction. The nation-building model encompasses the following concepts: (1) exercising tribal sovereignty; (2) establishing effective organizations that match the culture; (3) setting a strategic vision and direction for the tribe; and (4) taking concrete action through strong leadership. ${ }^{14}$

Calliou contends that the competencies required in today's indigenous leaders must include the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of the modern organizational business leader. However, he also asserts that "they should reconcile these modern competencies with some of the principles of the traditional indigenous leadership and governance." In his work on indigenous research at the Banff Center's Aboriginal Leadership and Management Development Program, Calliou used focus groups of indigenous leaders in order to identify competencies. Business leaders in previous management studies identified many of the same competencies. However, a notable exception was the indigenous leaders' need for knowledge of their culture and history of their communities. ${ }^{15}$ These three leadership models (Warner and Grint, Humphreys and colleagues, and Calliou) incorporate a role for traditional knowledge, emphasizing that oral tradition and collaboration must be based within the needs and culture of the tribal community.

## WOMEN AND LEADERSHIP: CO-CREATORS

The role of Native women in leadership is the second theme that emerged from the leadership literature. Many publications focus on Native women in human services, gender considerations, biographies, and participation in the health sciences. Each of the studies analyzed the view that Native women in leadership positions operate as co-creators. In their study, "Native American Women Who Lead Human Service Organizations," Mary Jane Taylor and Kimberly Stauss interviewed thirteen participants in order to elicit their definitions of leadership and perceptions of their roles as leaders. In this study, leadership was defined as an effective ability to bring two cultures together. ${ }^{16}$ Respondents noted their need to overcome a history of racial discrimination and achieve self-identity as minority female leaders.

Participants consistently referred to the primacy of family teachings when making leadership decisions. This strong reliance on family teachings from previous generations was viewed as a necessary source of spiritual direction in their leadership. This leadership style, exemplified by sharing, building, collaborating, and mentoring, is in contrast to a leadership style in which the use of power and control is promoted. Respondents repeatedly commented: "I don't consider myself as a leader. I'm doing what I have to do," and "I'm not a leader. It's more circular. Not a pyramid. It takes all of us to make it work." ${ }^{17}$

Again, this theme of collaborative leadership is echoed by the research on Native women and leadership conducted by Kidwell and colleagues. In a comparison of American Indian women leaders and other feminist leaders, Kidwell and colleagues argue that the objectives of American Indian women leaders differ from those of other feminist leaders. Kidwell and colleagues emphasize that inclusiveness, considered an essential component of feminist leadership, is inherent in the nature of American Indian communities in which traditional decision making was based on consensus and not on majority rule. Of special note in this study is the discussion of communities in which true leadership is exercised at the informal level and often administered by women who manage tribal programs that provide services for the community. The authors argue that these women become "key communicators who create information flow and mobilize community resources." ${ }^{18}$ Writing about feminist leadership in contemporary American Indian society, Kidwell and colleagues postulate that feminist leadership today resides in the political arena and is much different from that based on traditional cultural values. ${ }^{19}$ To that end, the authors examine the leadership of several Native women including Wilma Mankiller, Ada Deer, Elouise Cobell, Cecelia Fire Thunder, LaDonna Harris, and Annie Wauneka.

Harris, who established Americans for Indian Opportunity as a means of supporting tribal economic development, is the only individual leader studied in the literature published from 2003 to 2008. Amanda Cobb's study, "Powerful Medicine: The Rhetoric of Comanche Activist LaDonna Harris," examines Harris's leadership style by situating the discussion within Harris's Comanche values. The author contends that Harris's model of leadership is significant not only because of what she accomplished but also because of how she accomplished it. According to Cobb, "Harris's leadership style and rhetorical practices grow directly out of her Comanche values as she had defined them." ${ }^{20}$ Harris reported to Cobb that her life could not be understood without understanding her Comanche values, which guided all of her decisions.

Examples of these Comanche values identify leaders as co-creators. This underscores: (1) the inherent powers of tribal people; (2) the fact that one learns the way to lead through family relationships; (3) the fact that one treats Native and non-Natives as family and expects them to be "good relatives in return"; and (4) the redistribution of goods, which is having a willingness and even an obligation to share. Cobb states that Harris lived the leadership values that she expressed in her writings. An example of this may be found in Harris's This Is What We Want to Share: Core Cultural Values. ${ }^{21}$ She states, "We realize in the Indian way, that no one person can speak for another. Authorship of this work is complex. . . . The role of the scribe in this work is that of the orator in the Comanche community, or perhaps, of the interpreter in Pueblo life." In Cobb's research, as in that of Warner and Grint, and Kidwell and colleagues, we see the role of the orator/interpreter as being a critical dimension of leadership-traditional and contemporary. Cobb also acknowledges Harris's belief, in tandem with the work of Warner and Grint, that the tribes recognize the need for different kinds of leaders for different social responsibilities. In Harris's words, "Everyone's medicine is different." ${ }^{2} 2$

These studies of Native women leaders also implicitly consider the teaching facet of leadership. In addition, three publications by Cheryl Crazy Bull, Leleua Loupe, and Tarrell Portman and Michael Garrett, respectively, explicitly explore leadership and American Indian women in their roles as educators within their communities. Crazy Bull, president of Northwest Indian Tribal College, writing in the Tribal College Journal, emphasizes that leadership and wellness are complementary, and that leadership is grounded in relationship, spiritual practice, and healthy intentions. She advises emerging leaders that with leadership comes the privilege of practicing the values of traditional leadership-compassion, generosity, and accountability. ${ }^{23}$ Accountability to the community is fundamental to the teaching responsibility involved in leadership and is linked to culture. Loupe examines the lives of three Native women leaders who exemplify the relevance of traditional education. Juanita Ortega, Jesusa Manuel, and Ida Gooday-Largo are recognized as "women who applied their traditional teachings to contemporary circumstances and acquired the new knowledge and skills needed to benefit Indian people." ${ }^{24}$ The importance of accepting leadership positions as a way to benefit the community is evident in the findings of Caroline Turner in her biographical sketches of women in higher education administration. ${ }^{25}$ Karen Swisher, who served for seven years as president of Haskell Indian Nations University, described her leadership style as "participatory" and spoke of the importance of mentoring from female role models, interpersonal relations, holistic education, and family stories and support. ${ }^{26}$

Very little research on Native women leaders in the health sciences exists. However, in 2004, Lee Anne Nicholas studied Native nurses, and, in 2005, Portman and Garrett studied American Indian women in counseling professions. Noting that counseling theories and practices tend to reflect a Western, masculine worldview, the authors discuss American Indian perspectives as reflected through an examination of the leadership styles of prominent American Indian women. ${ }^{27}$ As part of their analysis, the authors examine American Indian women's role in decision making by focusing on the work of Wilma Mankiller and Michael Wallis, who studied the history of leadership among Cherokee women. Mankiller and Wallis discuss a series of characteristics of Cherokee women leaders. For example, the title of "The Ghigau," or Beloved Woman (Mankiller and Wallis), was only bestowed on women after they had proved their leadership skills. ${ }^{28}$ This lifetime distinction included the "right to speak, vote, and act in all peace and war councils of the tribe, and it also vested her with the supreme pardoning power, a prerogative that was not granted to any other-not even to the civil or war chiefs." ${ }^{29}$

Portman and Garrett consider contemporary leadership issues not only within the context of the Cherokees but also within the context of other tribes. Although recognizing tribal differences in contemporary leadership styles, the authors state that "there are some universal underlying values that permeate what can be considered a Native worldview and existence." Among these is a worldview in which leadership is reflective of a shared vision and responsibility. In addition, they note that Indian women have been consistently involved in leadership throughout history. The authors identify
a nurturing dimension of American Indian leadership among women that is called "relational" by contemporary authors. They also stress the importance of considering the Native and non-Native perspectives in the mentoring needs of women in the counseling profession. ${ }^{30}$

Nicholas conducted an exploratory study of Native American nurses, in which sixty-seven Native and non-Native nurses participated in focus-group sessions and responded to open-ended questions about leadership style. The purpose of the research was to identify the characteristics and skills that are essential to becoming a Native American nurse leader. The findings were to be used to design a leadership curriculum suitable for developing Native nurse leaders. The overarching finding was that Native nurses lead differently than non-Native ones. For instance, Native nurses rely on silence and being good listeners. Although non-Native leaders tend to delegate, Native leaders inspire and mobilize. The findings of the study are incorporated into a Taxonomy of Native American Nurse Leadership, which highlights the differences between Native and non-Native nurses. The taxonomy highlights three facets: point of reference for the leader, what a leader is, and what a leader does. ${ }^{31}$

Anne Straus and Debra Valentino also discussed the activities involved in leadership. In their study, published in 2003, the authors examined gender in Chicago's American Indian community. The article traces the significance of the American Indian Women's Leadership Development Project in helping to articulate the leadership role of Native women in Chicago. Although not focused solely on leadership, one of the findings was that women had been the de facto leaders from the founding and throughout the establishment of the community despite the fact that they did not always hold official positions. ${ }^{32}$

## EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND LEADERSHIP

The third theme that emerged from this analysis concerns leadership as expressed in educational settings. In these studies, the role of culture in educational institutions and leadership is of eminent importance. Two articles deal specifically with leadership in the tribal colleges during the time of this review. John Phillips, in a brief report, notes that Native leadership is founded on spiritual values, community, and shared responsibility. He cites the work of Vine Deloria Jr. and Clifford Lytle who state that in institutional environments these values are in contrast to those in Western leadership models, which are based on authoritative and hierarchical relationships. ${ }^{33}$

In the second article concerning tribal colleges, Valerie Johnson and colleagues examined leadership in the context of educational policy as reflected in tribal college leadership development. In "Native Leadership: Advocacy for Transformation, Culture, Community, and Sovereignty," the authors include a detailed literature review, citing works by Rebecca Robbins and John W. Tippeconnic III, Don Coyhis, and Patrick Lynch and Mike Charleston. ${ }^{34}$ Johnson and colleagues' article features a chart created by Joann Sebastian in 1980 that contrasts traditional Indian values with nonIndian values. Examples include patience versus aggressiveness; group emphasis versus individual emphasis; cooperation versus competition; and
spiritual/mystical versus skeptical. The authors conclude that there is no one model of Native leadership, and that leadership is "grounded on principles that reflect an inner strength, a meaning and purpose in one's life to make a difference in one's Native community. This awareness is often referred to as spirituality." ${ }^{35}$

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The scarcity of research on American Indian leadership suggests that many areas merit further study. Although a few studies of American Indian women and leadership exist, there is a need for more, and in particular a need to consider contemporary Native women leaders from a range of disciplines, careers, and reservations, and from urban and rural environments. Specifically, more research on the role of Native women leaders in the development of urban Indian communities is needed.

Studies of gender, age, and leadership might consider how American Indian women and men interact in order to provide leadership in their communities, including urban communities. In Los Angeles, Denver, Seattle, and Chicago, Native populations maintain family ties to reservations and rural communities. Within these communities, traditional leadership practices might be studied from the perspective of challenges faced by those who, although they live off the reservation, maintain an interest in leadership decisions affecting their reservation communities.

American Indian leaders have much to teach non-Native leaders regarding sharing power in order to improve their communities and organizations. Harris recognized the strength of inclusiveness when she stated, "To create a system which nurtures us, then probably we will have created a system capable of nurturing everyone." ${ }^{36}$ Cobb's study of Harris's leadership suggests the need for more research conducted by Native scholars using the biographies of contemporary Native leaders in order to understand Native leadership better. This type of research will expand our knowledge of Native leadership as well as inform the study of leadership in general.

The place of storytelling in the instruction of leadership bears further exploration. How can Native stories be more effectively and consistently used to nurture leadership within tribal communities? One of the riches of American Indian communities resides within the beauty, significance, and power of the spoken word. These riches are also reflected in the concept of relationality by which language and worldview are connected. ${ }^{37}$ More studies could examine the language related to leadership that forms and informs the worldviews of the people. Kidwell and Velie illustrate this richness and relatedness when they quote a Santa Clara woman who said, "When I dance, I am the corn." ${ }^{38}$

Assessing the status of the nation-building model is valuable-especially where it intersects with traditional leadership and governance-in efforts to assist leaders in guiding their communities in this global society. The Comanche-based leadership model, discussed by Warner and Grint and examined by Cobb, suggests the potential for studying other tribal models.

The qualities identified in mainstream leadership studies, which include creativity, persuasion, spirituality, community building, and serving and empowering others, resemble the qualities inherent in American Indian traditional leadership. It is evident that much of today's non-Native leadership literature and education espouse values and practices that have long been rooted in Native leadership practices and worldviews. However, there are Native leadership practices that are not necessarily familiar in non-Native arenas. Biographies and life stories provide a much deeper understanding of a leader and his or her community, culture, and indigenous worldviews. It is possible that non-Native business leaders, for example, might benefit from research that demonstrated tribal leaders' use of oral presentations to introduce innovations into their communities.

## CONCLUSION

Winter stories, with themes of endurance, service, and ingenuity illustrate the importance of traditions and worldviews in studying and developing indigenous leaders. This review has shown that there is not a single model of American Indian leadership. It is evident from the literature that there are at least three models studied from 2003 to 2008: traditional models of Native leadership, Native women as leaders, and leadership as reflected in educational settings. Researchers in the fields of education, political science, health science, management, and history have begun to characterize American Indian leadership through a reiteration of Native values. The values, often labeled cultural values and sometimes framed as models, include spirituality, sharing, reverence for the spoken word, silence, leading by example, and recognition of community accountability based on relationality. Of paramount importance is the understanding that leaders are leaders only when accepted as such by the Native community, and that leadership may shift with the community's requirements. Consensus and a spirit of respectful and inclusive discussion are necessary for deliberative decision making. When problems occur in an indigenous community, restitution as opposed to retribution is the more constructive and effective means of resolution.

In many tribal communities today, the distrust of regulations and restrictions accompanies increasing population growth, fluctuating economic conditions, and potential threats to sovereignty. These contemporary concerns may be better addressed within the context of traditional ways of leading. The literature suggests that traditional ways of leading, including winter lessons, are not static and have much to contribute to the discussion of effective leadership in today's Native and non-Native communities. Although the stories recall the past, they also help leaders guide their communities toward a prosperous future.

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