



Fostering Resilience in Response to Terrorism

The dawn of the 21st century was looked to with great anticipation as the potential for a new day for humankind. Spurred on by telecommunication and other technology, the world has increasingly become a global community. However, the hatreds and jealousies resulting from centuries-old ethnic strife, as well as present-day imbalances in power and resource distribution, have resulted in global warfare of a magnitude previously unimagined (Chirot & Seligman, 2003). The war strategy of terrorism allows small groups of people to have a major impact on much larger bodies (Lawal, 2002). The war is waged not only on the battlefield, but also in the minds and hearts of all. Our response to the threat is colored both by our national identity, as well as our cultural and ethnic beliefs and values (Macias, 2002). This fact sheet, one of a series developed as a resource for mental health providers, gives an overview of the unique issues inherent in fostering resilience in response to terrorism in some of the varieties of ethnic groups that make up the American community. The broad considerations of diversity will be presented as well as some perspectives from the four traditional American ethnic minority groups. These are the Native American, Black American, Latino(a) American, and Asian Pacific Islander American. Although it is recognized that there are growing numbers of other subgroups, such as those from the Middle East, who are particularly targeted at the moment and who are particularly at risk and in need of services (Trautman, Tucker, Pfefferbaum, Lensgraf, Doughty, Buksh, & Miller, 2002), considerations of those and other minority groups within the United States are beyond the scope of this fact sheet. While we are mindful that minority groups are not homogeneous, it is our hope that some of the learnings from research with other groups can help people of Middle Eastern descent as well.

What Is Terrorism?

Terrorism is the "systematic threat or use of unpredicted violence by organized groups to achieve a political objective. Terrorism's impact has been magnified by the deadliness of modern-day weapons and the ability of mass communications to inform the world of such acts" (Merriam Webster, 2000). It is particularly pernicious in its ability to create fear and anxiety in large groups of people, poignantly exemplified in the response to the 9-11 attacks on the World Trade Center. Weinberg and Davis (1989) pointed out that this feeling of anxiety, a result of

the fear that anything can happen at anytime and anyplace, is the result of terrorism. However, the very nature of this psychological strategy means that its effectiveness will be modified by the psychology of those upon whom it is attempted. This psychology is not only individually based, but also is influenced by a myriad of environmental factors, such as the culture and ethnicity of the target groups. While there are generalized responses, it is also clear that perceptions of terrorism play a significant role in the unique responses of cultural groups (Walker & Chestnut, 2003). Building effective intervention strategies, including fostering resilience, must take into account these ethnocultural differences.

What Is Resilience?

"Resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or even significant sources of stress—such as family and relationships problems, serious health problems, or workplace and financial stressors. It means 'bouncing back' from difficult experiences" (Discovery Health Channel and APA Practice Directorate, 2002). Resilience research spans half a century, dating back to the "ego resiliency" construct (well adjusted and interpersonally effective) as defined by Jack and Jeanne Block in their 1950s studies at Stanford University (Davis, 1999). However, Davis and others (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998) credit Norman Garmezy as the pioneer of resiliency research for focusing on the large percentage of children with schizophrenic parents who were able to survive and thrive despite their obvious adversity. Since then, a great deal of research has been conducted, on all populations, particularly children and adolescents, on the factors that influence resilience. A common consensus is that resilience can be taught (Katz, 1997; Meyers & Taylor, 1998). In the growing number of terrorist attacks, resilience research has increasingly focused on the growth of resilience in the face of terrorism. Much of the research has focused on the individual traits, such as easy temperament, secure attachment, basic trust, problem-solving ability, social competence, and self-esteem, among others (Davis, 2001; Gordon, 1995). However, Clauss-Ehlers (2004) has advocated for a more inclusive definition of the factors that promote resilience. She suggests that culture, ethnicity, and environment play key roles in the manifestation of resiliency in individuals and in communities, particularly among People of Color.

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Special Considerations for People of Color

Diversity has become a well-accepted buzz word within American culture. Diversity training is big business within corporate America, and, across the nation, government and private industries and organizations have moved to incorporate awareness of and respect for diversity within their daily functioning. Nevertheless, the dominant culture and value systems remain primarily Euro-Caucasian, with their emphasis on individuality, nuclear family, and the self-made road to success. Hence, the status of minority reflects a unique perspective for ethnically diverse Americans who are expected to participate in and support the American dream, despite the remaining barriers to reaping the rewards of that system. Of the four major recognized ethnic minorities (African American, Hispanic American, Asian Pacific Islander American, and Native American), census figures continue to reveal disparities on every level, including salary, educational status, health status, and representation at the highest echelons of corporate America, to name but a few (Mio & Iwamasa, 2003). Even the so-called "model minority," the Asian Pacific Islander American community, finds greater incidence of mental health issues within certain segments of their subpopulations, such as refugees from Southeast Asia (Sue & Consolacion, 2003), possibly a reflection of the stress of living as a minority in a majority culture. Hence, there are several special considerations in working with People of Color. The resilience that must be developed to function with the vestiges of racism is one concern. In addition, providers must be cognizant that there are approaches to resilience that reflect a cultural dynamic that is at variance with the individualism of the dominant culture. Other considerations include identification with the target group, as well as being falsely identified with an "out" group because of dress or physical features.

Impact of Terrorism on People of Color

It is widely accepted that a person's worldview will affect the person's response to terrorism (Ofman and Mastria, 1995). Within weeks of the 9-11 tragedy, Walker and Chestnut (2003) studied the ethnocultural differences in response to terrorism. Although they found greater differences between the genders, they did find significant ethnic differences. Religious explanations for the attacks were more prominent among minority groups, as well as in the explanations for the causes of the attacks.

Two major aspects of reality for People of Color include poverty and racism. These ethnocultural realities play a major role in a Person of Color's response to terrorist attacks and the ongoing threat of same.

Poverty and Racism

The disproportionate number of People of Color with poor health (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001), compounded by poverty and racial discrimination (Williams, Yu, Jackson, & Anderson, 1997), further compromises ethnic minorities' resilience. Research indicates that Hispanics/Latinos in New York reported more mental health symptoms after the September 11, 2001, attack as compared to Whites (Galea, Ahern, Resnick, Kilpatrick, Bucuvalas, Gold, & Vlahov, 2002). Among other ethnic minority groups, trauma responses are increased presumably because of the ongoing stress of living with limited resources.

In his chapter on modern forms of resistance to multiculturalism, Mio (2003) asserts that overt racism is no longer socially tolerated. He identifies three types of racism—symbolic, modern, and aversive—which currently exist outside of public acknowledgement and conscious awareness. These new forms of racism covertly and overtly serve to maintain the power differential within American society, and it is this power differential that affects People of Color. In times of terrorism, they are less powerful and thus more open to attack by majority groups, with less protection from the law. In addition, access to resources remains differentially distributed, while challenges to affirmative action continue to burgeon (McConahay, 1986).

Being the Other

In times of national insecurity and crisis, visible People of Color are scapegoated (Greider, 1991) and targeted as the enemy (Root, 1990). Loo and her associates (1998) described the race-related stress and trauma Asian American Vietnam veterans experienced because of their physical similarity to the enemy. Racial profiling increased after 9-11 creating an "us and them" mentality where People of Color were "Them." For example, anecdotal reports indicate that Latinos were targeted and even attacked because they looked "Middle Eastern."

Ethnocultural Allodynia

A repetitive exposure to racial discrimination and the development of dysfunctional reactions to racism can compromise the resilience of People of Color. Because of the pervasiveness of racism, many People of Color are socialized to be vigilant in ambiguous social situations. Ethnocultural allodynia is the abnormally increased sensitivity to relatively innocuous or neutral stimuli resulting from previous exposure to painful racially and culturally based situations (Comas-Diaz & Jacobsen, 2001). As a risk factor, ethnocultural allodynia limits the person's ability to distinguish between a racist act, an oversensitivity, and a neutral situation.

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Historical Trauma

Historical trauma is "cumulative emotional and psychological wounding, over the life span and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma experiences" (Brave Heart, 2003). An estimated 95% of the Native American population was wiped out through federal policies of extermination, removal, relocation, and assimilation (Stiffarm & Lane, 1992). This American Indian "holocaust" (Braveheart & DeBruyn, 1998), which meets the United Nations definition of genocide (United Nations, 1948), has resulted in generations of traumatic losses in Native communities. Traditional spiritual and ceremonial ways of healing were outlawed by U.S. policy until 1978, leaving Native American people with no mechanism for healing from these historical traumas. The historical trauma response described by Brave Heart (1999a, b, 1998, 1995) in reaction to these cumulative traumas includes high levels of substance abuse, suicide, depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, anger, difficulty recognizing and expressing emotions, and unresolved historical grief. It is important to recognize that Native people have already experienced terrorism in their own communities for generations (slavery, warfare, loss of lands, forced removal of children to boarding schools). In addition, the terms *biological warfare* and *weapons of mass destruction* have a special meaning for Native Americans, whose populations were decimated by the deliberate introduction of diseases as a mechanism of war (e.g., smallpox infected blankets) (Stiffarm & Lane, 1992).

What Contributes to Resilience?

While resilience has been studied for some time, the importance of the work has taken on new relevance and importance with the recent increase in terrorism within the country. Several factors have been identified as contributing to resilience. Individual characteristics of resilience in adults include optimism, self-efficacy, a sense of mastery, a sense of coherence, and hardiness (Butler, Hobfoll, & Keane, 2003). However, for People of Color, resilience is as much if not more based in one's sense of connectivity, including social ties, belief systems, and community supports (Dudley-Grant, Mendez, & Zinn, 2000) as it is in any particular individual characteristic. While social connectedness is seen as one aspect of resilience in the general population (Fonagy, Steele, Steele, Higgitt, & Target, 1994), the primacy of the individual is still maintained as the basic value in the American value system. Hence, the resilience of the individual remains the focus, rather than the resilience of the community, which is a conceptual shift that is necessary to make when considering resilience in persons from People of Color communities (Clauss-Ehlers, 2004).

How Does Resilience Manifest in a Cultural Context?

Cultural Resilience

Culture influences how people understand and cope with stress (Lopez, Prosser, Edwards, Magyar-Moe, Neufeld, & Rasmussen, 2002) and cope with adversity. Resilience, like most behaviors, is culturally learned. Cultural resilience (Elsass, 1992) is a host of values and practices that promote coping mechanisms and adaptive reactions to trauma within a cultural context. Factors in promoting ethnic minority cultural resilience include connection, cultural adaptation, spirituality, generativity, and creativity. Risk factors for People of Color include racism, and for a significant segment of ethnic minority population, poverty.

Factors Increasing Cultural Resilience

Connection

Most ethnic minorities endorse a sociocentric worldview promoting both individual and collective resilience. Ethnic minorities tend to form strong social and emotional connections with others, embrace group identity, and value community welfare (Ho, 1987). Under distress, they often reaffirm their bond with others and increase their sense of connection. Since trauma victims struggle to reinstate a sense of connection to a larger group (Lifton, 1988), the connection of People of Color to an ethnic community enhances their resilience. As an example, familism—valuing nuclear and extended family needs over individual ones (Sabogal, Marin, Otero-Sabogal, Marin, & Perez-Stable, 1987)—has been empirically associated with resilience among Mexican American youth (Gonzalez & Padilla, 1997). Research found that family and social support have been associated with resilience among Puerto Rican adolescents (Colomba, Saez-Santiago, & Rossello, 1999). Strengthening afrocentric values and cultural identity increases resilience among African Americans (Belgrave, Chase-Vaughn, Gray, Addison, & Cherry, 2000). Community-based models of intervention (Duran & Duran, 1995; Weaver, 1998), with emphasis on traditional culture (Cross, 1994; Silver & Wilson, 1988; Brave Heart, 2003), strengthening positive Native identity (Oetting & Beauvais, 1989), and emphasizing intergenerational relationships (Brave Heart, 1999a) have been found to increase resiliency among Native Americans.

Connection among People of Color transcends death. For many Latinos, affiliation with dead relatives through dreams, visions, and feelings helps them cope with grief (Shapiro, 1994). Likewise, some Asian American groups value their connection with their ancestors (Tan & Dong, 1999). This connection provides a wider sense of belonging to a group and can be translated into a more collective sense of resilience. Being a member of a close group with a sense of historical

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continuity provides an expanded definition of resilience. Native Americans view the relatives who have gone before them as part of their lives, and relationships with ancestors help to guide present-day actions.

Cultural adaptation

Many ethnic minorities are bicultural, and, thus, need to adapt to their original culture as well as to the dominant one. Biculturalism enhances cultural adaptability. Moreover, immigration increases cultural adaptation because immigrants face culture shock and acculturation. Some ethnic minorities have struggled with trauma and terrorism prior, during, and after their immigration. Surviving these traumatic experiences entails developing resilience in addition to adapting to sudden cultural change. Thus, many ethnic minority immigrants develop resilient strategies helpful in handling the cultural change inherent in our modern society.

Spirituality

Spirituality predicts resilience (Masten, 1994). Most People of Color are spiritually oriented (Cook & Wiley, 2000; Ho, 1987; Tan & Dong, 1999; Trujillo, 2000; Zea, Mason, & Murguia, 2000; Dudley-Grant, 2003) and use spirituality to enhance their cultural resilience (Brodsky, 1999). Furthermore, spirituality strengthens resilience by helping individuals to discern when to give up on things that they cannot control (Werner & Smith, 1992). Divine will—the spiritual understanding that things happen for a reason—as well as cultural beliefs in destiny, fate, and karma help many ethnic minorities accept that which cannot be changed (Richards & Bergin, 2000). A spiritual orientation helps People of Color cope with trauma by addressing questions regarding the meaning of life, loss of hope, victimization, and demoralization. Indeed, engaging in spiritual ceremonies increases and reaffirms ethnic identity and increases resilience among many native Americans (Mehl-Medrona, 2003). Native Americans value balance between the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects of the self and harmony and interdependence with the environment. Illness, adversity, and difficult times are understood as a lack of balance and harmony (Thin Elk, 1993). Within a spiritual framework, adversity promotes personal development and growth. Finding meaning in adversity and espousing a sense of purpose to survival facilitates resilience (Kay, 1998). Among some Asian American groups, adversity and suffering are conceptualized as necessary for enlightenment (Tan & Dong, 1999). Similarly, some Native Americans believe that adversity teaches valuable lessons in living (Mehl-Medrona, 2003). The use of a spiritual paradigm for "meaning making" in adversity is a resilience tool among many People of Color.

Generativity

The desire to promote the next generation's well-being—generativity—enhances resilience. Research indicates that Holocaust survivors who take responsibility for issues of personal and community survival are more resilient than those who don't experience generativity (Kay, 1998). Within their collective orientation, many People of Color emphasize generativity by endorsing communal well-being. Most People of Color consider elders as authority figures (Yeo & Hikoyeda, 1991). Elders of all cultures experience multiple losses and have to adapt to them. However, ethnic minority elders are considered wise people, and, thus, promote resilience by teaching how to cope with necessary losses. Ethnic minority elders embody generativity and act as role models within their communities. For example, Native American elders teach that each decision of the present must be considered in terms of the impact it will have on the next seven generations.

Creativity

Most ethnic minority groups have used creativity as a resilient response (Elsass, 1992). Among People of Color, creative responses to oppression include Jazz, Salsa, Hip Hop, Rap, and Def poetry. Humor, another resilience strategy, identifies the comedy in the tragedy (Kumpfer, 1999). Ethnic minorities have historically used humor to cope with oppression and adversity (Dorison & Boskin, 1988).

Ethnopolitical Context in the Lives of People of Color

The lives of visible People of Color are embedded in an ethnopolitical context. The legacy of historical and contemporary oppression has shaped ethnic minorities' cultural resilience. Many People of Color have been exposed to ethnopolitical trauma and terrorism (Comas-Diaz, 2000). These experiences have promoted both protective and risk factors to adversity.

Protective factors

A protective factor is racial socialization or the lessons People of Color teach their children about coping with racism. Healthy paranoia, a sixth sense sorting out racist individuals and situations, constitutes a resilience skill. This sixth sense, or ability to read vibes, could be helpful in detecting imminent dangerous situations involving terrorism threats.

Building Resilience

Given the unique characteristics and cultural concerns of People of Color, it is important to utilize culturally consonant interventions for building resilience. The following are suggested strategies for increasing the resilience of People of Color.

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- Strengthen ethnic identity through conscious participation in cultural activities.
- Increase community ties by encouraging actions with and for others while encouraging recognition that community trauma is best addressed by community healing.
- Promote positive meaning-making constructs with regard to terrorism.
- Promote spirituality and a return to the faith of their choice.
- Encourage the use of traditional knowledge and the ancient ways of knowing that have sustained communities for generations.
- Encourage use of traditional ceremonial ways of healing; return to balance and harmony.
- Support reaching out to extended family members.
- Recognize the community's historical trauma and unresolved grief (and other natural responses to colonization) and empower the community to engage its natural healing mechanisms.
- Encourage story telling and drawing on past experiences of overcoming trauma.
- Promote generativity, desire to develop the next generations.
- Promote use of creativity and humor in mitigating the trauma experience.
- Validate their experiences of increased racism and prejudice following a terrorist event.

We can learn from the cultural resilience of People of Color. As our society becomes more diverse, we can learn from various cultural resilience modes and access different approaches and ideas used in various cultures to build resilience. With their unique background of sustained ethnopolitical trauma, visible People of Color can additionally offer a viable cultural style to enhance resilience to terrorism. Within communities, resilience can be fostered by supporting local spiritual and cultural institutions, such as Hispanos Unidos or a local chapter of the NAACP and the Interfaith Coalition. Reaching out to community members and focusing on the strengths in the interactions will ultimately foster a healthier community both in times of war and peace.

Additional Resources

Getting help when it is needed is an important aspect of taking care of oneself, and it can also contribute to resilience. In addition to turning to family members and friends for assistance, a person can take other helpful actions, including joining community support or self-help groups, reading books about how others have successfully managed hardships and challenges, and gathering related information on the Internet (though quality can vary by source).

One online resource that may be a good place to start is the **APA Help Center at www.APAHelpCenter.org**.

Authors

G. Rita Dudley-Grant, PhD, MPH, ABPP, Virgin Islands Behavioral Services; Lillian Comas-Diaz, PhD, Transcultural Mental Health Institute; Beth Todd-Bazemore, PhD, University of South Dakota; Jamie Davis Hueston, PhD, Indian Health Service
Senior Editor: Laura Barbanel, EdD

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Fact Sheet

Fostering Resilience in Response to Terrorism: For Psychologists Working With People of Color

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