

Indigenous Perspectives on Strengths, Resilience, and Well-being

Nikki Crowe, Melissa Walls, Vicki Oberstar, Joseph P. Gone, Marcia Kitto, Colleen Bernu, & Nicole M. Weiss

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Abstract

Indigenous communities consistently call for strengths-based, assets-driven approaches to promoting health equity. This includes efforts to expand well-being and resilience frameworks to reflect cultural understandings and perspectives. This study describes community-based participatory research (CBPR) involving focus groups with four diverse groups of Indigenous community members in a single reservation community in the United States. Data were analyzed using inductive and deductive multi-coder processes. Collaborative efforts led to innovations in the planned methods and focus areas of this study, including a reframing of the construct of resilience as one that brings hearts and community together. This approach also yielded a unique, intensive qualitative coding structure that represents a substantive effort to democratize and Indigenize research methods. Community members who participated in focus groups identified Indigenous cultural practices, beliefs, and community as critical components to well-being.

Author Info

Nikki Crowe, Tribal Conservation Coordinator, Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa
Dr. Melissa Walls, Associate Professor, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Center for Indigenous Health Great Lakes Hub, Email: Mwalls3@jhu.edu
Vicki Oberstar, Ed.D, Oodenang Project Member, Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa
Dr. Joseph P. Gone, Professor; Harvard University, Director, Harvard University Native American Programs
Marcia Kitto, Oodenang Project Member, Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa
Colleen Bernu, Oodenang Project Member, Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa
Dr. Nicole M. Weiss, Researcher, University of Minnesota – Twin Cities

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Glossary

Community-based participatory research (CBPR)
Government Accountability Office (GAO)
Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA)
Institutional review board (IRB)
Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS)

Introduction

Human resilience involves “a dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity” (Luthar et al., 2000, p. 543). The notion that individuals and communities can survive or recover in the face of tremendous stress and trauma is perhaps most poignantly illustrated in the context of Indigenous Peoples’ (specifically American Indian) persistence and survival despite centuries of historical trauma including genocide (Duran & Duran, 1995; Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998; Vizenor, 1999, 2008; Bombay et al., 2009, 2011; Burnette & Figley, 2017; Weiss et al., 2022).

At first glance, resilience frameworks offer opportunities for understanding and promoting Indigenous health and well-being. Yet, there are numerous critiques of the construct both from Western scientific and Indigenous community perspectives. These criticisms include a lack of agreement on the definition (Luthar et al., 2000) and misunderstanding of resilience as a “trait” rather than a process (Luthar & Zelazo, 2003). On the latter point, labeling resilience as a personal characteristic can individualize what is inherently a social problem: attention falls upon an individual’s capacity to rebound from stress rather than addressing the root causes of their disproportionate exposure to trauma (Luthar et al., 2000; Luthar & Zelazo, 2003).

Resilience frameworks have also been criticized for failing to adequately account for cross-cultural understandings of adversity and well-being (Luthar et al., 2000). This concern is critical because resilience has been shown to look and operate differently across diverse socio-environmental and cultural contexts (Ungar, 2013). In the case of Indigenous communities, traditional Indigenous culture (e.g., identity, enculturation, etc.) is a frequently cited protective factor and stimulator of individual and collective resilience (Wexler, 2014; Fleming & Ledogar, 2008). Indigenous communities have expressed resilience through stories and metaphors, often connecting well-being and resistance to history, healing, relationships with land, and cosmo-centric understandings of the self (Kirmayer et al., 2011). Most Indigenous conceptions of resilience involve a collective focus, including community-wide cultural revitalization, activism, support, and group agency; yet, these attributes of resilience remain underexplored, particularly in action-oriented health promotion literature (Kirmayer et al., 2011; Teufel-Shone et al., 2016). As such, the promise for Indigenous knowledges and perspectives to inform effective public health programming remains unmet. The purpose of this study is to contribute to the literature on Indigenous conceptions of resilience using data from a community-based participatory research (CBPR) project involving focus groups with American Indian adults.

Methods

Community-Based Participatory Research Structure

This research was developed as one component of a team-based health leadership program focused on resilience research and sponsored by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Protocols were reviewed and approved by a university and Tribal institutional review board (IRB). The approach

included attempts to decolonize (e.g., transforming how research unfolds, who leads research, etc.) and Indigenize (e.g., respecting and integrating Indigenous knowledges, perspectives, and protocols into the research methods), the research process using principles of CBPR including a focus on community strengths, mutual empowerment and power sharing (in this case, via collaboratively developed decision-making protocols), and co-learning (Israel et al., 2017). Local perspectives and concerns were prioritized throughout the 3-year research process, ample time was invested in relationship building and formative work, and local and cultural protocols were followed to create safe, inclusive spaces (e.g., gifting, sharing meals, consulting with Elders when appropriate, etc.). The team began with one Tribally based community member and two Indigenous researchers who led the initial development of the research protocol. Methods were substantially improved and revised in deep collaboration with a community research board comprised of 10 members of the Tribal community who were recruited and supported specifically for this project. The overall goal of the research was to engage community members to identify local sources of strength for health promotion. Notably, discussions on the term “resilient” were prevalent in community board meetings. The fact that the notion of resilience centers a response to stress and trauma was critiqued in community board conversations. This critique is illustrated in the words of the lead author, who shared: “Do you know how tired I am of being resilient?” Based on these conversations, the team deliberately avoided overuse of the term “resilient” in the research approach. Ultimately, the group collectively determined that the research work would be called oodenang, which was understood to encompass “a gathering of hearts,” or more simply, “community”.

Focus Group Methodology

Focus group participants were recruited using purposive sampling with assistance from community research board members. The recruitment process focused on participants from four categories of eligibility: adults, Elders, service providers (e.g., education, health, human services, etc.), and young adults. All participants were connected to the reservation community where the research took place.

A total of four focus groups (one for each category noted above), facilitated by a trained member of the community, occurred from August to October 2019. The interviewer followed a script focusing on questions about community strengths and weaknesses, coping mechanisms, and definitions of well-being. All focus groups were transcribed and de-identified by a trained transcriptionist who is a member of the community.

Two qualitative approaches were employed to evaluate data (see Analysis below). This innovative, multi-methods strategy was chosen for two reasons. First, considerable time was invested in collaborative, community-driven analysis to Indigenize the data analysis process. This approach emphasized co-training and collaboration among community and research team members. The second approach centered on theory-based research question(s). Using two approaches allowed for triangulation of data. Ideally, triangulation helps mitigate the biases of one type of method, ensuring that each method is “checked” by the other (Flick, 2009).

Analysis

Coding Approach 1. The first approach was undertaken by a team of six Indigenous coders. Two of these are not community members; NC has extensive experience in qualitative analysis. The primary aim of the six coders was to use a community-driven approach to examining data. This team used a deductive, “top-down” style of coding in which they read through the focus group transcripts searching for indicators of six categories.

The first category, *strengths*, was defined as “cultural, community, and/or personal attributes; qualities that are positive and beneficial in one’s life.” *Well-being*, the second category, included “ideas or understanding of what it means to thrive and survive.” Well-being often depends on strength. The third category was *coping with challenges* and was defined as “reference to an obstacle or setback that people manage through some strategy or quality.” In a similar vein, the fourth category, *overcoming adversity*, was “getting over an obstacle even if you thought it could limit your momentum. Coping with challenges is related to overcoming adversity, but the distinction could be coping/trying to cope but not overcoming the adversity. Overcoming is the follow-through / having overcome.” The next category, *community resources*, included any resource that was not cultural; *cultural resources* comprised the sixth category and included traditions and other aspects of Indigenous culture.

Coders highlighted excerpts of the transcripts and labeled them with at least one of the six categories, also adding keywords to their labels to describe the chosen category more clearly (e.g., an excerpt describing a ceremonial *powwow* would be labeled as “cultural resources: powwow”, in which the format is “main category: keyword”). Related keywords of multiple excerpts were then grouped together. For example, keywords such as powwow, *sweat lodge*, *drum making*, *being in circle*, etc. were grouped together because they all related to community cultural activities or ceremonies. Grouping these keywords by theme facilitated comparison to the data examined in the second approach (described in Coding Approach below).

Three of the four focus group transcripts were coded by two team members. The last focus group transcript was coded by three team members, making for a total of nine sets of coded transcripts. Coding was completed either by inserting comments in Microsoft Word or by hand using hard copies of the transcripts.

Coding Approach 2. The second approach was completed by a non-Native coder NW with expertise in qualitative and content analysis. Their primary aim was to identify perspectives on well-being with a focus on living a thriving life (i.e., more than just surviving). Thriving is a key component of what Vizenor termed *survivance*, which more broadly describes the dynamic and active presence of Indigenous people despite dominant invisibility narratives (Vizenor, 1999, 2008). NW developed a codebook using an iterative process based on a modification of a protocol by Trout and colleagues (2018). This process used both deductive (“top-down”) and inductive (“bottom-up”) approaches (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

Deductive codes were written before examination of the transcripts and based on topical domains within the focus interview guide. Additional deductive codes were created based on findings from previous work, namely results from prior examination of risk and protective factors among Indigenous young adults (led by author MW: Walls et al., 2016; Kading et al., 2019). The deductive codes used in this approach were developed independent of the six categories described in the previous approach. Each deductive code was written to capture a specific theme.

Next, NW noted excerpts initially coded as “noteworthy” during the first round of coding, a catch-all category designed to indicate a topic’s importance despite no code having yet been written for it. In the second round of coding, phrases originally coded as “noteworthy” were grouped according to shared theme. A code was then created to reflect this emergent theme, and all excerpts reflecting this theme were assigned the new code. For example, many participants discussed ways in which they used good medicines as a positive coping mechanism. Because “good medicine” wasn’t in the initial codebook, NW created a “good medicine” code during the second round of coding and assigned this code to all applicable excerpts. *Good medicine* was thus an emergent theme.

The aim of this approach—using both deductive and inductive codes—was to mitigate the influence of researcher biases and preconceptions on code creation. This approach was completed using *NVivo 1.0* (Lumivero, previously QSR International Pty Ltd, 2020), a qualitative analysis software.

Results

Results were analyzed across coding strategies in two ways. First, categories (defined in Approach 1) and themes that occurred most frequently (from both coding approaches) were examined. For themes, this meant that the theme comprised more than 5% of responses for a particular coder examining a particular transcript. Second, themes were compared across coders (irrespective of frequency of occurrence).

The following sections synthesize results from both coding approaches, comparing the community-driven approach to examining data (i.e., Approach 1: focusing on *strengths*, *well-being*, *coping with challenges*, *overcoming adversity*, *community resources*, and *cultural resources*) with the theory-driven approach focusing on survivance (i.e., Approach 2). Results are presented by focus group type.

Adults Focus Group

Most frequent themes. Among the six categories used in the first coding approach, *strengths* and *coping with challenges* were used most frequently, followed closely by *community resources* then *cultural resources*. Overcoming adversity was used the least often (roughly half as often as *strengths*).

Specific themes from the first coding approach were examined using keywords added by coders to the six predetermined categories. These themes are described below for results comprising more than 5% of responses. For example, the most common keywords used within the category *strengths* were 1. nature (e.g., plant medicines, connecting with nature and the land), 2. spirituality (e.g., holistic health, spiritual health), and 3. community (e.g., a caring community, a sense of family). Similar keyword themes emerged within the *community resources* category: 1. green space (e.g., farmlands, wetlands), and 2. help (e.g., centers, clinics, programs, housing, prevention) being the most used keywords. For the *cultural resources* category, the main keyword was natural resources, including plant medicines, hunting, ricing, and maple syrup. Notably, the resulting themes from the first coding approach were also salient to the second coding approach. Common themes emerging from the second approach included talking with others, coding community programs, education/mentorship, traditional practices, good medicine, and connecting with land.

Comparing themes across coders. Some themes did not occur frequently but were noted by multiple coders, even among those using different approaches (Table 1). Again, note that these themes do not necessarily comprise more than 5% of responses; they were compared across coders based on presence or absence of the theme.

Table 1
Comparison of findings for both coding approaches in the adult focus group

Themes	Approach I: Coder I	Approach I: Coder II	Approach II: Coder I	Example Quote
Connection, community, family	X	X	X	“I didn’t know what family was until I came out here . . . You know, you walk through the hallway or whatever and ‘Oh, hey Auntie!’ . . . and ‘Oh, hey Uncle!’”

Themes	Approach I: Coder I	Approach I: Coder II	Approach II: Coder I	Example Quote
Education, mentorship, leadership	X	X	X	“If we really look at what’s going to help heal, it’s probably going to be those things, the connections with people who have been down those roads, like yourselves. And just mentoring people or just listening and acknowledging.”
Nature, green space, plants, land, connect with land	X	X	X	“One thing that also helped me was, well, I got a formal education on plant sciences . . . It did amazing things for me. Being out there and creating relationships with all the plants . . . That’s amazing and that helped me spiritually in a way that I didn’t think that it would.”
Spirituality, immersion, ceremonies, good medicine, ancestors	X	X	X	“Your dreams are medicine.”
Next generation, youth, children	X	X	X	“I see this already being passed on to our grandchildren. You know, the way of life with hunting and fishing and harvesting.”
Colonization, lateral oppression, stereotypes, isolation	X	X	X	“I think there’s a lot of lateral oppression that happens in our own communities. [It] ties to a lot of different things – the things that happened to us, blood quantum issues, greed.”
Growth, building, accepting, accountability	X	X	X	“And maybe being able to look at where you’re at in your life and that you’re in an okay place, and it’s not the place that you want to be but it’s still an okay place that you’re in. And not . . . comparing yourself to others.”

Themes	Approach I: Coder I	Approach I: Coder II	Approach II: Coder I	Example Quote
Addiction, sobriety, health, mental health, treatment, therapy		X	X	“You wanna sell drugs? Let’s create a vision board [instead]: getting an education, being an entrepreneur . . . They have to have different channels, different avenues.”
Decolonization, self-determination, survivance		X	X	“Showing people their power . . . It’s so important to remind people who they are and not who you think they should be or who society says.”

X = theme observed in analyses

Summary: adults focus group. Overall, the adult participants emphasized nature and connection frequently in their discussions such as “Being out there and creating relationships with all the plants out there . . . that’s amazing and that helped me spiritually in a way that I didn’t think that it would.” and

I have enjoyed my time outside and being with people. So, being on the (wild) rice landings or staying late and finishing fish, fileting fish . . . It’s an awesome feeling. A feeling of accomplishment. Even walking somewhere or running or doing certain things that kind of push your spirit. You’re able to find that different place of enlightenment with other people, and that feels good.

Elders Focus Group

Most frequent themes. The most coded themes of the six pre-determined categories of the first coding approach were *community resources* followed by *cultural resources*. Both the *strengths* and *well-being* categories were observed about half as frequently as the *community resources* category. The least common categories were *coping with challenges* and *overcoming adversity*, with the latter occurring about one third as often as the most frequent category.

As with the adults focus group, specific Elders group themes were examined using keywords from the first coding approach. Again, these themes are described below if the theme comprised more than 5% of responses. For the *community resources* category, common contextual keywords included 1. clinics and centers (e.g., cultural and community centers, programs, events, ropes course), 2. sense of home (e.g., place of peace), and 3. relatedness (e.g., showing up for each other, pulling everyone together, quick communal response). These keywords overlapped slightly with those used in the *cultural resources* category 1. spiritual practices (e.g., sweat lodge, ceremony, pipe, drumming as heartbeat of nation) and 2. awakening (e.g., sharing culture with youth). For the *strengths* category, the most common keyword was “community”, which meant “this is home” and open lines of communication. Similarly, the keyword “interconnection” was used commonly to describe the *well-being* category, which included being accepting of the seasons of life. Lastly, the *overcoming adversity* category was commonly described with themes related to community and family, such as

sober communities and learning through one's parents. Similar themes were frequently observed with the second coding approach, including environmentalism, traditional practices and teachings, therapy, reservation centers, people, and talking with others. Of note is that "family breakdown" was a common theme observed in the second approach but not in the first.

Comparing themes across coders. As with the first focus group, themes observed by coders were compared. The results of this are found in Table 2.

Table 2

Comparison of findings for both coding approaches in the Elders focus group

Themes	Approach I: Coder I	Approach I: Coder II	Approach II: Coder I	Example Quote
Future thinking, youth, youth-elder relationships, planting seeds	X	X	X	"We have to be the ones who initiate that, who have it ... who provide that little seed for them to have that growth."
Connection to place, land, nature, beautiful home	X	X	X	"Look how beautiful this is. You know you take a walk out in the forest ... or you go out and you just walk in the woods. I mean, it's nothing but peaceful; it's beauty ... You can hear our Ojibwe words coming through the leaves. I mean, why would you not wanna show somebody that?"
Community, love, protecting families, healthy communities	X	X	X	"Well-being to me is to know that my great-grandkids, grandkids, kids, family are ... healthy ... emotionally and physically and mentally. That my community is also."
Spirituality, culture, medicine wheel	X	X	X	"I believe that we have a strong culture. Anybody (whether ... they're Native or non-Native) need[s] to know that [it] still exists; it's not dying ... You hear that every now and again. They say 'Well ... it's dying.' No, it isn't. It was sleeping. It's getting woken up right now."

Themes	Approach I: Coder I	Approach II: Coder II	Approach III: Coder I	Example Quote
Healing, mind-fulness, soothe, processing the past, survivance	X	X	X	“That’s how we measure our age . . . how many winters we’ve lived through, how [many] winters we’ve survived.”
Sobriety, addiction, other drugs	X	X	X	“Is it gonna be drugs or alcohol, or is it gonna be the cultural ways?”
Agency, understand purpose, acceptance, peace	X	X	X	“[Well-being] means being at peace with myself. I don’t have any internal struggles or things that are bothering me.”
Learning, growth, skillsets	X	X		“We were taught love. We were able to show that in a family. And so, I was thriving back then and I’m thriving right now.”

X = theme observed in analyses

Summary: Elders focus group. Elders who participated in focus groups tended to emphasize community and spirituality in their discussions. Examples of quotes that embody these themes include:

You feel it when you’re here. You know, it’s a feeling; you can’t describe it. But it’s a feeling that you have. You know, you go to bed at night, and you have dreams of . . . they’re beautiful things . . . I think it’s all because of the fact that we’re all related. We’re all a part of what it is we have.

You know, it’s just . . . there’s this, I don’t know, the bond, I guess. I’m not exactly sure what it is, but when you come back, it’s like you know . . . everybody and everybody knows you. It’s [a] big family.

Service Providers Focus Group

Most frequent themes. *Well-being* was the most frequently observed of the six categories used in the first coding approach in the providers focus group, with *strengths* second. *Coping with challenges* was next, and *overcoming adversity* was fourth. Next were *community resources* and *cultural resources*, with the latter used about one quarter as often as the *well-being* category.

Below are the keywords used to provide context for categories, given that these keywords were used for more than 5% of responses. For the *well-being* category, three main themes arose 1. *ginawenimaad* (e.g., taking care of one another), 2. inner comfort and peace (e.g., contentedness, forgiveness, nurturing), and 3. care, compassion, and comfort (e.g., caring out of respect, keeping a kind heart). The only other frequently occurring keyword was “healing”, used to describe the *coping with challenges* category. Healing in this sense meant “move forward and create distance from unhealthy relationships.”

As in the first approach, frequent themes observed in the second approach included educating/connecting, talking with others, people, and “you don’t have to pass it on”, which specifically referred to trauma. A frequently occurring theme in this approach explicitly not noted in the first approach was *anikoobijigan*, which is a stream of lives or all human life being on a continuum.

Comparing themes across coders. Table 3 displays comparison of themes observed by different coders.

Table 3

Comparison of findings for both coding approaches in the service providers focus group

Themes	Approach I: Coder I	Approach I: Coder II	Approach II: Coder I	Example Quote
Connection, kinship, family, help each other, <i>Anikoobijigan</i>	X	X	X	“We have a place in the continuum of everybody that came before us and everybody that’s gonna come after us.”
Land, nature, natural medicine, plants	X	X	X	“I think it starts from [the land] . . . It all goes back to the land.”
Mentorship, learning, education, teaching history	X	X	X	“That’s the question: ‘How do we come back from that?’ . . . I said, ‘I personally think it’s education.’”
Healing, introspection, survivance, “you don’t have to pass it on”, “set down the pain”, endurance	X	X	X	“It can stop with you. You have that power.”
Empathy, sharing, caretaking, compassion	X	X	X	“My definition of well-being is to walk and lead and hold myself with love. And live and project compassion.”
Cultural identity, good medicine, language, cultural reclamation	X	X	X	“I go to ceremonies, and I try and walk the spiritual path. So, I’m not living in the past . . . I’m healing and growing and moving forward in my thinking with the past.”
Balance	X	X	X	“For my well-being, I think about . . . balance too but I think about the unbalance when things start going off . . . And how can I find that balance?”

Themes	Approach I: Coder I	Approach I: Coder II	Approach II: Coder I	Example Quote
Improving, recovery, becoming, positivity, humor, joy	X	X	X	“This little girl came in everyday and want[ed] a smile. Where’s your smile to share? ... Share your smile; share your gift. If that’s all you can give, well, give it.”
Sense of self in time, acknowledgement, finding meaning, peace, contentment	X	X	X	“The first word that came to my mind, thinking of well-being, is ‘inner-peace’ and kinds of the columns that hold up my own inner-peace: my family [and] my child as well.”
Youth, parenthood, children	X	X	X	“It’s made me a stronger parent, to be a strong and a good parent to my children, and to teach them values. To be kind, loving, patient, and understanding with your children and to never abandon them emotionally and spiritually. That is a very important thing for me.”

Themes	Approach I: Coder I	Approach I: Coder II	Approach II: Coder I	Example Quote
Tribal government, services, programs	X	X		“And we’re starting to take charge of our own education. We’re starting to become the teachers and the entrepreneurs, business leaders, and all those other facets of who we are as a community. We got aways to go; we still gotta make mistakes. We inherited a broken system, so we’re dealing with it. We have the rules with a constitution and it wasn’t supposed to last so long because we weren’t supposed to be here. But we’re still here and we have people here at the table that are working on improving it and understanding it. And hopefully their work will be handed down to their children and their children’s children with a better form of government for everyone.”
Trafficking, family breakdown, addiction, broken system, isolation	X		X	“But as an adult, I managed to find culture and healing, and I see so much of that family system broken up, broken down . . . And I’ve had to learn in therapy that I have to accept [my parents], that they did the best they could and I’m okay with that.”
Telling our story, storytelling	X	X		“I think that, you know, we all share a story. We’re all part of that story.”

X = theme observed in analyses

Summary: providers focus group. Generally, those in the service providers focus group discussed comfort, care, and peace, as shown by these quotes.

But mostly just a sense of forgiveness and peace, I think, is really where I’m at in my life. That’s what I have tried to accomplish in my life. Maybe that’s part . . . that’s the journey.

The underlying reason why we use [drugs] is because we don't know how to bring comfort to ourselves. I think that's a big piece. You know well-being . . . like how do you nurture yourself? How do you bring comfort? So, that's a really fun thing to explore. And your list should keep getting longer and longer, and mine does. You know in the end it's like I learned to love myself. Not in a narcissistic way but . . . like . . . you know the Creator had something in mind when he created me. And I like living that out.

Ganawenimaad gaye, ganawenjige. You know the respect to take care of one another and to take care of myself. An example that I want [to] give is I was out three months with sciatica. Anybody [who has] ever had sciatica . . . you know how painful it is. But my co-workers . . . they took care of me. They took over my caseload. But then not only that . . . my young grandson . . . I had to go up to the mall one time. He was like seven or eight, maybe nine. He opened the door for me 'cause I couldn't drive. He grabbed me by the arm and [took] me out and [took] me to the mall. He was real patient. He lives with me right now; he's sixteen years old. But I mean taking care of your grandpa. But he doesn't remember when I used to take care of him. So, that's a roundabout way of how we take care of each other. You know and that's also the way we do it in our community . . . We take care of one another. You know, and it's out of respect. And it's out of love. And doing the things that we need to do, I think, at the right time.

Young Adults Focus Group

Most frequent themes. Within the young adults focus group, the most frequently observed pre-determined category in the first coding was *coping with challenges*, followed by *strengths* and then *community resources*. *Cultural resources* were next, and the least common categories were *overcoming adversity* and *well-being*.

The following keywords are described if they comprised more than 5% of the responses. For *coping with challenges*, there were two themes 1. culture and teachings (e.g., wanting culture and language for children) and 2. community and family (i.e., the core strength is still in the community). There were many contextual keywords for *strengths*, including 1. back to culture (e.g., connection to spiritual tools), 2. introspection (e.g., humility, authenticity, filtering out the noise), 3. culture and teachings (e.g., revitalization of language, being a part of something bigger), 4. community and connections (e.g., family as strength), and 5. personal (i.e., individual strengths we draw on). Themes for *community resources* included 1. people (e.g., classmates, teachers, people who offer support) and 2. programs (e.g., Sober Fest, support groups, grants). For cultural resources, the most frequent keyword was "language", which often referred to the immersion school. Interestingly, *overcoming adversity* also included the theme of "back to culture"—described as "culture opening up from underground"—as well as the theme of leadership accountability. *Well-being* themes were "community" and "culture".

The following themes were frequently observed in the second coding approach: asking for help or offering help, systemic reorganization needs, and the governance structure of the reservation (as a challenge the community must work through). These themes were not necessarily unique to the second approach, as coders in the first approach had noted themes of leadership accountability (see previous paragraph), which relates to calls for systemic reorganization seen in Approach 2.

Comparing themes across coders. Table 4 compares themes observed by different coders for the young adults focus group.

Table 4

Comparison of findings for both coding approaches in the young adults focus group

Themes	Approach I: Coder I	Approach I: Coder II	Approach I: Coder III	Approach II: Coder I	Example Quote
All my relations, community, family, part of something on the rez, coming together in crisis	X	X	X	X	“I get through it by using my support system. The way that I got sober was having somebody else by my side. Having support, having people there to help me 'cause I can't do this alone. I can't. So, I use my community, my resources.”
Back to culture, teachings, language, ceremonies	X	X	X	X	“That's what saved my life. Culture really saved my life.”
Decolonizing actions, acknowledging barriers, “to the other side”, resilience, creating change, self-determination	X	X	X	X	“Our rights, I think, are about as important as anything. Us, people.”
Celebrating youth, future thinking, each generation changing	X	X	X	X	“Supporting the community can be in any variety of ways. Can be bringing your nephews and nieces to play basketball if you need. Can be playing chess with your kids.”
Introspection, therapy, humility, positive coping	X	X	X	X	“It ain't gonna be easy after. You don't just think, ‘Oh, I can change my thinking. I'm feeling good.’ You gotta put in the work, too ... There's just so much to it.”
Historical trauma, internalized oppression, blood quantum, barriers, two worlds	X	X	X	X	“And that impacts resiliency, too! There's so many times I got kicked out of meetings that I wasn't allowed to speak for my own band member children. I wasn't allowed to be a mom to my children because of blood quantum.”

Themes	Approach I: Coder I	Approach I: Coder II	Approach I: Coder III	Approach II: Coder I	Example Quote
Leadership reform, accountability, government, politics	X		X	X	“I understand that their positions were set up for something else and we’ve grown into something else, and now we need to change our system to fit what we’re doing and what we have, and where we’re going.”
Resources, money, programs, clinics	X		X	X	“There’s good resources through the clinic. Like therapists and [Prevention Intervention] . . . But the community centers are kind of . . . where the kids go when they want to feel safe, where they don’t feel judged.”
Natural resources, medicine in the natural world, connect to land			X	X	“And like my fiancée, I will share with her the knowledge that’s been passed down to me from my family. Things like the story about how we were created. Things like the fish. When they bite. What time we can catch walleye. Things like that, and it makes me feel better. It makes me feel good.”
Positive emotions, gratitude, happiness, purpose			X	X	“Focus more on the positive, more than the negative. Looking at the silver linings of everything. Gratitude is a really good coping skill that’s helped me. Being grateful.”
Being physically active, exercise			X	X	“Football is what did everything for me. You know I graduated school with good grades, with the best that I could do. By quitting football . . . I knew what I was getting myself into cause that’s what kept me striving for so long.”

Themes	Approach I: Coder I	Approach I: Coder II	Approach I: Coder III	Approach II: Coder I	Example Quote
Ask for help, offer help, accept help			X	X	“What got me through the hardship was just determination and willpower and the support of my family. They supported my decisions and what I wanted to do. And I just had a hard time letting people in when I was younger . . . ’cause I was so independent, I guess. So, then I finally opened up and let them help me.”
Schools, fixing the schools			X	X	“Hopefully I can bring some of my education back and benefit the community and help better things around here.”
Addiction, mental health, recovery, drugs, alcohol			X	X	“And I’m not ashamed to say that I’m in recovery.”

X = theme observed in analyses

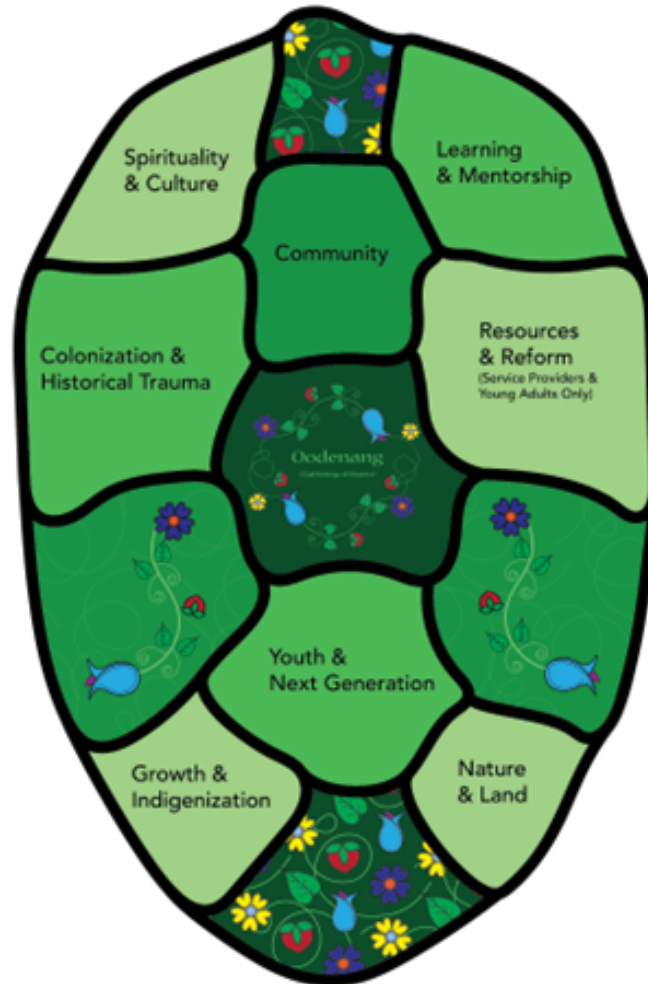
Summary: young adults focus group. Overall, young adults spoke of getting back to culture, such as “I’m processing stuff and trying to live by the teachings” and

Back in the day, when we used to be able to be us all the time and we supported each other in that way . . . those children were the highest celebrated things in our community, every little thing. Their first cries. Their belly button falling off. Every little thing they ever did. Their first deer. Their first gathering firewood. All these . . . even little things we think are stupid these days were celebrated. Imagine if your whole childhood was celebrated, every good thing you did was absolutely celebrated by your family, your community. Would you be capable of any less than what they believed in you that entire time?

Summary of Overlapping Themes

Figure 1 is a graphical portrayal of themes appearing across all or most of the four distinctive focus group discussions. As can be seen, these themes tend to focus on strengths like culture, community, family/multiple generations, and nature. In addition, and as articulated previously, each group discussed the significant impacts and legacy of historical trauma via colonization. The themes are portrayed across the back of a turtle, a culturally salient symbol and reference to Turtle Island, the home for all Anishinaabe Peoples. The project logo and artwork, which were created in collaboration with local Indigenous artist Sarah Agaton Howes, also appear across the figure.

Figure 1
Overlapping Themes Across Focus Groups



Limitations

The strengths of this study include a strong community-based participatory framework, project leadership and data collection for and by community-based team members, an all-Indigenous investigative team, and a novel, multi-pronged approach to coding data representing perspectives of diverse groups of Tribal community members. While attempts were made to control for inter-observer differences by highlighting themes observed by multiple coders, it was not feasible for more

than one coder to complete the second approach to coding. Preconceptions may also have limited which codes were used in both approaches, suggesting that deep latent content within these data, for practical purposes, is not fully developed in the current manuscript.

Furthermore, Western scientific methods likely cannot completely elucidate themes expressed by participants. Though qualitative methods were chosen to emphasize narratives and storytelling, which are critical aspects of many Indigenous cultures, understanding of the data presented here is limited because qualitative methods were designed in large part by settlers for use in colonial frameworks (Smith, 2012; Held, 2019). In other words, decolonial methods still center, in some respects, colonialism (Comenote et al., 2021). Indigenous methodologies, such as re-Indigenizing qualitative methods frameworks, may provide a more nuanced understanding of the data in this manuscript (Comenote et al., 2021).

Discussion

The methodology employed in this study included efforts to Indigenize and decolonize research processes (Walters Simoni, 2009; Smith, 2012). CBPR was employed as an orientation through which to maximize historically silenced community members and voices, hire and build capacity of local research team members with bidirectional training for university-based team members, engage Tribal IRB representatives, and create spaces that honor Indigenous protocols (e.g., sharing meals, taking care of relationships, developing shared decision-making processes, etc.). Results of these efforts led to innovations in the planned methods, including a complete reframing of the construct of *resilience* as one that brings hearts together, and intensive community-based data dissemination in collaboration with local Native artists and photographers. This approach also yielded a unique, intensive qualitative coding structure that represents a serious and substantive effort to democratize and Indigenize research methodology.

Results from Indigenous adult groups illuminate pathways that may mitigate and/or address challenges faced within the community and underscore numerous sources of individual and community resources and strengths. Findings across focus groups reveal several common themes. For example, all four diverse groups of participants cited culture and community as critical pathways to well-being. This finding aligns with Indigenous community perspectives of culture as medicine, treatment, and well-being (Gone, 2013; Barker et al., 2017) and Indigenous preferences for culturally safe, culturally based counseling and educational services (Gone 2004; Giordano et al., 2020). Below, we elaborate on additional major themes (many of which appear in Figure 1, representing themes appearing across all or most groups) and pathways forward to address Indigenous health inequities via community strengths.

Community and Family (Across Generations)

Participants in this study overwhelmingly cited community and family when asked about positive aspects of living on their reservation. Regardless of the coder or the method used, we found that participants commonly viewed Elders, children, and other family members as community strengths. As such, protection of families is critical. Yet, the reverse trend is happening at the federal government level. For example, in June 2022, the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) decided that states have jurisdiction over Tribal Nations regarding specific types of crimes, directly weakening the *Indian Child Welfare Act* 1978 (ICWA). A few months later, in a significant challenge to tribal sovereignty, SCOTUS heard arguments for *Haaland v. Brackeen* [2021] to determine if the ICWA was constitutional (Thompson, 2020). These moves run the risk widening inequities in out-of-home

placement of Indigenous youth (Lawler et al., 2012; Grinnell Davis et al., 2022), which has been shown to sever cultural and community ties (Weaver & White, 1999).

Also critical to this theme is protection and care for Elders. Nationally, much is to be learned from the leadership of Indigenous nations to “protect our Elders,” including during the COVID-19 pandemic (Chatterjee, 2021). Indigenous values hold reverence for Elders and their physical, mental, and emotional health, and funding and policymaking should align with this cultural strength.

Reservation Resources

Participants in this study commonly spoke highly of community resources provided by the reservation to local citizens, including mental health resources, community centers, and community events. These resources were viewed as community strengths. Community assets exist while the federal government has historically underfunded Tribal programs despite its trust and treaty obligations to fully support these endeavors (Government Accountability Office, 2019a). In 2019, the Government Accountability Office (GAO), in a testimony before the House of Representatives Subcommittee on Indigenous Peoples of the United States, noted that health care, education, and employment programs for Tribal Nations historically have been and continue to be underfunded. GAO (GAO, 2019b) cited “historical discriminatory policies, insufficient resources, and inefficient federal program delivery” as reasons for this lack of funding. As such, a pathway forward may be to continue to support Native activism and efforts to educate Congressional representatives on the need to honor this trust and treaty responsibility (Reclaiming Native Truth, 2018).

Back to the Land: Nature and Plants

Beyond reservation resources, participants spoke often of natural resources alongside cultural and spiritual teachings on the interconnections between human well-being and the well-being of the natural world. These discussions also touched on issues of conservation and how to protect the natural resources on and around Tribal lands. Relatedly, the White Earth Band of Ojibwe in 2018 protected wild rice (*mahnomen* or *manoomin* in the Ojibwe language) by recognizing its intrinsic rights as a living species (Gunderson, 2021; Marohn, 2021). In 2019, the Fond du Lac Tribe published a report on the importance of *manoomin* as a central aspect of Anishinaabe identity, social relations, holistic health including spiritual, physical, mental, and social wellness, environment well-being, and natural resource management. Such efforts support the sovereign rights of tribes to protect *manoomin* (Gunderson, 2021; Marohn, 2021; Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, 2019) and represent a strategy useful for preserving species and ecosystems that are threatened or endangered due to habitat destruction, overharvesting, and extractive industries.

Conclusion

Resilience frameworks offer opportunities for understanding and promoting well-being in the face of adversity and thus may be useful for considering Indigenous survival and survivance despite colonization. Yet, much work is to be done to center Indigenous perspectives in resilience research and practice (Teufel-Shone, 2016). Central to future work is a broadened understanding of collective resilience; community members in the current study described resilience as *oodenang* (“a gathering of hearts”). Indigenous communities have championed the importance of moving beyond victim or deficits-centric research to focus on strengths. As an example, educators at the Fond du Lac Ojibwe School implemented strengths-based assessments and curricula to encourage youth and families to recognize, bolster, and support student success, growth, and future goals (Newman & Oberstar,

2017). Their work is ongoing and enhanced by the findings from the current study. In addition, various divisions of the Fond du Lac reservation have utilized these findings and the work of the team to support additional, externally funded grant applications and to bolster strengths-based programming. This includes focus areas like Ojibwe language courses, cultural programming including seasons activities, and healthy coping skills workshops. Sociocultural perspectives that emphasize the structure and nature of relations and collective strengths in Indigenous communities are critical to such strengths-based approaches (Bryant et al., 2021). When asked about Indigenous strengths, participants in this study primarily discussed their culture, communities, families, reservation resources, and the natural world. Underlying these sentiments was the theme that Indigenous Peoples are strongest when they gather as a community.

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