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VALUES AND GOALS: NEBRASKA RESERVATION INDIANS¹

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ABSTRACT: An Interview Schedule consisting of 20 questions was given to 89 persons living on three reservations in Nebraska around Macy, Winnebago, and Niobrara. This paper is based on data from three of the questions about their judgments of 'good' and 'bad', and those aspects of Indian culture which should be emphasized.

The data were content analyzed. Responses were coded as units of value-statements and assigned to various categories. Five inter-related value clusters or themes emerged: *culturally-oriented* such as, pride in Indianness; *group-oriented* such as, sharing, being non-interfering; *individually-oriented* such as, courage both physical and moral, good judgment in the use of liquor; *humanity-oriented* such as, genuine love and respect for human beings; and *spiritually-oriented* such as, return to the Native American Indian Church, communion with God and nature.

Instead of the stereotyped "lazy, drunkard, savage Indian," the Nebraska Indian from this exploratory study, emerges as a human being struggling against innumerable odds trying to hold on to some of his cultural values and basic human virtues.

"Seven different tribes of Indians – Pawnee, Omaha, Otto, Ponca, Sioux, Cheyenne, and Aprapaho – numbering about 40,000 peoples and speaking three distinct languages, once lived in what is now Nebraska." (American Guide Series, 1939) But today the American Indians comprise only .4% of the total Nebraska population of 1,484,493. The 1970 census lists 6,624 (.4%) as Indians; 1,432,867 (96.6%) as whites; and 39,911 (2.7%) as Negroes. Of the 6,624 American Indians, 3,322 are males and 3,302, females; 3,013 live in urban areas and 3,611, in rural areas. (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1971) The rural areas include the three reservations in northeastern Nebraska, the home of three Indian tribes: 1. The Omahas, around Macy; 2. The Winnebagos, around Winnebago – both along the Missouri River or along "Ni-shu-da," meaning "Smoking Waters"; 3. The Santee Sioux, around Santee, along the Niobrara River.

PROBLEM

This paper, Values and Goals: Nebraska Reservation Indians is based on data from a study of Nebraska Reservation Indians. An Interview Schedule consisting of 20 questions was given to 89 Indian Parents living on the three reservations. The Interview Schedule is one of the several instruments used in research related to understanding disadvantaged and educationally retarded

¹ University of Nebraska Experiment Station Project No. 93-9.

child of the Indian reservation in Nebraska. In its broad exploratory aspects the project deals with the identification of the able Indian students by means of a non-verbal intelligence test; finding the non-intellective variables that affect their academic performance; and investigating the school drop-out problem as perceived by the drop-outs, teachers, and parents.

This paper, however, reports data from only three of the questions of the Interview Schedule. Question 14: What does it mean to be a good Indian? Question 15: What does it mean to be a bad Indian? Question 20: What aspect of Omaha/Winnebago/Santee-Sioux culture should be taught to children? No effort was made to define "good" or "bad" either before, after, or during the interview. The study being an exploratory one, no specific hypotheses were stated or tested. The aim was simply to seek answers to the three questions stated above pertaining to their values and goals.

SAMPLE

The sample could best be described as an "availability sample." Efforts were made to schedule appointments with some selected parents representative of the reservation parents. This plan did not succeed. So it was decided to interview any parent who was available and who was willing to talk. This may have introduced an undetermined bias in the sample, but under the circumstances, this was better than no sample at all.

Sample characteristics are described in Table 1. Some of the important details might be mentioned here. There were more females (62.9%) than males (37.1%). The average age of the sample was 48.1 years; 56.2% of the sample fell within the age range 30-49 years; 22.5% of the sample were parents 60 years or older. The youngest was 29 years old and the oldest was 79 years. About 16.9% of the sample were Sioux, 40.0% were Omahas and 33.7% were Winnebagos. The Sample also included four whites who were married to Indians and were living on the reservation.

COLLECTION OF DATA

An interview schedule containing 20 questions was given to 89 parents living on the three reservations. One graduate student and a Vista volunteer assisted with the interviews. Responses were recorded as fully as possible. Each interview took from about one to two hours. Parents were encouraged to talk freely and efforts were made to make sure that they fully understood the questions. An Indian interpreter was used whenever necessary. Interviews were conducted in any place available at the time and suitable to the parents, such as the back seat of a car, the pow-wow grounds, some place under a tree, a room adjacent to the jail, a classroom, or an office in the tribal building. The cooperation of the parents was amazing and heart warming.

Table 1. SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

		NUMBER	PERCENT
SEX	1. Male	33	37.1
	2. Female	56	62.9
TRIBE	1. Sioux	15	16.9
	2. Omaha	36	40.0
	3. Winnebago	30	33.7
	4. White	4	4.5
	5. Cherokee	3	3.4
	6. Mexican	1	1.1
AGE	1. Below 30	3	3.4
	2. 30-49	50	56.2
	3. 50-59	16	18.0
	4. 60+	20	22.5
MARITAL STATUS	1. Single	4	4.5
	2. Married	44	49.4
	3. Separated or Divorced	17	19.1
	4. Widowed	12	13.5
	5. Multiple Marriages	12	13.5
BLOOD	1. Full	50	56.2
	2. 50-99%	21	23.6
	3. 0-49%	8	9.0
	4. White	4	4.5
	5. Other	1	1.1
	6. No Response	5	5.6
RELATIONSHIP	1. Parent	68	76.4
	2. Grandparent	10	11.2
	3. Adoptive Parent	1	1.1
	4. Aunt, Uncle	2	2.2
	5. Undetermined	8	9.0

AVERAGE AGE 48.1

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

The data were subjected to content analysis. Each response was interpreted as consisting of one or several units of value-statements, expressive of underlying goals and values of the respondent. For example, one of the responses to question 14 (What does it mean to be a good Indian?) was "responsibility for children, not tearing others down." This response was analyzed into two units of value-statements. One value-statement was "responsibility for children," and the second value-statement was "not tearing others down." To the same question another parent replied, "works,

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educated, takes care of family.” This response was analyzed into 3 units of value-statements – ‘works’, ‘educated’, and ‘takes care of family’. These value-statements were assembled into several large categories or clusters, each of which was further divided into several sub-categories, and coded accordingly. Initially three, but later, two persons analyzed and coded the data. Disagreements were resolved by discussion.

FINDINGS

Responses to each of the three questions and their corresponding value-statements will now be examined. Question 14: What does it mean to be a “good Indian?”

Some parents objected to the way the question was phrased. One parent retorted, “All Indians are persons, why separate them?” Another said, “Each is an individual. No one is all good or bad. You don’t have to say Indian. Just, what does it mean to be a good person?” The interviewers agreed. Why separate him? He is a human being. Still they were urged to think of an Indian person living on the reservation whom they considered a “good Indian” and then relate their responses to that person. Value-statements of question 14 were coded in four large categories or clusters (Table 2) as follows:

- A. Values related to home life (9.1%)
- B. Values related to church and community (9.6%)
- C. General values related to personal integrity and strength of character (74.2%)
- D. Miscellaneous (7.2%)

A. Values related to home life

This category included value-statements such as: healthy relations between parents, stays with husband, takes interest in home and children, has good relations with children, takes financial responsibility for the family, and has steady employment, etc. About 9.1% of the total value-statements of question 14 were coded in this category.

The three subcategories rank ordered according to the frequency of value-statements were: interest in home and children (44.4%); financial responsibility (44.4%); and healthy parental relations (11.1%).

B. Values related to church and community

Value statements coded in this category were: regular church attendance (63.2%); sincerity in belief and practice (15.8%); and interest in community life (21.1%). About 9.6% of the total value-statements of question 14 were coded in this category.

C. General values related to personal integrity and strength of character

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This category included value-statements such as: generous; peace loving; responsible; courageous; law abiding; respect for self and for others; honest; sociable; leader in community; respect for Indian culture; educated and well behaved; avoids excessive drinking; sympathetic and understanding; close to nature and mankind; good mental health; and willing to change and accept change. About 74.2% of all value-statements of question 14 were coded in this category. Subcategories could be rank ordered as follows: Generosity and sharing (12.3%); honesty and integrity (8.9%); avoiding excessive drinking (8.9%); respect for Indian culture (8.2%); respect for self and others (8.2%); law abiding (6.8%); sociable, friendly (6.8%); educated and well mannered (6.2%); sympathetic and understanding (6.2%); leadership (6.2%); peace loving (5.5%); courageous and brave (5.5%); closeness to nature and mankind (4.1%); responsible (3.4%); willing to change (1.4%); no smoking (0.7%); and good mental health (0.7%).

D. Miscellaneous

To this category belonged all the remaining units of value-statements of question 14. Responses such as, all Indians are good, White man corrupted him, a good Indian is a dead Indian, all Indians are bad, and I do not know – were coded in this category. About 7.1% total value-statements belonged in this category. Question 15: What does it mean to be a “bad Indian?”

Again some of the parents objected to the phrasing of the question. One said, “There is no such thing as a bad Indian. There’s good and bad in everyone.” Another said, “Every human has weak points.” Again the interviewers agreed wholeheartedly, because they do not accept stereotypes either. The parents were urged, however, to think of an Indian person living on the reservation whom they considered a “bad Indian” and then relate their answers accordingly.

All the responses to question 15 were coded as 146 value-statements and divided into 4 categories or clusters of negative valence (Table 2) as follows:

- A. Related to family, church, and community (12.3%)
- B. Related to lack of integrity and weakness of character (76.7%)
- C. Miscellaneous (10.9%)

A. Related to family, church, and community

About 12.3% of the total value-statements of question 15 were coded in this category, which included statements such as: neglect of family; non-participation in community life; disloyalty to the Indian community and use of peyote. The most frequently mentioned subcategory was neglect of the family (72.2%); the next subcategory was non-participation in community life (22.2%).

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Table 2

Question 14: What does it mean to be a "good Indian?"			
Categories	Description	Frequencies	% of 197 Frequencies
A	Values Related to Home Life	18	9.1
B	Values Related to Church and Community	19	9.6
C	General Values Related to Personal Integrity and Strength of Character	146	74.2
D	Miscellaneous	14	7.1

Question 15: What does it mean to be a "bad Indian?"			
Categories	Description	Frequencies	% of 146 Frequencies
A	Related to Family, Church, Community	18	12.3
B	Related to Lack of Integrity and Weakness of Character	112	76.7
C	Miscellaneous	16	10.9

Question 20: What aspect of the Omaha, Winnebago, or Santee-Sioux culture should be taught to children?			
Categories	Description	Frequencies	% of 233 Frequencies
A	Values Related to General Culture and Heritage	181	77.7
B	Values Related to Individual and Personal Living	36	15.5
C	Miscellaneous	16	6.9

B. Related to lack of integrity and weakness of character

About 76.7% of the total value statements of question 15 were coded as 112 unit-statements relating to lack of personal integrity and weakness of character. Fifteen subcategories rank ordered according to the frequency of value-statements were as follows: drinks (33.9%); fights (15.2%); disrespect for the law (13.4%); irresponsible (8.0%); selfish and calculating (6.3%); no respect for self and others (5.4%); defeated attitude (3.6%); ashamed of being Indian (2.7%); easily influenced (2.7%); vandalism (2.7%); dishonest (1.8%); racist (1.8%); no value of education (0.9%); and lacks social skills (0.9%).

C. Miscellaneous

To this category belonged units of value-statements that were difficult to code in either A or B. About 10.9% of the value-statements of question 15 were coded in this category. They included such statements as: no one is all

good/bad, no such thing as a bad Indian, no difference between white and Indian, do not know, etc. Question 20: What aspect of the Omaha/Winnebago/Sioux culture should be taught to the children?

A total of 233 value-statements derived from question 20 were divided into three categories or clusters, each of which was further divided into several subcategories. The three categories (Table 2) were as follows:

- A. Values relating to general culture and heritage (77.7%)
- B. Values relating to individual and personal living (15.5%)
- C. Miscellaneous (6.9%)

A. Values relating to general culture and heritage

To this category belonged value-statements referring to language, the Native American Church, history of the tribe, stories of great chiefs, reinterpretation of history, Indian dancing, music, Indian hymns, art work, bead work, cooking recipes, Indian dress, jewelry, hand games, certain taboos, marriage and family values and customs, old respect for marriage and family, etc. About 77.7% of the total value-statements of question 20 belonged in this category. About 33.1% of total value-statements of this category emphasized the teaching of native language; 14.9% emphasized Indian dancing; 14.4% stressed Indian history, legends, and stories of chiefs; 9.4% emphasized religion, especially the Native American Church; 9.4% emphasized understanding of the basic culture; 5.0% emphasized family life and marriage; 5.0% emphasized art work; 4.4% emphasized Indian music; and 4.4% emphasized such things as Indian dress, jewelry, special ceremonies, and hand games etc.

B. Values relating to individual and personal living

To this category belonged value-statements such as non-interference, sharing, pride in Indianness, respect and acceptance of others, taking care of interpersonal relationships, day to day good living, honesty, and respect for courage and bravery. About 15.5% of the total value-statements of question 20 were coded in this category, which was further divided into 9 subcategories. The most frequently occurring value-statements in various subcategories were as follows: pride in Indianness (30.6%); sharing (25.0%); respect and acceptance of others (13.9%); Indian values in general (8.3%); non-interference (5.6%); taking care of inter-personal relationships (5.6%); honesty (5.6%); respect for courage and bravery (2.8%); and day to day good living (2.8%).

C. Miscellaneous

To this category belonged all the remaining units of value-statements of question 20. This included statements such as: everything of Indian life should be emphasized; nothing of Indian life should be emphasized; no

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reservation; no Indian language; and some compromise between the old and new. About 6.9% of the total value-statements of question 20 were coded in this category. The most frequently mentioned value-statements referred to the subcategory – compromise between old and new. It is interesting to note that one person said, “everything of Indian life should be taught,” whereas another said, “nothing of Indian life should be taught.” Between these two extreme were some who settled for a happy medium – a compromise between old and new.

DISCUSSION

Question 14 and 15 “What does it mean to be a “good” or “bad” Indian were deliberately phrased this way to encourage interaction and to elicit free responses. No effort was made to define “good” or “bad” either before or during the interview. While the respondents were thinking and talking about a good or bad Indian person living on the reservation, they were also indirectly projecting their own values. When a group of 89 adults talk with some consistency about positive and negative aspects of human behavior, it is possible to formulate some ideas about their goals and values. It may be argued that these values are only verbally expressed statements and may not relate to their own behavior. This may be true, but a man is what he thinks and this is how the Nebraska Indian parents included in the sample thought about some good or bad Indian persons living on the reservation. From their responses, then, are inferred the values and goals of Nebraska Reservation Indians.

Question 20 was phrased as “What should be . . . ?” rather than “What is . . . ?” The parental responses then refer not only to the cultural values that are significant, important and worth preserving for posterity, but also to the directional-values, or goals or aspirations that must be emphasized for futurity to keep that “goodness” intact for cultural survival.

To summarize then, to be a good Indian means: taking an interest in one’s family; accepting financial obligations; and working for healthy interpersonal relations in the home. It also means being generous; honest; using sound judgment in the use of liquor; respecting and taking pride in one’s own culture; knowing the Indian language and history; appreciating the Indian arts and crafts; upholding the traditions and customs; and at the same time, being willing to change and accept change. It also implies being friendly, courageous, law abiding, responsible, and close to nature and mankind.

To be a “bad Indian” means: ashamed of being an Indian, being disloyal to Indian cause, non-participation in tribal and community affairs, drinking excessively, fighting, being violent, breaking the law, neglecting the family, being irresponsible, having no respect for self and others, having a defeatist

attitude, being easily led and influenced, having no respect for public property, being dishonest, and being a racist.

From the above discussion, five major inter-related value themes or value-clusters emerge. They are:

1. culturally-oriented value theme or value clusters
2. group-oriented value theme or value clusters
3. individually-oriented value theme or value clusters
4. humanity-oriented value theme or value clusters
5. spiritually-oriented value theme or value clusters

1. Culturally-oriented value theme or value cluster

The theme of Indianness, the theme of Indian identity emerges again and again. There is an apparent pride in being an Indian, new and positive acceptance of Indian culture, and a tenacious determination to conserve some of its beauty.

2. Group-oriented value theme or value cluster

Sharing of worldly goods with those in need, not being selfish or calculating, being non-interfering, improving marriage and family relations, participation and active interest in tribal and community affairs, and being law abiding – all of these may be considered as group-oriented values.

3. Individually or personally-oriented value theme or value clusters

Courage, both physical and moral; sound judgment in the use of liquor; honesty; self-respect; responsibility; patience and forbearance; and day to day good living – are some of the personally or individually-oriented values.

4. Humanity-oriented value theme or value cluster

Genuine love and respect for other human beings; hospitality to strangers; acceptance of others whether weak or strong with love and respect; not tearing others down; and sympathy for the low and down-trodden – relate to the humanity-oriented values.

5. Spiritually-oriented value theme or value cluster

Faith in a supreme being; return to the Native American church; and communion with God and nature with or without the use of peyote are some of the spiritually-oriented values.

Lest one gets too romantic and idealized a picture of the Nebraska Indian parents living on the Nebraska reservations it needs to be emphasized that these parents are aware of the magnitude of problems on their reservations – poor housing, unemployment, health hazards and dependence on welfare. Alcoholism is recognized as the number one problem. One mother pointed out, “Drinking is the root of all problems here. Whoever discovered liquor

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ought to go to hell.” They also realize with a certain fatalistic pessimism what liquor is doing to their family life structure. One parent implored: “Fix up the families somehow.” While talking with these parents, one does not get the stereotyped picture of a “lazy, drunkard, savage” Indian. Instead, one sees a human being struggling against innumerable odds, sinking but struggling to swim across; falling but trying to stand upright; trying to hold on to his own cultural values in the surrounding sea of topsy-turvy values of the white culture.

CONCLUSION

In the end, let me propose a model, which incorporates the values and ideals expressed by these parents. It is a hypothetical model of what it means to be a good Indian to the Nebraska Reservation Indian parents. I shall call him Omwisa.* Let Omwisa represent this new image of the Nebraska Indian. Omwisa is a man of deep faith in Nature and in a Supreme Being. He tries to be a good parent. He is not arrogant, but takes on honest pride in his culture and heritage; values his own traditions and customs, but is willing to change and accept change. He is neither a bigot nor a racist, but is serenely proud of his own ethnic origin. He prefers to live within an ecological balance with man and nature in a technological society. He is a man of courage, honesty, and simple faith in other human beings, whom he is willing to accept on equal terms. He is generous to the point of giving his last dollar to a man in need. By no means a paragon of virtues, riddled with problems of alcoholism, he struggles to lead a simple life of day to day good living in a world that has cheated him of everything he possessed, knew or loved. This is Omwisa. Does he exist? I saw glimpses of Omwisa in men and women; boys and girls; young and old living on the reservations in Nebraska. I heard him reprimand me and say, “Why do you say, an Indian, why don’t you just say a good person. There is no such thing as a good or bad Indian. Simply a human being.”

* Omwisa-coined from the first two letters of the names of three reservation tribes in Nebraska: *Omaha*, *Winnebago*, *Santee-Sioux*.

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