

# Adoption Outcomes for Native American Adoptees



# Research on adoptees

**1972 David Fanchel**

Far From the Reservation

**1978 Rosalind G. Hussong – CA**

A Phenomenological study on the experience of transracially adopted American Indians who have been reunited with their birth parents.

**1988 Carol Locust – U.N.M.**

Split Feather Study

**2001 Jeffery Peterson – U.W. Madison, WI**

Lost Birds: An exploration of the phenomenological experience of transracially adopted Native Americans.

**2006 Susan Harness – Colorado State University - Amazon.com**

After the Indian Adoption Project: A Search for Identity

**2009 Jody Becker-Green – University of Portland, OR**

Developing One's Self: Adoption and Identity Formation Through the Eyes of Transracially Adopted Native American Adults

# Experiences of Adopted and Fostered Individuals: An anonymous study to break the silence.

December 2012- May 2013

- Online – Adoptee FB page – other lists
- Land of Gazillion Adoptees
- Email
- Paper invitations dispersed at NICWA

# Research/Analysis Team

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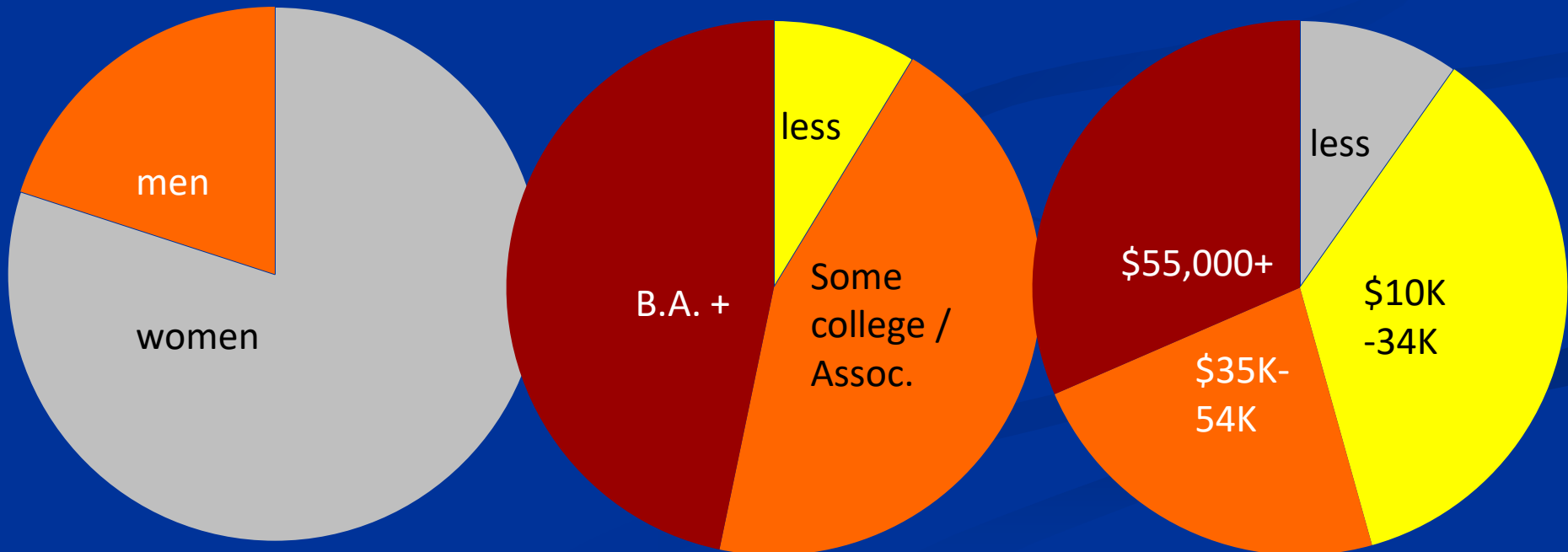
# Breaking the Silence

- Anonymous web survey of adults
- Hosted by University of Minnesota
- Conducted in 2012–2013
- Surveyed
  - Childhood & adult experiences
  - Mental & physical health
  - Reunification with birth family
- 336 responded including 129 First Nations

# First Focus: 95 respondents who are

1. American Indians (or suspect they are) AND
2. Have been in contact with their birth families

Average age  
50.4 years old



# Significant Abuse in Adoptive Homes

- 23 of 95 (24%) experienced sexual abuse
- 44 of 95 (46%) experienced physical abuse
- 47 of 95 (49%) experienced emotional abuse

	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
<i>Substance Abuse</i>		
Alcohol Addiction	22	26.2%
Alcohol Recovery	17	20.7%
Other Drug Addiction	9	10.7%
Other Drug Recovery	7	8.2%
<i>Mental Health</i>		
Eating Disorder	20	23.8%
Self Injury Without Suicidal Intention	24	28.6%
Depression	71	84.5%
Contemplated or Planned Suicide	43	50%
Attempted Suicide	20	23.3%
Hospitalized for Mental Health Condition	15	17.2%
<i>Other</i>		
Therapy for Abuse (Emot., Phys., Sexual)	51	69.9%
Felony or Gross Misdemeanor Conviction	7	8.2%
Served Time in Prison	5	6.1%



1 in 10 Americans suffer from depression



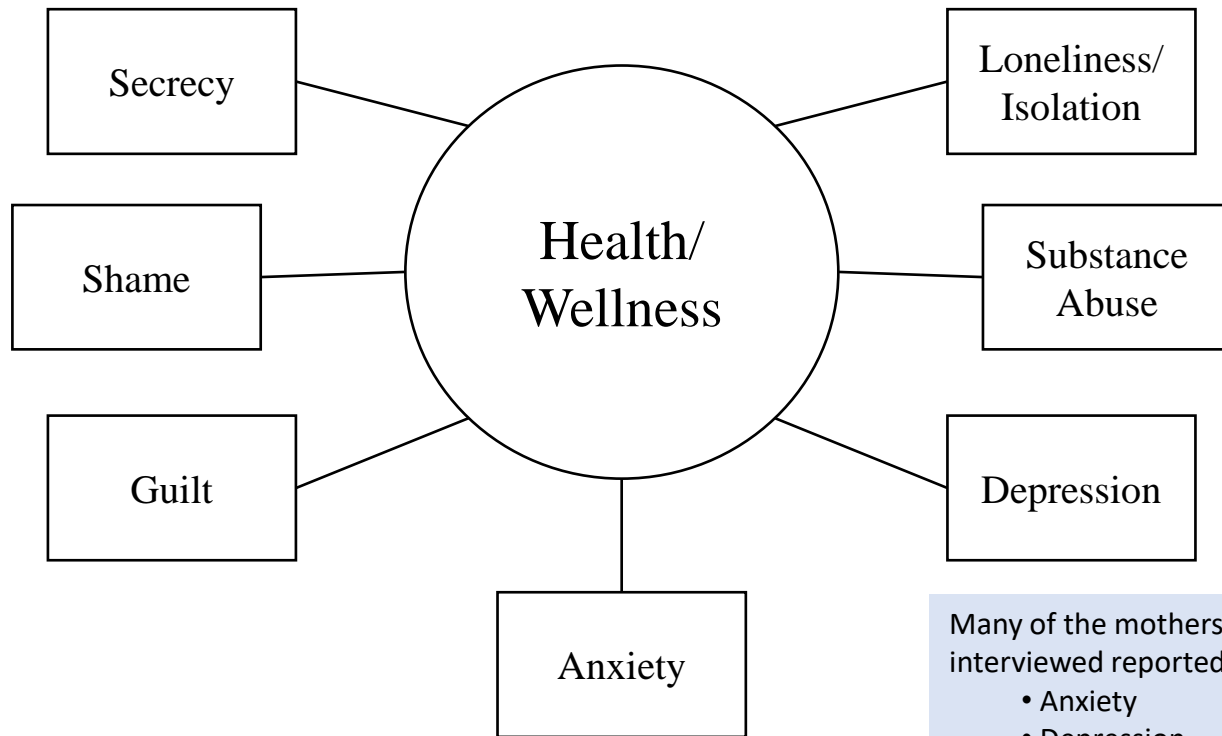
# Citation

- Landers, A. L., Danes, S. M., Ingalls-Maloney, K., & White Hawk, S. (in press). American Indian and White Adoptees: Are there Mental Health Differences? *American Indian and Alaska Native Mental Health Research.*

# Adoptees 4 Times More Likely to Attempt Suicide

- Chuck Johnson, president of the National Council for Adoption, an Alexandria, Virginia–based advocacy organization, emphasized the good news from the study, saying that most adoptees are not at risk for suicide.
- "It doesn't surprise me that children who've been adopted in great numbers have struggles, which, I guess, if you took to its natural consequences, would increase the suicide rate," he told *Medscape Medical News*. "But the thing that really comes out at me is it appears a vast majority of children are doing really well."
- [https://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/810625#vp\\_2](https://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/810625#vp_2)

# PRELIMINARY FINDINGS



Many mothers experience **guilt** and **shame** associated with the child's surrender.

Many of the mothers were interviewed reported

- Anxiety
  - Depression
  - Substance abuse
- ... a result of the loss of their child

# If we know this.....

- Adoption is NOT a guaranteed safety
- Removal causes trauma
- Former foster children are twice as likely as U.S. war veterans to experience **PTSD** in adulthood.
- Families that are in crisis and need time to heal

# Family Preservation has to be the goal

Child removal has an  
**intergenerational** impact on:

- Individual
- Families
- Communities

# Finding Balance

- Who am I?
- Where do I come from?
- What am I doing?
- Where am I going?



# Words In Adoptees' Stories of Reunification

A word cloud illustrating the vocabulary used in adoptees' stories of reunification. The most prominent words are "called home", "found", and "search". Other significant words include "family", "heritage", "reclaiming", "locate", "discover", "regain", "gain", "know", "belonging", "touch", "one", "connection", "sense", "access", "attain", "discover", "locate", "search", "reclaiming", "knowing", "look", "need", "find", "duality", "ones", "touch", "meet", "returning", "seize", "learning", "return", "tribe", "learn", "loved", "arrive", "retrieve", "acceptance", "relative", "take", "going", "effort", "inclusive", "relative", "information", "get", "enrollment", "meeting", "part", "relatives", "culture", "request", "reach", "answers", "dissonance", "knowledge", "obtained", "recovered", "acquire", "hold", "obtain", "support", "engagement", "location", "coming", "inherent", "procure", "need", "duality", "ones", "touch", "belonging", "ones", "touch", "meet", "returning", "seize", "learning", "return", "tribe", "learn", "loved", "arrive", "retrieve", "acceptance", "relative", "take", "going", "effort", "inclusive", "relative", "information", "get", "enrollment", "meeting", "part", "relatives", "culture", "request", "reach", "answers", "dissonance", "knowledge", "obtained", "recovered", "acquire", "hold", "obtain", "support", "engagement", "location", "coming", "inherent", "procure", "need".

# Contact Information

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