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Y Indian Guides Research Paper

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Y Indian Guides

Exploring The Kautz Family YMCA archives at the U of M Anderson Library revealed the dynamic history of arguably, the most successful program in the history of the YMCA, the Y Indian Guides. After pouring through the wealth of fascinating archives, our research group was thoroughly engaged in exploring deeper questions related to the unique program. The most obvious initial questions surfaced related to the negative cultural implications of a program designed around the Native American culture. We also were interested in exploring what elements contributed to making this program one of the most successful in YMCA history. In this paper we will present a history of development of the Y Indian Guides program, what the program design and delivery looked like and in some cases continues to look like. Finally, we will focus on the strengths of the father/son program design and weaknesses of the program as it relates the negative implications for the Native American culture.

History and Origins of the Program

“Pals Forever”, this is the slogan of the Father and Son Y-Indian Guide program that was sponsored by the YMCA. The program was developed in St. Louis, Missouri in 1926 as a deliberate way to support the father’s vital role as a teacher, counselor and friend to his son. Harold S. Keltner, the director of the YMCA in St. Louis organized the first tribe in Richmond Heights, Missouri with the help of his friend Joe Friday, an Ojibway Indian, and William H. Hefelfinger, Chief of the first Y-Indian Guides. Keltner was inspired by his experiences with Friday. The inspiration came about while the two men were on a hunting and fishing guide trip in Canada. Around the fire one evening Friday said to Keltner, “The indian father raises his son. He teaches his son to hunt, to track, to fish, to walk softly and silently in

the forest, to know the meaning and purpose of life and all he must know, while the white man allows the mother to raise his son.” These comments quickly struck home with Keltner. Keltner realized that many fathers and sons in the American culture too were experiencing this lack or loss in their relationships, and after that moment, Keltner arranged for Joe Friday to work with him at the St. Louis

YMCA. (<http://www.nationallonghouse.org/Archives/History/FridayBio/FridayBio.html>, retrieved on November 12, 2014).

Joe Friday, the Ojibway Indian, quickly began to inspire many young men and their fathers. Friday started to speak before groups of YMCA boys and their fathers in St. Louis and Keltner discovered that fathers and their sons had a keen interest and curiosity in the traditions and ways of the Native Americans. Because of this strong interest and desire, Keltner conceived the idea of creating a father-and-son program based on the strong qualities of the American Indian culture and life, which involved dignity, patience, endurance, spirituality, feeling for the earth and concern for the family.

In 1935, the program was launched as a national program of the Young Men’s Christian Association. The program was set up for young boys in grades kindergarten through fourth grade as an opportunity for these school aged boys and their fathers to have enriching learning opportunities, mutual understanding and fun. It served as a place for quality, planned, one-on-one time with their sons. The programs main purpose was to increase the number of activities that fathers and sons can do together during the ages of adolescence when young boys look up to their fathers as being the greatest man in the world along with the time when young boys really need that positive influence and masculine relationships in their lives. (*The Father and Son Y-Indian Guides*, 1956).

Because of the successes of the YMCA Indian Guides program, shortly after World War II a father and daughter program was developed called Y-Indian Princesses. This program's aim was helping daughters develop a closer inter-relationship with their father and self-esteem and confidence in the child. For 75 years, the Y-Indian Guide program was the cornerstone for family programs in YMCA's across the country. In the next section of our paper we will take a closer look into what the Y-Indian Guide program looked like and the program's delivery methods.

Program Delivery and Design

The Y Indian Guide program was like many other strong youth development programs. For example, youth development programs such as 4-H, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts and the Y Indian Guides all have a general format and youth development mission and vision for what a positive youth development program looks like. Each of these programs has a national, regional, state and local level. In the Y Indian Guides, the Local Long House was essentially where the tribes would report to as well as receive leadership and guidance. The Local Long House was where the tribal chiefs would get together for their federation meetings to talk out strengths and weakness of their individual tribes and given the tools to bring ideas from other neighboring tribes to be used in their local tribe. The Local Long House would communicate with the State Long House and the state would communicate with the National Long House. Within the Y Indian Guides there were many support systems and resources to help the tribes succeed. This type of program design and delivery is typical within other youth development organizations. The local groups within the Y Indian Guide program were called tribes. Tribes were similar to clubs in 4-H, in Boy's and Girl Scouts they call their local level a Pack or a

Troop. Besides the overall structure, the meeting structure and the foundations goals of each organization had similar goals and visions; they were just achieved in different ways.

The Y Indian Guides had local tribes throughout the area. When tribes were formed, it was encouraged that fathers join a tribe with their friends whom they already had a relationship with in their local neighborhood. Each tribe was made up of six to nine father and son combinations. Indian Guide tribe meeting would be held about twice a month. Fathers and sons were required to attend the meetings together, if the father could not attend, the son was not able to attend either. Local tribes were led by a father who was considered the chief. The chief's position was a volunteer who led the membership within the local tribe.

The fathers and sons were referred to as big braves and little braves. When forming a tribe, members choose the unique name for their new tribe. Typically, tribes choose a name that was from a tribe that once lived in that local region where they live. Once a tribe determined their unique name they ran it past other local tribes to make sure everyone approved of the name. Once the name was approved, it was passed along to the Local Long House (*The Father and Son Y-Indian Guides*, 1956). When Y Indian Guide members joined the tribe, they choose a Native American name to be called while at at Y Indian Guide activities. Dr. Dale Blyth recalls when he participated in the program with his son, he, as a big brave, was referred to as the "Golden Eagle" and his son, a little brave, was called "Soaring Eagle".

The Indian "themes" were most present within the program in terms of vocabulary, traditions, and ceremonies used. Some connections made to Native American culture seemed to be genuinely rooted in factual information or terms but it appears that most were created by non-natives with their own perceptions or stereotypes of what constitutes native american

culture. These stereotypes were most present in the Y Indian Guide program in the rituals that were practiced at their meetings and how they structured their program leadership.

A few examples of the unique leadership positions that were a part of Y-Indian Guide meetings included Chief, Tom-Tom, Tom-Tom Beater, Tally Holders, Totem, Wampum Pouch, Wampum Bearer, Medicine Man and Indian Runner. Chief was the leader of the local tribe; they were volunteers that acted as the leader to the local tribe. The chief organized the meetings and invited the tribe members to join. It was also their role to attend Y-Indian Guide federation meetings. These federation meetings helped the chiefs and assistant chiefs bring new ideas back to their tribe and give suggestions to other chiefs. The open and closing of ceremonies and meetings was conducted by a tom-tom. The tom-tom was used much like a gavel that we are familiar and use in meetings today to begin and end a meeting. The tom-tom beater was a little brave whose job was to help out at the meeting by beating the tom-tom to open and close the ceremony or meeting. The tally holders were essentially a secretary and were in charge of taking notes and records for the pow-wows and meetings. A totem was symbolic to their tribe and distinguished the tribe as one. The totem was a pole between four to five feet tall, was painted or carved by the tribe members and usually consisted of some type of animal, bird or fish and was made to represent their specific Y-Indian Guide tribe so it was unique and creative representing the individual tribes. The Wampum Pouch was the responsibility of a little brave, which was a pouch made of leather that held money, this position was for the son of a big brave that was the Wampum Bearer who was the tribe's treasurer. Medicine Man was responsible to help with resource development that was appropriate for the tribe's activities and programs. A little brave acted as the Indian Runner; he had the responsibility of holding the tribe's supplies between meetings. These many examples show the complex (and successful) structure they developed for

program operations. Unfortunately, the terms and rituals created to wrap the program into an Indian “theme” are not respectful to the Native American culture.

Outside what occurred during formal tribe meetings, additional activities the tribe participated in together ranged from campouts to tours in their local communities such as historical sites, parks, zoos and farms. These activities provided opportunities for sons to experience different locations around the community in which they may not have the time to explore on their own. Many experiences were designed for fathers and sons to learn more in-depth about the unique Native American culture. Y Indian Guide tribe members learned about Native American culture by exploring unique customs, unique crafts and games that were a large part of the Native American community (according to each local tribes interpretation as there was no set research-based curriculum utilized). The Indian themed activities of the Y Indian Guide Program was an element of the program that helped to foster the the relationships between sons and their fathers. It taught the little braves how to work with other adults through meaningful adult partnerships. The fathers in the tribe would work together to help mentor each of their sons (*Scioto Longhouse Upper Arlington Indian Guides, November 18, 2014*).

Strengths of the Y Indian Guides Program

Our research helped to define what we believe are the four main strengths of the Y Indian Guides program. These include a strong youth development program design and delivery model including the use of experiential learning as a key delivery method, the programs connection to nature and spirituality, the opportunity for youth and adult partnerships and the program mission of creating connections between father and son. For this research paper we have chosen to focus on what we believe is the main strength of the program: creating connections between father and son.

A Father and Son Program

To understand why the program was based on father/son involvement we first sought out to understand the historical perspective. In pre-industrial revolution time fathers played a central role in the family. Stephen F. Duncan (2000) in his article on *The Importance of Fathers* explains that prior to the late 18th and early 19th centuries, fathers were intimately involved in the daily lives of their children. Fathers taught their children how to work and children were seen as part of the family workforce. With education primarily a responsibility accomplished at home, fathers also took charge of teaching them to read and write and served as spiritual educators as well (Duncan, 2000). Industrialization and urbanization in the early 19th century brought a host of challenge for family life as fathers typically left home to work. Duncan (2000) asserts that many fathers were working in factories with 14-16 hour workdays which left their role in the family as primarily “absentee managers” with emotional distance from their families and no real connection to day to day parenting tasks. The role of the child in the family was also drastically changing at this time. In the 1920s, for the first time a bare majority of American children grew up in families where the husband provided all the income, the wife stayed home full-time, and they and their siblings went to school instead of work. (Coontz, 1999) It is because of these societal happenings that Keltner began the work of the Y Indian Guides Program.

According to *History of Indian Guides* (1931), in the earliest stages of program development the founders looked towards the viewpoints and needs of the father just every bit as the boys. After examining all of the ways boys were engaged outside of the home and their families the founders posed the question, “has it ever occurred to you that many fathers desire (and many more should) to compete, believing after all, that his contribution is also valuable” (*History of Indian Guides*, 1931). They sought to “help fathers make the home attractive to the

boy and become of real assistance to that institution” (*History of Indian Guides*, 1931). The resounding conclusion was that fathers did indeed have a genuine desire to connect with their sons. Because of this, they developed a youth development program in which fathers and sons would participate together in an environment where fathers and sons could learn to relate to each other and where the father would serve as a positive role model to his son, helping turn boys into men that would be a credit to their families and societies.

When referring to recruitment of fathers and program design in *History of the Indian Guides* (1931), they state “too much emphasis cannot be placed upon the fact that this is a father’s program first, then a boy’s.” The founders recognized that engaging fathers in their concept would be a larger challenge than it would be to recruit eager young boys. They go on to say, “more accurately this program would be called the “Father and Son” program, but romantically and practically, it works out better as a movement being called the Indian Guides” (1931). This represents one of the most profound statements uncovered in the archives of Y Indian Guides program. It helps to explain why the Indian “theme” was chosen as the main concept for the program. Creating a program for “fathers and sons” is valuable, but it was more “romantic” and exciting to entice fathers and their boys to join because of the Indian theme.

The slogan of the Y Indian Guides is “Pals Forever” but the archives suggest that merely creating a “pal-like” relationship between father and son was not the primary goal. The work of Dr. David B. Lynn (as cited in *The Father and Son Y-Indian Guides*, 1956) asserts:

The presence of the father seems especially important to the development of boys. The man of the house is the model of the boy’s future potential as a man. If there is genuine love, the son will learn the subtleties of being a man without any special effort from the fathers. If this be true, the father is a better representative of manhood if he does not

relegate his role to “just being a pal” to his son. If a father fails to represent a mature man, his son is very unlikely to find an adequate substitute. Usually the boy has plenty of “pals” but only one father.

The slogan means “a close relationship between father and son, not the relationship between two equals - such as between two boys who are pals...it means companionship” (*The Father and Son Y-Indian Guides*, 1956). The program design allows for natural opportunities for father and son to engage in programs together and spend quality time. *The Father and Son Y-Indian Guides* (1956) handbook goes on to say that participation in programs provides an opportunity for satisfactory and rewarding interactions, a sharing of happy experiences, and an opportunity to observe one another and learn about one another.

As previously stated, the main purpose of the Y Indian Guides was to increase the number of activities that fathers and sons can do together during the ages of adolescence when young boys look up to their fathers as being the greatest man in the world along with the time when young boys really need that positive influence and masculine relationships in their lives (*The Father and Son Y-Indian Guides*, 1956). The Long House News, the monthly newsletter of the Y Indian Guides program, provided insight into the specifics of various programs and activities that fathers and sons would do together. The *Tribal News* section of the newsletter was a place for members to publish monthly highlights from their tribe meetings. The following are a few examples taken from the December 1938 issue. The Ottawa tribe “collected all of their old toys that they didn’t use anymore, and took them to the tee-pee of Cheemaun who delivered them to the local fire department” (*Tribal News*, 1938). The Mohawk tribe reported in *Tribal News* that “three little braves gave reports on aviation, sports, and a quiz.” The Arapahoe Tribe invited a speaker who “spoke of all kinds from the Eskimo to the inhabitants of South America

and about their religions, customs, how they live and where they come from” (*Tribal News*, 1938). These examples illuminate that the members were participating in service projects, public speaking opportunities, and learning from others alongside their fathers.

Participation in the program alongside other father/son pairs also provided valuable experiences in learning from others. The Father and Son Y Indian Guides manual (1956) addresses this unique program benefit by stating “a boy must learn to be a man, and learning takes place very largely by and unconscious imitation of older men or boys with prestige in the neighborhood. The presence of other mentors in addition to the boys’ own fathers can further contribute to the learning process.” The interaction with other fathers proves just as valuable for both fathers and sons in the program as they were able to learn from their interactions as a group.

Weaknesses and the Romanticism of a Culture and Religion

In this section we will examine the program’s weaknesses. This is not an exhaustive list and further examination can and should be done. For our purposes, we will examine those we felt were most detrimental to the program. Perhaps the program’s greatest strength is also its greatest weakness. The tension between the success of the Y Indian Guides program and the portrayal of the Native American is rooted in the stereotypes portrayed in the program guide and further reinforced by the romanticism of the Native American in popular American culture. These stereotypes manifest themselves in two prevailing representations within the Y Indian Guides program: words and images. The way these words and images are presented seems to align with those presented in three main sectors of popular American culture: children’s toys, television and movies, and sports teams and school mascots.

Children’s toys have long included illustrations of tan men shooting bow-and-arrow to kill wild game and “the white man.” Usually these Native Americans were males with long

black hair, often a loin cloth or other clothing made out of wild animal hide and topped off with a head-band with a single feather or full ceremonial head dress. Toy drums and costumes from the 1980's had images similar to these on the sides, as well as small action figures and Little Tikes toys with Native American characters depicted in a similar fashion. Children's books about Native American symbols that correlated with Earth's elements much like hieroglyphics and that used words similar to those found in the Y Indian Guides handbook like "wampum" for money (*The Father and Son Y-Indian Guides*, 1956) and more popularized in American culture, "how" for hello.

Television, movies and other media have long told the story of cowboy versus Indian all the way back in the early 20th century through the golden age of television in the 60's and even as recently as the early part of the 21st century. From Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid to the Lone Ranger, Native Americans have been portrayed as savages, again dressed in animal hide and heads adorned with feathers and often speaking broken English and using words like "ugh." Episodes of Bugs Bunny included inaccurate portrayals as well as in many popular Disney movies like Peter Pan and Pocahontas. In Peter Pan the American Indian is even called a savage. Who doesn't remember the portrayal of the Native American by the Village People in their rendition of, ironically, YMCA; or Cher's song Half-Breed and correlating music video and costumes. Media has romanticized the image of the Native American for the better part of a century.

Finally, the use of Native American symbols, names and even their likeness as mascots and logos by sports teams, schools, and companies to promote their products continues to be scrutinized. Most recently a large protest occurred here at the University of MN prior to a Vikings game against the Washington Redskins. Centennial High School in Circle Pines, MN

had a Native American Chief as their mascot until 1997 when the mascot was changed to the Cougar out of respect to the Native Americans.

The tension within the Y-Indian Guides program is further perpetuated by its own handbook that includes many contradictions about respecting the sacred Native American culture and its religion, but then recommends using many of its religious traditions, words, ceremonies, dances and garb as part of the program. The use of these is often viewed as disrespectful and confusing, as well as derogatory and racist toward the Native Americans. A 2001 newspaper article from the Los Angeles Tribune quotes Vernon Bellecourt, a spokesman for the American Indian Movement based here in Minneapolis, “They [Y-Indian Guides groups] are a breeding grounds for racism.” In the same article Chet Ossowski, a family program coordinator with Newport Beach’s YMCA who is part Cheyenne and has two daughters in the program, says that “to scrap the theme altogether would be a missed opportunity for the YMCA to partner with the American Indians in their communities to learn about the culture.”

Further complicating the stereotypes portrayed by the program is the mindset of those who participated. Dr. Dale Blyth participated in the program with three of his children and recalls feeling they were honoring the Native Americans through their portrayal of ceremonies and costumes (personal communication, October 2014). He indicated that it helped his children, and himself, better understand a culture they knew little about. While this was a benefit of the program, it was not the initial aim, however. Blyth participated so that he could spend more time with his children and bond with them. The cultural influences simply enhanced the experience. This then, is another source of tension within this romanticism of a culture equating to honoring it; and whether participants really feel as though they are paying homage, or choosing to remain ignorant while participating in a program that has widely been scrutinized for

choosing bits and pieces of a culture and religion to provide youth development. The romanticism of it in popular American culture over the last century though does make it seem more plausible.

Y-Guide Program in 2014

As society changed, controversy regarding the Y Indian Guide program became apparent in the late 1990's and in the early 2000's, as there was significant pressure from Native American advocates that the program needed to be changed to remove any Native connections and themes within the program. Because of the long history of the program there were deep personal roots and strong personal connections that many people held for the program, making it hard to do a simple name change, especially when the program ran generations deep. The experiences that some of the big braves had as a participant when they were a little brave has sometimes been the reason for joining the program with their own sons. Despite long traditions and passions, the program was discontinued in many YMCA's in United States of America, on a statewide basis. There are a few Local Long Houses that have persisted and still have continued on with the Y-Indian Guide program and principles (as originally designed) while others have changed the name to Y-Adventure Guides where there has been some program modification in relation to the use of the Native American theme (Y-Indian Guide Programs: Responsible Use of the Native American Theme). Currently there are 24 states in the United States that are still offering the very same Y-Indian Guide program or a version such as the Y-Adventure Guide Program (<http://www.ytribes.com/index.html#M> retrieved on November 18, 2014).

Conclusion

As we stated earlier, the Y- Indian Guides program really drew us in because of its uniqueness and its oddities. It was a program that none of us had ever been exposed to and something that in so many ways was different than the work we all do. But throughout our research we started to see that even though this program was eccentric it also came with great strength and gifts to many fathers and their sons. The program created lifelong relationships that many fathers and sons will cherish, value and remember for many years to come. Today the Y-Indian Guides has taken on a new face and image however the same principles are still guiding the program and that is to be PALS forever with your child. Our hope is that the program concept of connecting a father and son can continue to be accomplished within the YMCA but in a manner that is in cooperation with the Native American community.

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Formative Evaluative Criteria for Formal Papers

Quality of Work Submitted <i>Work reflects graduate-level critical, analytical thinking.</i>	A: Exemplary Work	B: Graduate Level Work	C: Minimal Work	F: Work Submitted but Unacceptable
<i>Adherence to Assignment Expectations</i> <i>The extent to which work meets the assigned criteria.</i>	Assignment exceeds expectations, integrating additional material and/or information. The work is presented in a thorough and detailed manner. Assignment demonstrates exceptional breadth and depth.	All parts of the assignment are completed, with fully developed topics. The work is presented in a thorough and detailed manner. Assignment demonstrates appropriate breadth and depth.	Most parts of assignment are completed. Topics are not fully developed. Assignment demonstrates minimal depth and breadth.	Does not fulfill the expectations of the assignment. Key components are not included. Assignment lacks breadth and depth.
<i>Assimilation and Synthesis of Ideas</i> <i>The extent to which the work reflects the student's ability to-</i> 1. Understand	Demonstrates the intellectual ability to explore and/or implement	Demonstrates a clear understanding of the assignment's purpose. Includes specific information from required	Shows some degree of understanding of the assignment's purpose. Generally applies theories, concepts, and/or strategies correctly, with ideas	Shows a lack of understanding of the assignment's purpose. Does not

<p><i>the assignment's purpose;</i></p> <p>1. <i>Understand and analyze course, readings, and discussions</i></p> <p>;</p> <p>1. <i>Apply content.</i></p>	<p>key instructional concepts. Demonstrates exceptional inclusion of major points, using credible sources, in addition to course materials. Demonstrates insightful reflection and/or critical thinking.</p>	<p>readings to support major points. Provides careful consideration of key instructional concepts.</p>	<p>unclear and/or underdeveloped. Minimally includes specific information from required readings.</p>	<p>apply theories, concepts, and/or strategies Does not include specific information from required readings.</p>
<p>Written Expression and Formatting</p> <p><i>The extent to which scholarly, critical, analytical writing is presented in APA format; Standard Edited English (i.e. correct grammar, mechanics).</i></p>	<p>Represents scholarly writing in a correct APA format. Work is unified around a central purpose with well-developed ideas, logically organized in paragraph structure with clear transitions. Effective</p>	<p>Work is well organized with correct APA formatting throughout. Ideas are clearly and concisely expressed. Elements of effective communication such as an introduction and conclusion are included. Work is written in Standard Edited English with few, if any, grammatical or mechanical errors</p>	<p>Somewhat represents mature, scholarly, graduate-level writing, with APA generally followed. Ideas are incorporated. Elements of effective communication such as an introduction and conclusion are not included. Work contains more than a few grammatical, or mechanical errors.</p>	<p>The quality of writing and/or APA formatting are not acceptable for graduate level work. Limited evidence of effort to express ideas clearly and concisely. Major points do not reflect appropriate elements of communication. Work is not written in Standard</p>

	<p>sentence variety; clear, concise, and powerful expression are evident. Work is written in Standard Edited English. No prominent errors interfere with reading.</p>			<p>Edited English. Contains many grammatical or mechanical errors</p>
Final Assignment Grade	A: Exemplary Work	B: Graduate Level Work	C: Minimal Work	F: Work Submitted but Unacceptable