

# Trickster Spirits and the Opioid Response: Cultural Considerations in Addressing Substance Misuse



Danica Love Brown, PhD, MSW, CACIII  
Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma  
Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board  
Behavioral Health Manager

# Objectives

## Participants will

Overview of Tribal Opioid  
Strategic Agenda

Overview of the Trickster  
Stories

Connection of trauma and  
substance misuse

Overview of historical  
trauma and ancestral  
wisdom

Skills to address trauma

Overview of Indigenous  
Wellness and healing



# Tribal Opioid Response Agenda

- The goal of the Tribal Opioid Response Agenda is to support tribal communities in healing our relatives and relations
- We have worked alongside tribal policymakers, national experts, service providers, and community members, developed this strategic agenda.



# Culture is Medicine



# TRICKSTER

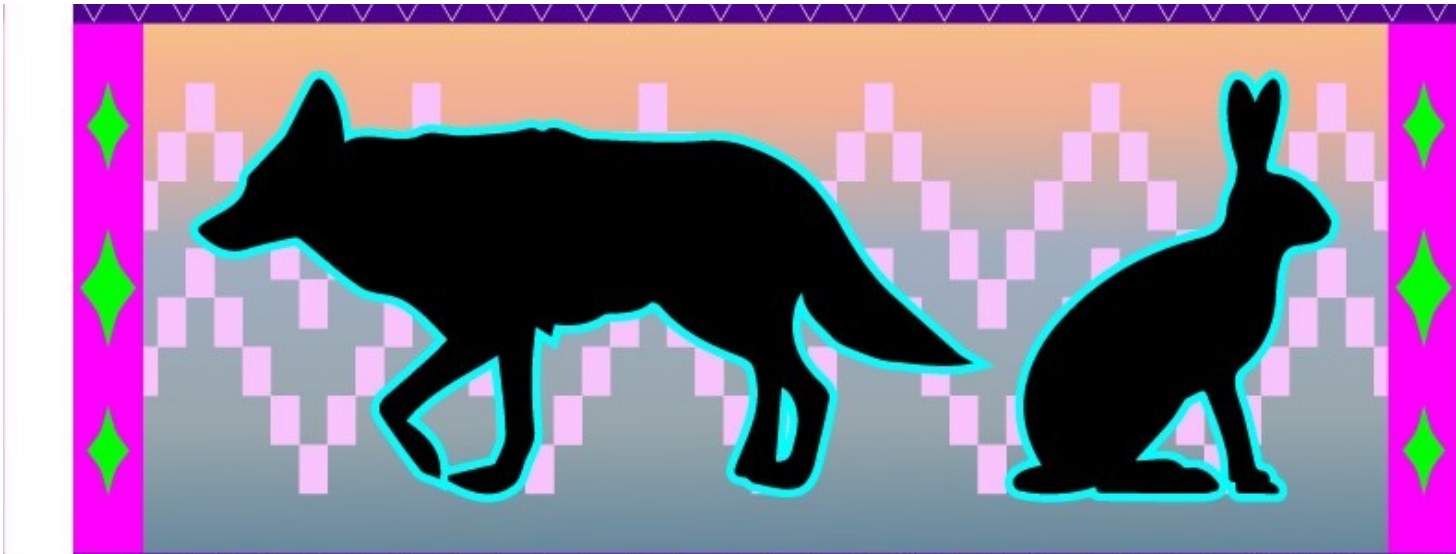
NATIVE AMERICAN TALES

A GRAPHIC COLLECTION

“Meet the Trickster, a crafty creature or being who disrupts the order of things, often humiliating others and sometimes himself in the process. Whether a coyote or a rabbit, raccoon or raven, tricksters use cunning to get food, steal precious possessions, or simply cause mischief.”



# Trickster Spirits and the Opioid Response



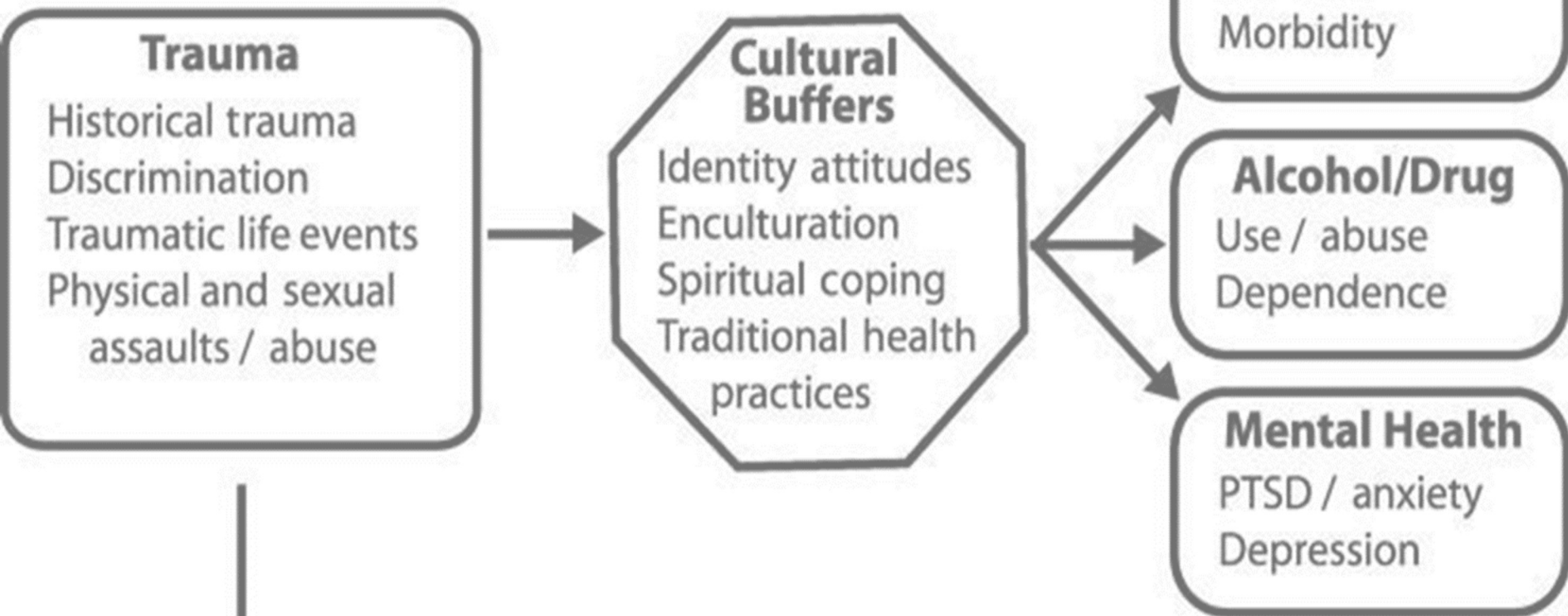
Coyote wanders into your life...he'll lend you a pair of eyes ...he'll burn a hole in the darkness.... He is the smoking mirror, night and sorcery, ancestral memory, the enemy on both sides, the crossroads, the compass, the silent wind and thunderous war inside you. ... He holds up the mirror relentlessly until you staring back at yourself....that seems alright to him - Diary of a Dog

**STRESS**

**COPING**

**HEALTH OUTCOMES**

# Indigenist Stress Coping Model



Walters, Karina L, Simoni, Jane M, & Evans-Campbell, Teresa. (2002). Substance Use Among American Indians and Alaska Natives: Incorporating Culture in an "Indigenist" Stress-Coping Paradigm. *Public Health Reports* (1974), 117(Suppl 1), S104–S117.

# Trauma

“Using trauma terminology implies that the individual is responsible for the response, rather than the broader systemic force caused by the state’s abuse of power”

Linklater, 2014







Our bodies are  
designed to  
remember danger

Each of us begins to maintain a database of threats in the environment.

# Historical Trauma



- Historical trauma - Cumulative emotional and psychological wounding from massive group trauma across generations, including lifespan. (Brave Heart, 2004)



**“The memories of our  
ancestors are passed  
down on our blood”  
Little Joe Gomez**

Hamby, Sherry, Elm, Jessica H L, Howell, Kathryn H,  
& Merrick, Melissa T. (2021). Recognizing the  
cumulative burden of childhood adversities  
transforms science and practice for trauma and  
resilience. *The American Psychologist*, 76(2), 230–  
242. <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000763>



مریم حسنا

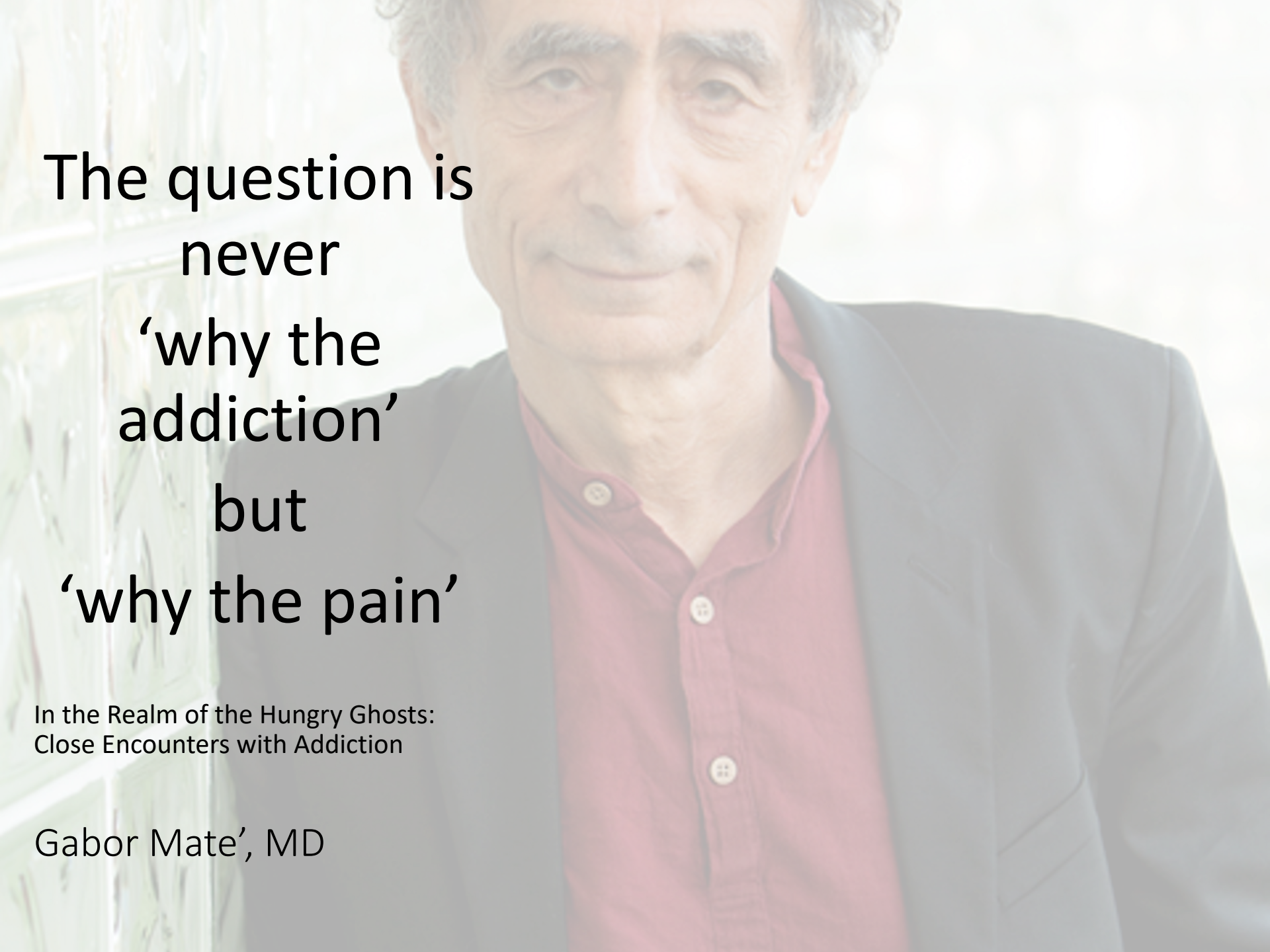
@Maryamhasnaa



Many of your emotional triggers came from when you were so young that the part of your brain that records memories wasn't even formed. This is why you might not be able to access the memory of the trauma. But the body remembers, in your muscles, tissue, bones and especially spine



informedtrauma



The question is  
never  
'why the  
addiction'  
but  
'why the pain'

In the Realm of the Hungry Ghosts:  
Close Encounters with Addiction

Gabor Mate', MD



**STRONG  
RESILIENT  
INDIGENOUS**

5  
7  
3  
15

# Resilient Responses to Trauma

- Increased bonding with family and community.
- Redefined or increased sense of purpose and meaning.
- Increased commitment to a personal mission.
- Revised priorities.
- Increased charitable giving and volunteerism.



Center for Substance Abuse Treatment , issuing body, publisher. (2014). *Trauma-Informed care in behavioral health services : A treatment improvement protocol*. (Treatment improvement protocol (TIP) series ; 57). Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Substance Abuse Treatment.

# Using Information About Biology and Trauma

<b>Frame</b>	Frame reexperiencing the event(s)
<b>Communicate</b>	Communicate that treatment and other wellness
<b>Refer</b>	Refer certain clients to a psychiatrist
<b>Discuss</b>	Discuss traumatic stress symptoms and their physiological components.
<b>Explain</b>	Explain links between traumatic stress symptoms and substance use disorders
<b>Normalize</b>	Normalize trauma symptoms.





# What works

- Those who are fluent in many theories and models of treatment.
- Who are client centered/counselor driven.
- Focus on strengths and protective factors
- Who are able to develop trusting therapeutic relationships.
- Who are work within their area of expertise.
- Culture as prevention

# Wellness

Sacred Tree: Four Worlds  
International Institute.  
<https://www.fwii.net/profiles/blogs/the-story-of-the-sacred-tree-1>



# COMMUNITY CARE IN INDIAN COUNTRY

- CONNECTION & BELONGING
  - CULTURAL CONNECTION
  - ANCESTRAL CONNECTION
  - LAND CONNECTION
  - COMMUNITY CONNECTION
- SACRED SPACE
- STORYTELLING/STORY LISTENING
- PRAYER/MINDFULNESS/CONTemplation/MEDITATION
- CREATE



## Relationship with Medicine

- Reestablish our relationship with medicine
- Change our relationship with medicine people
- Develop a relationship with the spirit of substances and substance misuse



# RESILIENT

HAVE BEEN HERE BEFORE

