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# Assessing Cultural Lifestyles of Urban American Indians

ROSE L. CLARK AND RICHARD H. MENDOZA

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The topic of cultural lifestyles of immigrant populations in the United States has received considerable attention over a span of many years.<sup>1</sup> Most of this attention has focused on examining and describing the ways foreign-born populations immerse themselves into mainstream US culture. Examinations of cultural lifestyles based on immersion in one culture only can be labeled *monocultural*. Various researchers have proposed that monocultural methods are ineffective because of their inability to measure the extent to which individuals also immerse themselves in their native heritage.<sup>2</sup> For example, with respect to the Mexican-American population, a monocultural approach cannot distinguish between individuals who immerse exclusively into the mainstream US culture and those who immerse equally and extensively into both Mexican and mainstream US communities. Theoretical and empirical examinations of cultural lifestyles of immigrant populations based on levels of immersion into two cultures—an alternate non-native community as well as a native heritage—can be labeled *bicultural*.

Within the American Indian community, monocultural and bicultural methods may be ineffective in assessing accurately the complex cultural experiences and lifestyle practices of many American Indians. Specifically, unlike

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many foreign-born populations that may have primary contact with their Native heritage and/or mainstream US culture, American Indians, as a community, have a long-standing history of extensive contact with many non-Indian ethnic and cultural groups, not just mainstream Anglo-American culture.<sup>3</sup> As a result, it is estimated that over 50 percent of American Indians are of mixed Indian and non-Indian ethnic heritage.<sup>4</sup> This exposure and amalgamation of multiple cultural groups renders typical monocultural and bicultural methods ineffective in assessing the many varieties of beliefs and practices that may manifest within the American Indian community. This study represents a preliminary effort to evaluate the utility of an inventory designed to measure cultural beliefs and practices of American Indians with respect to five major groups in the United States: American Indian, Anglo-American, Latino, African-American, and Asian-American.

### CONCEPTUALIZATION AND DESIGN OF THE MULTICULTURAL LIFESTYLE INVENTORY

A fundamental premise of the Multicultural Lifestyle Inventory (MLSI) is that American Indians, to a greater extent than other ethnic and cultural groups in the United States, have a long-standing history of extensive cultural contact with most major non-Indian ethnic and racial communities in the country. Central to this premise is the assumption that while many American Indians have remained immersed primarily or exclusively in their Native heritage, others have incorporated, to a greater or lesser degree, the beliefs and practices of one or more of the non-Indian cultural groups they have come in contact with. Accordingly, the MLSI was conceptualized and designed to examine the extent to which individuals within the American Indian community have immersed into one or more of the four major non-Indian cultural groups in the United States (Anglo-American, Latino, African-American, and Asian-American) in addition to their Native heritage. It should be noted that the MLSI does not assess immersion into specific tribal, ethnic, or racial cultural groups (i.e., immersion into all possible subgroups within the major cultures). That type of assessment is beyond the scope and objective of the MLSI.

The MLSI is a twenty-item self-report inventory that includes questions regarding language use, music preferences, friend- and kinship ties, food preferences, dating and marital practices, ethnic identity and pride, and celebration of national and cultural holidays. Response options for each item on the MLSI are designed to allow respondents to select from American Indian, Anglo-American, African-American, Asian-American, and Latino cultural beliefs and practices. Respondents are instructed to identify the cultural beliefs and practices that best describe their personal experience with respect to each item on the MLSI (see fig. 1).<sup>5</sup>

The MLSI produces two subscores for each respondent: a monocultural subscore and a multicultural subscore. Each of these subscores ranges between zero (meaning low monocultural or multicultural levels) and twenty (meaning high monocultural or multicultural levels). The monocultural subscore measures the extent to which an individual is immersed primarily or

exclusively in his or her American Indian heritage. The multicultural subscore measures the extent to which an individual is immersed extensively and equally into the American Indian and one or more other non-Indian cultural group (Anglo-American, Latino, African-American, or Asian-American). The two subscores are compared mathematically (at two levels) using a cultural lifestyle formula. First, the formula is used to determine if an individual is either predominantly monocultural or predominantly multicultural in their personal cultural beliefs and practices. At this level of analysis, the formula is useful in eliminating subjective interpretations about what constitutes a predominantly monocultural individual as opposed to a predominantly multicultural person. Second, the formula is used to determine if an individual is predominantly monocultural or predominantly multicultural with respect to the same culture or cultures. At this level of analysis, the formula is useful in identifying individuals who are cultural eclectics instead of predominantly monocultural or multicultural. A discussion of cultural eclecticism and its significance is provided later in this article. The cultural lifestyle formula is as follows:

$$Z \text{ Score} = \frac{(f1/n) - (f2/n)}{\sqrt{\frac{((f2/n)(1-f2/n))}{n}}}$$

where (f1) and (f2) are the most frequent and second most frequent subscores (monocultural or multicultural), (n) is the number of items that were answered in the MLSI, and the computed Z score is compared to the critical values from a Standard Normal Distribution Table at the ( $p < .05$ ) level of significance.

The cultural lifestyle formula can be used to discern fifteen types of monocultural and multicultural lifestyle profiles (see Table 1). Additionally, the formula can be used to identify individuals who can be classified as cultural eclectics. Cultural eclectics are different from monocultural and multicultural individuals because they are either (1) not predominantly monocultural or multicultural across all beliefs and practices, or (2) not monocultural or multicultural with respect to the same culture or cultures. Table 2 provides some examples of these differences.

Conceptually, cultural eclectics are identified by one of two modes. One mode includes individuals who are not predominantly monocultural or multicultural. Instead, these individuals are monocultural with respect to some beliefs and practices (for example, traditional American Indian with respect to friendship ties, music preferences, and celebration of cultural holidays), and multicultural with respect to other beliefs and practices (for example, multicultural American Indian, Anglo-American, and Latino with respect to language use and food preferences). These individuals can be identified as type 1 cultural eclectics. A second mode includes individuals who may be predominantly monocultural or multicultural, but not with respect to the same

**Multicultural Lifestyle Inventory  
(Version 1)**

Rose L. Clark, Ph.D.

The following are some general questions about yourself. There are no right or wrong answers. As you read each statement, place a  mark in the corresponding blank(s) that best describes your personal experience. Please respond to all questions and answer as accurately as you can. Thank you.

**EXAMPLE:**

1. What kind of music do you listen to *most* often? (Please check all that apply)

	American Indian	Anglo American	African American	Asian American	Latino
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If you listen <b>MOSTLY</b> to African-American music you would check	_____	_____	_____ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> _____	_____	_____
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If you listen to African American and Latino music <b>EQUALLY</b> you would check	_____	_____	_____ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> _____	_____	_____ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> _____
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1. What kind of music do you listen to <i>most</i> often? (Please check all that apply)	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
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2. What is the ethnic background of the people that you consider to be your <i>closest</i> friends? (Please check all that apply)	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
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3. What is the ethnic background of the people you have <i>mostly</i> dated? (Please check all that apply)	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
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4. When you go to social functions such as picnics, dances, or sports events what is the ethnic background of the people that you <i>most</i> often go with? (Please check all that apply)	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
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5. What types of national or cultural holidays do you celebrate on a <i>regular</i> basis? (Please check all that apply)	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
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6. With which culture(s) are you <i>most</i> familiar? (Please check all that apply)	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
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7. What is the ethnic background of the people (such as friends, teachers, doctors, movie stars, and professional athletes) that you <i>most</i> admire? (Please check all that apply)	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
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FIGURE 1.

	American Indian	Anglo American	African American	Asian American	Latino
8. If you had a choice, what is the ethnic background of the person you would <i>most</i> likely marry? (Please check all that apply)	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
9. What ethnic group(s) is/are <i>most</i> common in the neighborhood where you currently live? (Please check all that apply)	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
10. If you had children, what types of names would you <i>most</i> likely give them? (Please check all that apply)	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
11. Which culture(s) do you feel <i>most</i> proud of? (please check all that apply)	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
12. Which culture(s) would you say you feel <i>most</i> comfortable with? (Please check all that apply)	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
13. Which culture(s) would you say has been <i>most</i> influential on your life? (Please check all that apply)	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
14. What kinds of foods do you <i>most</i> often eat at home? (Please check all that apply)	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
15. Which kinds of restaurants do you <i>most</i> often eat at? (Please check all that apply)	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
16. How do you <i>prefer</i> to be identified? (Please check all that apply)	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
17. What language do you <i>most</i> often use when you speak with your parents? (Please check all that apply)	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
18. What language do you <i>most</i> often use when you speak with your grandparents? (Please check all that apply)	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
19. What language do you <i>most</i> often use when you speak with your brothers and sisters? (Please check all that apply)	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
20. What language do you <i>most</i> often use when you speak with your closest friends? (Please check all that apply)	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

FIGURE 1.

**Table 1**  
**Cultural Lifestyle Profiles Identified with the Multicultural Lifestyle Inventory**

<p><b>Monocultural</b>          American Indian</p> <p><b>Multicultural</b>          American Indian and Anglo-American          American Indian and Latino          American Indian and African-American          American Indian and Asian-American          American Indian, Anglo-American, and Latino          American Indian, Anglo-American, and African-American          American Indian, Anglo-American, and Asian-American          American Indian, Latino, and African-American          American Indian, Latino, and Asian-American          American Indian, African-American, and Asian-American          American Indian, Anglo-American, Latino, and African-American          American Indian, Anglo-American, Latino, and Asian-American          American Indian, Latino, African-American, and Asian-American          American Indian, Anglo-American, Latino, African-American, and Asian-American</p> <p><b>Cultural Eclectic</b>          Type 1 (monocultural with some beliefs/practices, multicultural with others)          Type 2 (predominantly monocultural or multicultural, but not with respect to same cultural group across all beliefs/practices)</p>
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specific cultural groups across all beliefs and practices. For example, an individual might be predominantly monocultural (American Indian) with respect to friendship ties and celebration of major holidays; predominantly monocultural (Anglo-American) with respect to language usage; predominantly monocultural (African-American) with respect to music preferences; and predominantly monocultural (Latino) with respect to food preferences. This type of individual can be identified as a type 2 cultural eclectic. Similar type 2 cultural eclectic scenarios are also possible with respect to multicultural tendencies across the various types of beliefs and practices (see Table 2).

Mathematically, type 1 and type 2 cultural eclectics represent individuals who on the Cultural Lifestyle formula have Z scores that are within the critical values at the  $p \leq .05$  level of significance. That is, these individuals do not depict a statistical tendency to be predominantly monocultural or multicultural with respect to the same culture or cultures across all beliefs and practices that are measured by the MLSI. In contrast, individuals having a predominant monocultural or multicultural lifestyle have Z scores that are beyond the critical values of the  $p = .05$  level of significance. That is, these individuals depict a statistical tendency to be predominantly monocultural or multicultural with respect to the same culture or cultures across all beliefs and practices. Table 2 provides four hypothetical examples, elucidating how monocultural, multicultural, cultural eclectic type 1, and cultural eclectic type 2 individuals are different from each other.

Cultural eclectics are noteworthy for various reasons. Specifically, they comprise a significant (and in some communities the most common) cultur-

**Table 2**  
**Examples of Monocultural, Multicultural, and Cultural Eclectic Profiles\***

<b>Lifestyle Profile &amp; Belief or Practice</b>	<b>American Indian</b>	<b>Anglo American</b>	<b>Latino</b>	<b>African American</b>	<b>Asian American</b>
<b>MONOCULTURAL (Example)</b>					
Music Preference	X				
Closest Friends	X				
Marital Preference	X				
Food Preferences	X				
Cultural Holidays	X				
Cultural Pride	X				
Cultural Identification	X				
<b>MULTICULTURAL (Example)</b>					
Music Preference	X	X	X		
Closest Friends	X	X	X		
Marital Preference	X	X	X		
Food Preferences	X	X	X		
Cultural Holidays	X	X	X		
Cultural Pride	X	X	X		
Cultural Identification	X	X	X		
<b>CULTURAL ECLECTIC TYPE 1 (Example)</b>					
Music Preference	X	X	X		
Closest Friends	X	X	X		
Marital Preference	X	X	X		
Food Preferences	X	X	X		
Cultural Holidays	X				
Cultural Pride	X				
Cultural Identification	X				
<b>CULTURAL ECLECTIC TYPE 2 (Example)</b>					
Music Preference	X	X		X	
Closest Friends	X	X	X		
Marital Preference	X	X			X
Food Preferences			X	X	X
Cultural Holidays	X	X	X		
Cultural Pride	X	X	X		
Cultural Identification	X	X			X

\* Only seven beliefs and practices are included in these examples to demonstrate the differences between the four cultural lifestyle forms. The MLSI measures twenty distinct cultural beliefs and practices.



al lifestyle group; they are frequently misidentified as presenting other cultural lifestyle forms (i.e., monocultural or multicultural); and, among some ethnic and cultural groups, they are the least likely to be involved in gangs, delinquency, and crime and the most likely to be successful academically and professionally.<sup>6</sup>

### STATISTICAL PROPERTIES OF MLSI

Preliminary analyses of the validity and reliability of the MLSI indicate that even with the use of a relatively small sample ( $n = 77$ ), the inventory has acceptable statistical properties. Analyses conducted to examine the internal consistency of the inventory, for example, produced a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of ( $\alpha = .72$ ). This indicates that, even with a small sample, the items on the MLSI hang together in measuring different aspects of the same construct. Additionally, preliminary tests of the construct validity of the MLSI using years of urbanization and monoethnic/multiethnic heritage as predictors of multicultural and eclectic tendencies also provide support for the validity of the MLSI: ( $r = .545, p < .05$ ) for the relationship between years of urbanization and multicultural and eclectic tendencies, and ( $r = .476, p < .05$ ) for the relationship between monoethnic/multiethnic heritage and multicultural and eclectic trends. Although additional analyses are clearly needed to determine more conclusively other statistical properties of the MLSI (e.g., factor structure, discriminant validity, and test-retest reliability), the conceptual model is sound and the available data is encouraging and shows considerable promise.

### DESCRIPTION OF THE SAMPLE

American Indians comprise a population of approximately 2.4 million individuals.<sup>7</sup> The largest tribes in the United States include the Cherokee (19 percent of American Indian population), Navajo (12 percent), Sioux (6 percent), Chippewa (6 percent), Choctaw (5 percent), Pueblo (3 percent), and Apache (3 percent). California has the largest percentage of the US population of American Indians (13 percent), followed by Oklahoma (11 percent), Arizona (11 percent), New Mexico (7 percent), and Washington (4 percent). Within California, Los Angeles County has the largest share of the state's American Indian population with an estimated 55,943 individuals.<sup>8</sup>

The subjects in this study were American Indians residing in Los Angeles County, California. This population was selected for three primary reasons: (1) the empirical evidence indicates that the majority of American Indians reside in urban settings; (2) Los Angeles County has one of the largest communities of urban American Indians in the country; and (3) Los Angeles County has a diverse cross-section of individuals from many American Indian tribes and nations. The total sample for this study included thirty males and forty-seven females. The sample ranged in age between nineteen and eighty-five years. The sample included individuals with primary and/or secondary affiliations with forty-one American Indian tribes or nations, including

Navajo, Cherokee, Choctaw, Ojibwa, Chippewa, Pima, Creek, Sioux, Comanche, Mohawk, Paiute, Seminole, Taos Pueblo, Shoshone, Seneca, and Cahuilla. With respect to tribal affiliations, 69 percent of the sample reported single affiliations and 31 percent reported two or more tribal affiliations. With respect to ethnicity and race, thirty-four of the respondents in the sample reported that they were monoethnic and forty-three reported that they were multiethnic. The majority of multiethnic individuals were mixed with Anglo-American (50 percent) followed by Latino (36 percent) and African-American (5 percent). Monoethnic individuals were more likely than their multiethnic cohorts to be born on a reservation (47 percent versus 5 percent). In contrast, multiethnic individuals were more likely to be born in an urban or rural community than their monoethnic counterparts (95 percent versus 53 percent). The average years living in the County of Los Angeles was 21.49 years, and the range extended from three to eighty-five years.

## RESULTS

The principal assumption examined with the available data was that as a result of their extensive exposure to and contact with multiple ethnic and cultural groups, urban American Indians in Los Angeles County would be extremely diverse in their cultural lifestyles, with some individuals being monocultural “traditional” American Indian, some being multicultural, and some being cultural eclectics. For the purposes of this study, the following operational definitions were used: (1) *monocultural* described individuals who were exclusively or primarily immersed into the American Indian culture across all beliefs and practices measured by the MLSI; (2) *multicultural* described individuals immersed extensively and equally into the American Indian and one or more other non-Indian major cultural group across all beliefs and practices; (3) *type 1 cultural eclectic* described individuals depicting monocultural tendencies on some beliefs and practices and multicultural tendencies on others; and (4) *type 2 cultural eclectic* described individuals who were predominantly monocultural or multicultural, but not with respect to the same cultural group or groups across all beliefs and practices.

The results showed that, consistent with the assumption that urban American Indians in Los Angeles County are extensively heterogeneous, twenty-seven (35 percent) of the total sample were monocultural, twenty-seven (35 percent) were multicultural, and twenty-three (30 percent) were cultural eclectic (see Table 3). It is noteworthy that of the total individuals in the monocultural group, fifteen of the twenty-seven (56 percent) were monocultural (American Indian). This shows the extent to which the American Indian lifestyle has endured as an exclusive cultural form for some urban American Indians, despite their urbanization experience and exposure to non-Indian cultures.

With respect to the multicultural group, the results showed that six of the twenty-seven individuals (22 percent) were a multicultural mix of American Indian and Anglo-American. This shows the extent to which the Anglo-American culture has influenced the lives of some members of the urban

**Table 3**  
**Distribution of Sample by Monocultural, Multicultural, and Cultural Eclectic Lifestyles**

<u>CULTURAL LIFESTYLE FORM</u>	<u>FREQUENCY</u>	<u>PERCENT</u>
<b>MONOCULTURAL TOTALS</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>(35% of total sample)</b>
American Indian Culture	(15)	(56% of monoculturals)
Anglo-American Culture	(7)	(26% of monoculturals)
Latino Culture	(3)	(11% of monoculturals)
African-American Culture	(2)	(07% of monoculturals)
<b>MULTICULTURAL TOTALS</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>(35% of total sample)</b>
American Indian and Anglo-American Cultures	(6)	(22% of multiculturals)
American Indian and Latino Cultures	(3)	(11% of multiculturals)
American Indian and African-American Cultures	(1)	(04% of multiculturals)
American Indian, Anglo-American, and Latino cultural groups	(9)	(33% of multiculturals)
American Indian, Anglo-American, and African-American cultural groups	(2)	(07% of multiculturals)
American Indian, Anglo-American, and two or more other cultural groups	(6)	(22% of multiculturals)
<b>CULTURAL ECLECTIC TOTALS</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>(30% of total sample)</b>
Type 1	(15)	(65% of cultural eclectics)
Type 2	( 8)	(35% of cultural eclectics)

American Indian community. The data also showed that nine of the twenty-seven individuals (33 percent) were multicultural with ties to American Indian, Anglo-American, and Latino cultures. This connection with Latinos is somewhat expected since Latinos comprise 46 percent of the total population in Los Angeles County and, in fact, are the largest ethnic group in that community.<sup>9</sup>

With respect to the cultural eclectic group, the results showed that fifteen of the twenty-three individuals (65 percent) were type 1 cultural eclectics and eight of the twenty-three (35 percent) were type 2 cultural eclectics. To reiterate, type 1 cultural eclectics portrayed an approximately equal combination of monocultural and multicultural tendencies across the various beliefs and practices that were assessed by the MLSI. In contrast, type 2 cultural eclectics portrayed a combination of American Indian, Anglo-American, African-American, Asian-American, and/or Latino cultural beliefs and practices within a specific predominant lifestyle form (monocultural or multicultural).

Analyses of the demographic profiles of the sample relative to the four major lifestyle patterns identified (monocultural, multicultural, cultural eclectic type 1, and cultural eclectic type 2) showed distinctive characteristics for the four groups. The data showed that with respect to the monocultural individuals, 90 percent had a monoethnic American Indian heritage, 76 percent

had only one tribal affiliation, and 69 percent were females who were married or in a permanent relationship. In contrast, 93 percent of the multicultural individuals had a multiethnic heritage, 75 percent had multiple tribal affiliations, 62 percent were males who were married or in a permanent relationship, and 94 percent were born in a nonreservation urban or rural community. Cultural eclectic type 1 individuals were primarily multiethnic with respect to their heritage (88 percent), principally single males (63 percent), and most likely to be born in a nonreservation urban or rural community (88 percent). Cultural eclectic type 2 individuals were also primarily multiethnic (80 percent), single females (70 percent), and born in a nonreservation urban or rural community (80 percent).

A comparison of the four groups on years of urbanization, years of total education, years of boarding school education, and income showed that monocultural individuals had the lowest number of years living in an urban community (mean = 11.87 years), the lowest total years of education (mean = 14.10 years), the highest years of boarding school education (mean = 2.15 years), and the second highest average income (mean = \$32,999 per year). Multicultural individuals had the highest number of years living in an urban community (mean = 29.18 years), the highest total years of education (mean = 16.375 years), the lowest years of boarding school education (mean = .50 years), and the highest average income (mean = \$42,999 per year). Cultural eclectic type 1 individuals had the second lowest number of years living in an urban community (mean = 19.88 years), the second lowest total years of education (mean = 14.64 years), the second lowest years of boarding school education (mean = .53 years), and the lowest average income (mean = \$19,499 per year). Cultural eclectic type 2 individuals had the second highest number of years living in an urban community (mean = 27.20 years), the second highest total years of education (mean = 15.80 years), the second highest years of boarding school education (mean = 1.20 years), and the second lowest average income (mean = \$30,956 per year).

## CONCLUSIONS

American Indians comprise a population that, in various ways, is distinct from all other non-Indian ethnic, cultural, and racial groups in the United States. They are nonimmigrant with respect to the United States; are members of sovereign nations within this country; hold dual citizenship status with the United States and their own tribal nations; have been the target of many seemingly conflicting federal programs designed to relocate, segregate, subjugate, tolerate, accommodate, and integrate their community; and have a long-standing history (in part because of federal programs) of extensive contact with most of the major non-Indian ethnic, racial, and cultural groups in this country. This unique transgenerational human experience has created a cultural community that is vastly pluralistic and extremely difficult to describe and appreciate fully.

This article represents an effort to measure and understand systematically and in greater detail the diversity and complexity inherent within the

American Indian population. The results of this study support the assumption regarding the many distinct ways that American Indians immerse themselves into the communities with which they come in contact. The results showed that while some individuals remain monocultural “traditional” American Indians, some become multicultural with respect to one or more non-Indian cultural group, and others become cultural eclectics. The finding that the MLSI can be used to identify cultural eclectics is particularly noteworthy because it offers a systematic way to discern more adequately the cultural nuances evident within the community and, very possibly, within families. Prior to this study, distinctions between multicultural and nonmulticultural eclectics have not been made.

The results of this study support prior research that shows that there is no prototypical American Indian cultural lifestyle. The results also show, very clearly and very poignantly, that much of what is known (culturally) about this oldest American population is effectively in its infancy. The Multicultural Lifestyle Inventory, although still in the developmental stages, provides a method for systematically measuring, observing, describing, understanding, and appreciating the richness of the cultural rainbow evident in the American Indian population in this country.

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5. Administration and scoring instructions may be obtained directly from the authors: Rose L. Clark, administrative clinical director, United American Indian Involvement, 1125 West Sixth Street, Suite 400, Los Angeles, California 90017; Richard H. Mendoza, professor of psychology, California School of Professional Psychology, 1000 South Fremont Avenue, Alhambra, California 91803-1360.

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9. Ibid.