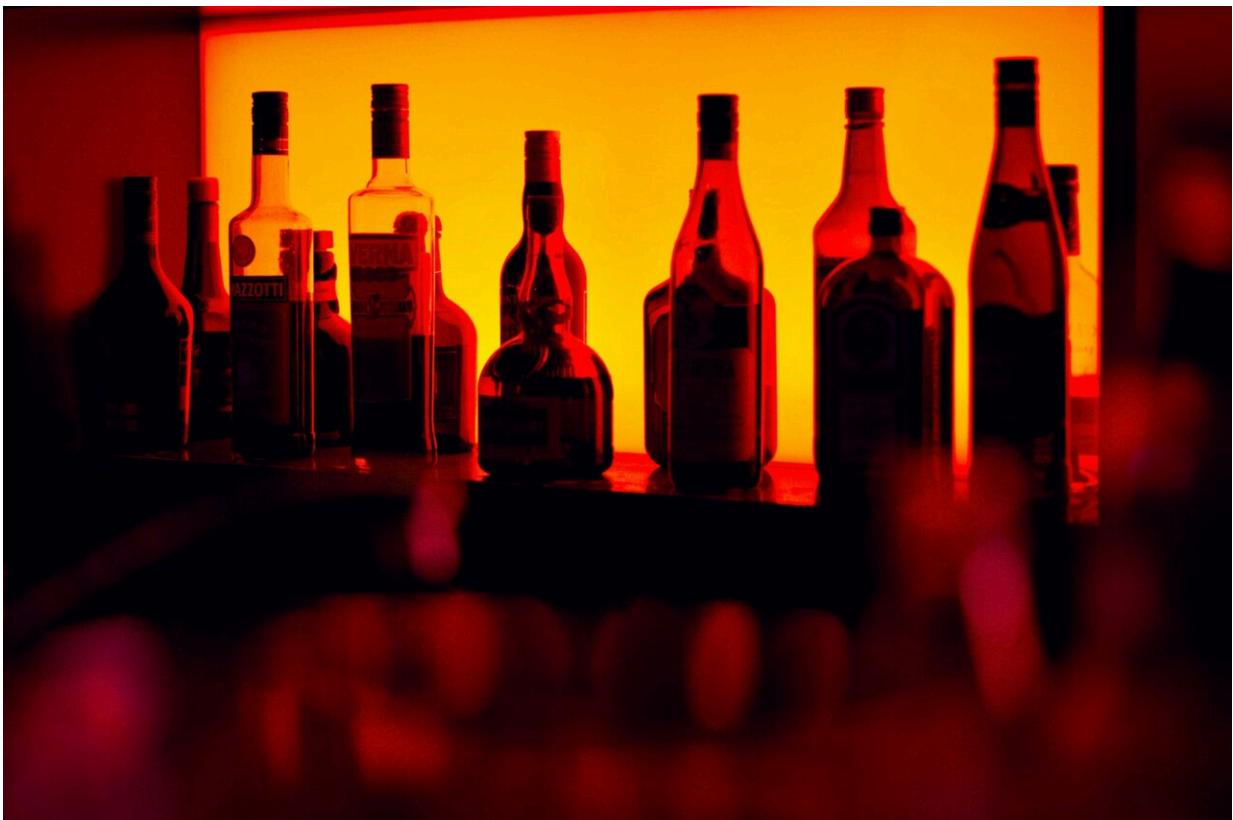


# American Indian teens who identify with their native culture experience fewer negative alcohol outcomes

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American Indian (AI) adolescents who expect to relate strongly to their racial culture in the future are less likely than their peers to experience

negative alcohol outcomes—like fighting with friends, being arrested, and memory gaps—even if they do not relate strongly to their culture now, a new study suggests.

Although AI communities overall have higher rates of abstinence from alcohol than other [racial groups](#), AI teens are particularly vulnerable to drinking and its negative consequences. This may be related to [cultural identity](#), which is known to influence substance use. Mixed findings in previous research suggest that different aspects of [culture](#) have different associations with drinking and drug use. The role of cultural identity may relate to experiences of historical trauma and ongoing racist discrimination linked to alcohol-related health disparities, as well as the loss of traditional Indigenous practices and healing.

Understanding how AI teens internalize both their racial culture and the dominant Eurocentricity may offer opportunities for preventing hazardous [substance use](#). For the study in *Alcoholism: Clinical & Experimental Research*, investigators explored the links between cultural identity, alcohol use, and alcohol-related outcomes.

Researchers used data from 3,200 AI adolescents and 1,600 white adolescents living on or near AI reservations between 2009 and 2013. The participants filled out questionnaires on their experiences of drinking and alcohol-related consequences. They also took surveys on how often they participated in events representing both AI and white racial cultures, as well as to what extent their way of life represented each cultural tradition and how much they anticipated associating with each racial culture in the future.

The researchers categorized participants based on cultural identity [affiliation](#). They used a relatively novel, person-centered approach that assumes subgroups may meaningfully differ from the overall cohort and additional statistical analysis to compare groups' drinking and alcohol-

related consequences.

For both AI and white participants, researchers identified three groups based on cultural identity: marginalized (low affiliation with both AI and white cultures), bicultural (high affiliation with both cultures), and "third culture" (a mix of high and low cultural identity scores). Among AI teens, the third culture group was the smallest. It manifested as a relatively high current affiliation with white culture and low affiliation with AI culture.

These participants expected, however, that in the future, they would affiliate strongly with their racial culture of origin. Among white teens, the third culture group was the largest. These participants currently affiliated strongly with AI culture and slightly with white culture—presumably an effect of living on or near a reservation—and expected that in the future, they would shift toward white cultural identity.

The relative ages of the groups—AI bicultural and white marginalized participants were older—suggested a developmental framework in which cultural identity evolves through adolescence. Alcohol use was largely consistent between groups. In both the AI and white groups, however, the third culture participants reported significantly fewer alcohol-related consequences than their marginalized or bicultural peers.

The findings add to evidence that future-oriented thinking (involving planning ahead) and engaging in [cultural activities](#) (even in youth who don't currently strongly identify with their culture of origin) are protective against alcohol-related risks. The study also illuminates the developmental nature of cultural identity affiliation. The investigators recommend interventions for teens that nourish future-oriented thinking and cultural engagement and call for further research, including studies involving multicultural participants.

**More information:** Melissa R. Schick et al, Cultural identity affiliation and alcohol use and related consequences among American Indian and White adolescents: A latent profile analysis, *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research* (2022). [DOI: 10.1111/acer.14927](https://doi.org/10.1111/acer.14927)

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