Foreword

Michael Hart

I recently attended an international gathering focussed on Indigenous cultures entitled Manitou Ahbee held in Winnipeg, Manitoba. It included the Aboriginal Peoples Choice Music Awards, an Indigenous market place and trade show, an education day, music festival, and an international competition Pow Wow. Literally thousands of people attended and participated. While my son and I attended the Pow Wow, I could not be but overwhelmed with the grand entry of approximately 800 hundred dancers. I thought about how many of our people continue to align themselves directly in the path that our ancestors have laid out for us. It was truly an event that presented a snap shot of how far our peoples have come despite the ongoing colonial oppression. When I returned to my office, after the weekend, I was quickly reminded that despite these changes, we continue to struggle to maintain, regain, our space in our own lands. I had just spent time in a First Nation where a community worker and I discussed the concerns she was supporting others to address, including a grandparent who has limited, if any, say in the well-being of her grandchildren in care; a parent who is overwhelmed with the number of suicides in her families that she too wanted an end to the pain; and a neglected child who is not wanted by his own family members because "he is too hard to handle."

I believe we need to continue building on the path that our ancestors have laid out for us. We need to remember the historical oppression our peoples have faced and how we continue to face the new forms of colonialism present today. This challenge can seem overwhelming as we struggle to meet the needs of the communities and address community wellness despite the fact our agencies and organizations continuously face inadequate funding and support. Still, we must be prepared to address how our identities have been shaped by this oppression and the need to ensure our cultural identities remain, as we define them. We need to turn to our understandings and views of how to move forward by including and relying upon our own Indigenous knowledge. We need to live and work in ways that reflect our values, and incorporate our sacred and traditional teachings in today's context.

I trust that this issue contributes to the building of our path. Together, these articles address several issues, dynamics and perspectives evident in our ongoing development as Indigenous nations and peoples, including the history of Indigenous child welfare and the sixties scoop, cultural identity, Indigenous knowledge, and Indigenous ways of life. With these contributions and our reflections as readers, practitioners, educators, and concerned individuals, it is my hope, and I believe the hope of many, that we may move forward to the point where such gatherings as Manito Ahbee are regularly and frequently enjoyed and experienced by thousands of our children and families across Turtle Island as it is meant to be: an expression of pride in one another and in ourselves.

Ensuring Knowledge Transmission in the Aboriginal Child Welfare Field

Marlyn Bennett, Co-ordinating Editor

This issue of the First Peoples Child & Family Caring Society is the third volume produced by the Caring Society since our first inaugural issue was released in 2004. It demonstrates our commitment to ensuring knowledge transmission in the field of Aboriginal/First Nations child welfare. An important aspect of knowledge transmission is the need to ensure that the knowledge generated by the authors within the journal, as well as how the journal is prepared, is shared with the wider community. The collection of essays in this volume details distinctive issues that confront many Aboriginal/First Nations and child welfare and social service agencies on a day to day basis, whether they are located on reserve, or in rural or urban localities. Issues around identify formation in relation to adoption and suicide prevail as the top themes within this volume. All of the 10 articles in this edition weave together important elements of storytelling and Indigenous knowledge that are unique among Aboriginal practitioners and community researchers.

Naturally, one would assume that children apprehended by child welfare agencies will be safely cared for by the agencies tasked with children's well-being and one would expect these same children participate and have access to all the services and programs

that child welfare agencies are typically required to provide. For Aboriginal children residing on-reserve, in particular, their safety is at an increased risk, not because agencies are incapable of taking on this responsibility but because these agencies are inadequately resourced and funded to do so. The first article in this volume Keeping First Nations Children at Home: A Few Federal Policy Changes Could Make a Big Difference, succinctly summarizes the insufficient funding environment in which First Nations child welfare agencies must currently operate. Wien, Blackstock, Loxley and Trocmé indicates that although First Nations Child and Family Agencies are under funded by the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, this can be alleviated through the adoption of four policy changes to the funding formula which may have better outcomes for children in care. They note firstly that key components of the funding formula to FN CFS agencies have not been augmented despite increases in cost of living factors – an increase in funding would help alleviate core agency funding around salary and benefits for executive directors, financial officers and agency board. Secondly, government incentive structures being what they currently are only permit FN CFS agencies to apprehend children not reimburse agencies

for costs or provide resources related to work that would help children stay at home with their families of origin. Furthermore, they note that staff within First Nations CFS agencies must also contend with jurisdictional disputes that further exasperates operating problems from inadequate funding and services. Lastly, Wien, Blackstock, Loxley and Trocmé note that a lack of management information systems also further exasperate the work required by agencies in that such technological infrastructures would be useful for exchanging quantitative information within and between agencies and would assist in research that would contribute strategic planning for the future and for understandings the effectiveness of programs.

The next article The Politics of Kith and Kin: Observations on the British Columbia Government's Reaction to the Death of Sherry Charlie, written by Gerald Craddock provides a prime example of risk that First Nations CFS agencies undertake when under funded by the federal government. Craddock examines events around the death of a First Nations child who was placed and eventually killed in a Kith and Kin arrangement. Although Kith and Kin arrangements have been identified as a culturally conducive practice for Aboriginal children in care, it has not always a practice that First Nations agencies have control over. Craddock examines the hazards faced by First Nations child welfare agencies that get drawn into child welfare policies, which may, have little or no bearing on how they actually conduct child welfare in their communities and how they would wish to develop those services in the future. In examining the political climate of child welfare with regard to the Sherry Charlie case Craddock seeks to raise questions about the appropriate role of government representatives and experts in preserving established practices

when confronted with influence wielded by elected officials and other interest groups seeking to further their own political, economic, and social agendas.

Through storytelling Nancy MacDonald provides a glimpse of her experiences in child welfare over the last 25 years in Reflections of a Mi'kmaq Social Worker on a Quarter of a Century Work in First Nations Child Welfare. As a Mi'kmaq social worker MacDonald draws upon her first interaction with a young Aboriginal child. The single act of placing the First Nations child into non-Aboriginal care triggered multiple losses for the child in MacDonald's story. The child became lost to herself, her family, community as well as lost to her culture and her heritage. Such is the case for all Aboriginal children who come into contact with the child welfare system as MacDonald notes that the story of the young girl in her article continues to be retold in exactly the same manner with the same outcomes for most Aboriginal children. MacDonald notes that schools of social work, through the principles of social just, can take a lead role on becoming decolonizing agents to First Nations peoples in Canada.

Jeannine Carriere's submission Promising Practice for Maintaining Identities in First Nations Adoption reflects on her PhD study regarding the importance of identity to First Nation individuals who have been adopted. The findings from her research indicate that there is a causal relationship between connection to birth family, community and ancestral knowledge, adoption and health. The overarching theme expressed by most adoptees is that loss of identify may contribute to impaired physical, spiritual, mental and emotional health for First Nation Adoptees. Carriere also provides

suggestions on how identity can be preserved in First Nations adoptions through programs, policies and practice.

Adoption and an examination of early child welfare practice with First Nations peoples was also the focus of the following article, Identity Lost and Found: Lessons from the Sixties Scoop by Raven Sinclair. Sinclair's article points to recent research that indicates that some Aboriginal adults once adopted as children have found consolation and stronger identity formation by re-acculturating with their birth cultures and contextualizing their adoption experiences within colonial history. The adoption history in Canada is examined along with an examination of issues around transracial adoption through the lens of psychology theories to aid in understanding identity conflicts facing Aboriginal adoptees.

Michael Hart's piece on Indigenous Knowledge and Research: The míkiwáhp as a Symbol for Reclaiming our Knowledge and Ways of Knowing illustrates the inherent symbolisms of Indigenous knowledge and research as expressed through the use of a Cree lodge. The elements of the lodge help tie together symbolic and collective elements of Indigenous knowledge and how it is similar to some mainstream research paradigms which guide research. Another indigenous tool is also covered in this issue. The use of the Medicine Wheel as an effective tool for examining anti-oppressive practices in A Way of Life: Indigenous Perspectives on Anti-Oppressive Living by Robina Thomas and Jacquie Green.

Here be Dragons! Reconciling Indigenous and Western Knowledge to Improve Aboriginal Child Welfare speaks of the need for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal child welfare structures to begin working together. It describes one such

approach being undertaken in Alberta under the "Making Our Hearts Sing" initiative which reflects not only on the impact of residential schools and foster care on Aboriginal children but on mainstream's professional beliefs and assumptions about child welfare services. The Making Out Hearts Sing initiative is aimed at building collaboration among child welfare stakeholders and Aboriginal communities to examine the delivery of child welfare in Aboriginal communities and to begin creating innovative, effective and practical approaches to child welfare that are more in keeping with traditional Aboriginal worldviews that will contribute to reconciliation, healing and increased community capacity.

The last two submissions are students' submissions that speak to the issue of identity formation and the impact that identity has on the development of young Aboriginal people and the risks of suicide ideation and suicide. John Cournane's short article Are Rural American Indian adolescents becoming a Race of Angels? centers on the importance of identify formation and development in young Aboriginal persons in the early years of education. He notes that positive identity development at an early age helps ensure a reduction in adolescent suicides and improves ego development as children mature. In Re-examining issues behind the loss of family and culture and the impact on Aboriginal Youth Suicide Rates, Kristine Morris, explores through the prevailing literature, issues around culture loss and lack of cultural identity and the correction with suicide risk among young Aboriginal persons. Ways of reconnecting culture and ways of building identity for Aboriginal children in care are explored including some of the ways this has been hindered for children and youth who come into care.

Future Developments

The creation of the First Peoples Child & Family Review has certainly played a significant role in filling the gap in knowledge production around the voices and perspectives of those working in the Aboriginal child welfare field. The First Peoples Child & Family Review has worked to ensure this knowledge is captured using the OCAP principles as established by the National Aboriginal Health Organization. The principles of ownership, control, access and possession (OCAP) as outlined in Schnarch (2004), basically relate to the collective ownership of group information; First Nations control over research and information; First Nations' management of access to their data and physical possession of that data.

Our Elders continually remind us that this generation has a responsibility to share the knowledge with the next generation and to ensure that this information is transferred to others (youth specifically) who will help in disseminating this information across various communities. Indeed, the importance of mentoring youth to help produce the journal was highlighted in the inaugural issue of this journal (Bennett, 2004, p. 4). Youth involvement is important to the viability and future of the journal. The addition of an Aboriginal youth editor to the staff overseeing the production of the First Peoples Child & Family Review journal will be instrumental to Caring Society/ First Nations Research Site's goal of ensuring knowledge transmission through mentorship, sharing knowledge within communities, as well as assuring that young people gain valuable skills that will contribute to their research and publishing capacities. It is also in line with principles that the Caring Society has established regarding the engagement of young

people. The Caring Society acknowledges that it is critical we support, nurture and respectfully engage young people in the work that our organization is mandated to provide. A commitment to engage youth means that we are committed to a relationship that goes beyond a project or a program (see Declaration of Accountability on the Ethical Engagement of Young People and Adults in Canadian Organizations).

Over the last two years the journal has been successful as a resource utilized by many students and instructors at the university level. Numerous copies of the journal are available through various libraries across Canada. In addition to being available for free from the Caring Society's website, the journal can also be accessed through Lund University's Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ, www.doaj.org) in Sweden and through EBSCO Publishing, an information source for millions of researchers in thousands of institutions worldwide (www. ebsco.com). This success has meant that hits to the Caring Society's online has increased considerably (on average, there are over 550 hits to the journal's webpage monthly). To date, there have been over 6,668 hits to the journal website since the beginning of the 2006 year. Increased interest in the journal in addition to increased responses to our Call for Papers means that we published on average 10 articles per issue. This indicates to us that our journal has become an important resource to many researchers, academic institutions and community members as a credible publishing entity. The early foresightedness and recognition of such a publication by our editorial board attests to the fact that open access to our journal is having a greater research impact than we expected (Antelman, 2004) not only among Aboriginal child welfare

practitioners but also among non-Aboriginal practitioners, researchers, administrators, including various learning institutions as well as at both levels of government.

In the coming future we hope to hire a youth from within Winnipeg who will assist the co-ordinating editor in learning about the publishing process. We hope in the process this individual, in turn, will help mentor others from within the Aboriginal child welfare sector who might wish to write for publication in our journal. It has been our intention since the journal's inception to hire an Aboriginal youth who will be mentored in all aspects of producing the journal and we have begun to look at ways to help us make this aspiration a reality. We feel that this position will be a long term opportunity and youth involvement is mandatory to the objectives and goals of our organization and the journal. Youth will have an opportunity to learn all aspects of research and publishing which will help strengthen our ability to maintain our cultures, our knowledges and contribute to culturally congruent research in the Aboriginal child welfare field. By involving youth in the production of our journal, we will be keeping the diversity of Aboriginal culture and knowledge alive and contemporary. Mentoring youth in the process of producing the journal from the beginning to end of each issue will assist the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society in furthering the transmission of knowledge which our Elders say is a significant responsibility that must be shared, a responsibility for which we take seriously.

Bio

Marlyn is the Director of Research for the Winnipeg based First Nations Research Site of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada and the co-ordinating editor and founder of the First Peoples Child & Family Review.

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Keeping First Nations children at home:
A few Federal policy changes could make a big difference

Fred Wien, Cindy Blackstock, John Loxley and Nico Trocmè

Jordan was a young First Nation child from Manitoba who remained in hospital for an extended period of time as federal departments disagreed about who should pay his at-home care costs. Jordan died before the jurisdictional dispute could be resolved and he never had a chance to live in a home environment. The only home he ever knew was a hospital (Lavallee, 2005).

This paper summarizes the results of a comprehensive and multi-disciplinary review of Canada's funding policy for First Nations child and family service delivery on reserve which was conducted by the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada in 2005. The resulting reports Wen:de: We are Coming to the Light of Day (Blackstock, Loxley & Wien, 2005) and Wen:de the Journey Continues (Loxley, DeRiviere, Prakash et. al., 2005) provide a comprehensive set of evidence based recommendations for reforms to the existing federal funding methodology. This

Abstract

Jordan's case illustrates one of several areas where the formulation of better federal child and family service funding policy for First Nations children and young people, could go a long way toward improving the lives of First Nation children on reserve.

article highlights some of the problems with the formula and presents some of the policy solutions that could redress the significant shortcomings in the current funding methodology and by extension make a marked improvement in the safety and well being of First Nations children and their families.

When the 2003 Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (Trocmè, N., Fallon, B., MacLaurin, B., Daciuk, J., Felstiner, C., Black, T. et al., 2005) was released recently, the results revealed two important distinctions. Firstly, the proportion of on-reserve First Nation children 0-18 years of age who have been investigated for alleged maltreatment is significantly higher than is the case for Canadian children (Trocmè, Fallon, MacLaurin, B., et al. 2005). Secondly, the reasons why First Nation children come to the attention of child welfare personnel are also different. By far the most important reason is physical neglect, which means that in many cases their parents are unable to care for the child because

of factors such as poverty, poor housing and problems with addiction (Blackstock & Trocme, 2004; Trocme, Knoke, Shangreaux, Fallon & MacLaurin, 2005).

At one level, the findings in the child welfare field are another consequence, along with poor outcomes in health, addictions, education, criminal justice and other areas, that arise from the deplorable social and economic conditions found in most reserve communities (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), 1996; Blackstock, Clarke, Cullen et al., 2004). Over the longer term, there can be no more effective intervention than to address the social and economic development of these communities. Investments in education, housing, expanded land and resource base access, business and employment development, and governance are some of the measures that need to be emphasized (RCAP, 1996; Blackstock & Trocmè, 2004).

In the short to medium term, however, family and child welfare agencies that serve the on-reserve population – and there are over 100 of them across the country – are struggling to meet the needs of children and families in their communities. They are funded by the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs according to a formula that was implemented in 1989 (McDonald & Ladd, 2000). The formula has been broadly criticized for its emphasis on child removal and lack of investment in community wellness measures that redress the drivers of neglect which could support larger numbers of children to stay safely at home. Four policy changes to the formula and how it provides funding would go a long way to providing a better future for First Nation children (Loxley, DeRiviere, Prakash et. al., 2005).

First, key components of the formula have not been adjusted for increases in the cost of living for the past 10 years (Blackstock, Loxley & Wien, 2005; Loxley, DeRiviere, Prakash, et al. 2005). The overall impact of the lack of inflation adjustment is that agencies have 21 million dollars less per year to spend in purchasing power today than in 1995. This inflation shortfall affects the amount available for core agency operations, such costs as the salary and benefits for an executive director, a financial officer and board meetings. It also affects the dollar allocation for each child in the 0-18 year population, out of which come the costs for social workers, supervisors, contracted services, travel and so forth (Loxley, DeRiviere, Prakash, et al. 2005).

Secondly, the formula provides very limited funds for family counseling and other community-based services (McDonald & Ladd, 2000; Blackstock, Loxley & Wien, 2005; Loxley, DeRiviere, Prakash, et al. 2005). Once a child is taken into care, all allowable placement-based costs are automatically reimbursed to the agency. However, the formula does not reimburse costs or provide resources related to work that would strengthen the family so that the child could safely continue to live at home, or that would reintegrate a child in care with their family of origin. As a result of this incentive structure, plus the physical neglect factors mentioned above, the number of children being taken into care on reserve in recent years has been increasing at the rate of 11 per cent each year (Blackstock, Loxley & Wien, 2005). The agencies have creative measures that they could take to address this situation, including working with other social service agencies within their communities, but their hands are tied and their frustration level is mounting (Shangreaux, 2004).

The results of these deficiencies in the formula also have negative impacts for the Department of Indian Affairs since the department has to find the extra funds for an ever increasing child maintenance budget as the number of children in care continues to rise (Blackstock, Loxley & Wien, 2005). We know from the experience of West Region Child and Family Services in Manitoba that agencies that are able to invest in preventive and least disruptive measures are agencies able to move to a point, within 5 to 7 years, where their case load levels off despite increases in the size of their child population aged 0 to 18 years (Blackstock, Loxley, & Wien, 2005). We also know from a cost-benefit analysis of specific programs, such as those that emphasize employment preparation or addictions prevention, that the net savings from this approach are substantial – not only in reduced maintenance costs for children in care but also in reduced costs arising from unemployment, social assistance, remedial education and the like (Loxley, DeRiviere, Prakash et al., 2005). First Nation communities have social program staff funded by discrete programs, such as alcohol and drug workers, education, health and child welfare staff, but the difficulty is that none have the mandate or resources to collaborate in moving beyond dealing with the symptoms of the problem to doing effective preventive work (Blackstock, Loxley, & Wien, 2005).

Thirdly, our research reveals that the staff working for First Nations family and child welfare agencies spend an inordinate amount of time having to deal with jurisdictional disputes between federal government departments or between federal and provincial levels, especially around the question of who pays for services to status Indian children that are normally available to other children (Blackstock, Loxley & Wien,

2005; Lavallee, 2005; Gough, Blackstock & Bala, 2005). More importantly, reports from First Nations child and family service agencies indicate that federal and provincial governments tend to delay providing services to children pending resolution of the dispute. The overall result is that governments are putting their own interests ahead of the interests of First Nations children. We recommend that governments adopt what we call Jordan's Principle, to the effect that the government department (provincial or federal) that first receives a request for payment of services for a First Nation child which would normally be available to non-Aboriginal children provides the service without delay or disruption. Issues of jurisdiction can be sorted out at a later date through the use of appropriate dispute resolution mechanisms (Lavalee, 2005; MacDonald & Walman, 2005).

Finally, it is clear that most First Nations child and family service agencies have not had the resources to establish an effective management information system by which they can track child welfare cases and related costs (Loo, 2005). Indeed, some still rely primarily on pen and paper, at great cost to their efficiency and knowledge base. With a better management information system, they could not only exchange quantitative information within and between agencies but they could also undertake the research that would inform them about the effectiveness of their programs and contribute to their strategic planning (Blackstock, Loxley & Wien, 2005).

First Nation child welfare agencies have shown that they are much better than provincial agencies in finding ways to care for children in need within their own communities, and in providing services that are culturally

appropriate. It is time to give First Nation child welfare agencies the flexibility and resources they need to do the job (Blackstock, Loxley & Wien, 2005).

Bios

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The politics of kith and kin: Observations on the British Columbia government's reaction to the death of Sherry Charlie

Gerald Cradock

A central difficulty for First Nations' child welfare agencies is that they operate in a world which is not of their own making. On the one hand, First Nations' agencies are required to operate within a national funding formula created by the federal government predicated upon a forensic, after-the-fact model of child protection where preventative services are not recognized. On the other hand, the delegation model the federal government requires places First Nations' agencies firmly within the legal and administrative practices of provincial child welfare jurisdictions and bureaucratic apparatuses even where federal funding is inadequate, or does not contemplate, provincial laws, policies, and practices. This means that despite whatever attempts First Nations may make towards a truly 'Aboriginal' form of child welfare and social work, such attempts are consistently undermined by legislative and policy initiatives over which First Nations have little or no control.

Abstract

This paper examines the events that occurred in British Columbia following the death of a First Nations child placed in a Kith and Kin arrangement. The paper, drawing extensively from internal government reports that were only just recently released to public, provides an "insider's" view of government sponsored child welfare polices and practices in relation to First Nations child welfare agencies and the communities they serve.

Lack of influence and control by First Nations' agencies over their own practices means these agencies must constantly adapt to legislation, policies and initiatives which are rarely, if ever, conceived with First Nations' conditions and aspirations in mind. In this sense, and despite the obvious over-representation of Aboriginal families within provincial child welfare systems, provincial practices ought not be described as deliberately obstructive. Rather, they are an assemblage of technologies, practices, and policies created and organized to service the multiple interests present within any government apparatus. As Foucault (1991) famously remarked, the modern state is not a monolithic *monstré froid* acting with a single purpose. Rather, it is more like one of Tinguely's 'fantastic machines' filled with parts

and processes created elsewhere and assembled into an incoherent whole which, despite its apparent ineffectiveness in achieving expected results nevertheless gets things done (Rose 1999). In the case of child welfare, this fantastic machine removes children from their parents, dubs some caregivers low risk and others high risk, makes foster payments, employs social workers, counselors, and the rest of the broad panoply of the 'psy' complex. From this perspective, government policies and practices are not irrational, but they are necessarily uncoordinated if only because they cannot control either the unexpected, or the actions and interests of divergent groups over whom the state is supposed to govern.

The delay in completing the Director's Report into the death of Sherry Charlie in British Columbia sparked multiple reviews of government policies and practices. They provide an object lesson in how government apparatuses operate, and how First Nations become trapped within forces and interests over which they have little or no practical control. Further, it demonstrates how a single tragedy can mobilize and serve as a nexus for multiple interests whose appearance on the stage might be brief, but whose effects may be wide-ranging and relatively long-lasting. Superficially, Sherry Charlie's death may be seen as yet another avoidable child protection tragedy in a long list of such tragedies. In particular, it seems to demonstrate British Columbia's child protection authorities' 'failure to learn' the lessons of the Gove Inquiry into the death of Matthew Vaudreuil more than a decade previously. However, as Nigel Parton (2004; 2006) has shown with respect to inquiries into U.K. child protection tragedies, such an analysis fails to account for the very real changes that have occurred in child protection practices in

general, and in British Columbia specifically. In particular, such a superficial analysis fails to ask whether the changes introduced in the wake of such inquiries as the Gove Inquiry, and the contemporaneous recommendations of the Legislative Review Panel, may have created new conditions of ambiguity and thereby introduced new risks and new possibilities for error.

This paper will review events occurring after the death of Sherry Charlie with a view toward elucidating the hazards faced by First Nations' child welfare agencies drawn into larger child welfare policies which may, in point of fact, have little or no bearing on how First Nations actually conduct child welfare in their communities and how they would wish to develop those services in the future. The paper draws heavily on various government documents – most originally prepared for audiences internal to government but now publicly available due to the profile the case has taken on both within the popular press and in British Columbia's Legislative Assembly. While some of the documents have been severed to meet privacy requirements, the documents nevertheless present an unusually frank 'insiders' view of government sponsored child welfare practices and policies.

In a sense, the paper is in the 'what we can learn' tradition so prevalent for commentaries and inquiries into child welfare tragedies. However, the focus is different; rather than look at the adequacies of case practices, or the efficiencies (or lack thereof) of child welfare policies and apparatuses, the paper seeks to understand the intricacies of the 'art' of government and the place First Nations' child welfare agencies play within that art. Despite the claim that politics should not influence the

child welfare project,[1] this paper assumes that child welfare is fundamentally political since it creates debate about the meaning of childhood, the appropriate independence of families from the state, and the degree to which children – or indeed any citizens – can claim 'safeguarding' as an objective of government. Moreover, the politics of child welfare raise questions regarding the appropriate role of government functionaries and experts in preserving established practices when confronted with influence wielded by elected officials and other interest groups seeking to further their own political, economic, and social agendas.

Some Background

No one disputes that Sherry Charlie was killed by her male caregiver[2] while in a kith and kin placement[3]. Outside of that fact, there is little agreement as to whether her death was the consequence of a specific breakdown in expected social work practice (as Jeremy Berland[4] indelicately put it to Usma[5] staff, a situation in which "heads usually roll") (Morley 2006, p. 46), or whether it was simply a confluence of legislative and policy decisions in which children were placed in danger *because of* expected social work practices. Specifically, whether these expected social work practices were rooted within the social work ethos and knowledge base, or whether they were a response to conflicting policy requirements rooted within political initiatives reflective of a political philosophy of appropriate governance. This is so because, in addition to the fact of Sherry Charlie's death, there are at least three other facts of which to take account. First, the provincial government of the day had severely curtailed spending in the area of child protection. Second, the government had pursued a policy of decentralizing responsibility away

from the provincial government and into the hands of regional arm's length organizations. Third, the provincial government had closed the Office of the Children's Commission (which formerly would have investigated Sherry Charlie's death as a matter of course) and the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate (who would have provided an avenue for family members and other interested parties to publicize their concerns). No account of Sherry Charlie's death can be complete without an understanding of these government initiatives and where they fit into the recent history of British Columbia's child welfare history.

The decade of the 1990s was a time of great turmoil for British Columbia's child welfare system[6]. The death of Matthew Vaudreiul, and the claim of his mother's lawyer that it was the 'system' that had failed the boy sparked the Gove Inquiry into his death (Cradock 2003). This inquiry rapidly expanded into an inquiry into the entire child protection system as it was then constituted in British Columbia. The inquiry produced a total of 119 recommendations for change. For brevity's sake, the many recommendations can be grouped into several themes. First, Gove argued for "child centered" practice because he believed social workers placed too much emphasis on supporting families instead of protecting children – their real clients. Second, Gove believed that all services to children should be placed under a single umbrella rather than scattered through various government departments and ministries. Third, while believing that it was the provincial government's responsibility to create policy and set standards, Gove proposed decentralizing the delivery of services to 'Children's Centers' operating at the community level. Finally, Gove believed child protection services were unaccountable to the

public and secretive in nature. In particular, Gove did not believe the child protection system could be trusted to investigate its own errors. He therefore recommended the establishment of an independent officer responsible for investigating all children's deaths and all critical injuries together with a mandate to review government child welfare policies and practices.

The NDP government of the day accepted all of Gove's recommendations. The opposition Liberals also endorsed Gove and additionally promised they would not oppose any extra expenditure necessary to implement the recommendations. Accordingly, a Transition Commissioner was appointed and the work of reforming children's' services and instituting the Children's Commissioner began. In the event, the Children's Commissioner did not become an Officer of the Legislature but instead was constructed as reporting to the Attorney-General – although the enabling legislation did give considerable room for independent action including freedom to inquire into any subject and the ability to issue independent reports.

Meanwhile, the NDP government had also commissioned a Review Panel with a view to overhauling child protection legislation. This Review Panel differed from Gove in two important ways. First, the Panel actually became two Panels since its Aboriginal members formed their own Panel and issued a separate report. Second, the Panel was composed of community activists and advocates. This choice of focus was deliberate since the NDP entered office convinced that the existing child protection system was punitive in nature, did not place sufficient emphasis on the need for family support, and was too remote from those it acted upon. The ensuing legislation reflected the Panels' general views by emphasizing "least

intrusive" measures. In addition, the Panels argued for local service delivery and control, and the creation of an independent advocate for children and families[7].

The Gove Inquiry and Legislative Review Panels agreed on the need for more localized service delivery, but they differed sharply on just about everything else. Where Gove wanted a child protection system concentrated on the safety of children, the Review Panels wanted a supportive system preoccupied with least intrusive practices. Where Gove sought local delivery but centralized control of services, the Review Panels sought highly independent local authority. Finally, where Gove wanted a Children's Commissioner to, in effect, police the child protection system, the Review Panels sought a powerful and independent advocate for children and families.

Of the two institutions it is the Gove inquiry that received the most press attention and the one that is exclusive invoked by the press in connection with British Columbia's child protection problems. This enables criticism of the system to be couched within a discourse of 'failure' to implement Gove's recommendations. This oversimplifies the situation not least because Gove said little or nothing about First Nations agencies[8]. The reorganization of child protection that came in the wake of these Reports created a number of contradictions about the purpose of the new Ministry of Children and Families. The legislation that was supposed to guide its practice was predicated on least intrusive methods and protection from heavy handed government interference. On the other hand, the ministry's structure and policy environment was created largely in response to Gove and emphasized the primacy of children's safety and a culture of 'defensive' social work

(Cradock 2004; Parton 1996)[9]. Indeed, central to Gove's model of child centered practices was the concept of 'risk' and the belief that social workers can and ought to base their practice on scientifically based risk assessment. Furthermore, the Children's Commission created an environment in which social work action was effectively policed from outside the responsible ministry, yet the ministry was also required to respond to interests advanced by the Child and Youth Advocate which, as a product of the Review Panel's recommendations, predictably tended to advocate for least intrusive and supportive measures.

Caught in the middle of all this change, First Nations agencies continued to pursue their attempts to gain control over child welfare through the delegation model. Despite the many complementary things said in the various reports about Aboriginal culture's attitudes to family and children, there is no evidence that First Nations' agencies were conceived by the provincial government as fundamentally different to the child protection system at large. Hence, there was no specific legislation with respect to First Nations' children and no real recognition of First Nations' particular status within policy and practice. The principal policies that emerged from the provincial chaos were never specifically designed for First Nations or to address the unique needs of First Nations' agencies.

The Liberals come to power

In 2001 the NDP government was replaced by a Liberal government under the premiership of Gordon Campbell. Despite calls for child protection to become depoliticized, the Liberals had used the Gove Inquiry Report to relentlessly criticize the previous government while they were in opposition. Famously, a part of the

Liberal platform was to "end the constant changes" within the child protection system. Further, the Liberals had specifically promised they would protect child protection from budget cuts. However, upon their election the Liberal government announced budget cuts to the renamed Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) of some 20% (later reduced to 11%) (BCASW 2006, p.8). They also announced plans to create regionalized agencies, and reduced the number of children in care. In addition, as part of a review of the core functions of government it was announced the Jane Morley would conduct a review of the Children's Commission and Child and Youth Advocates Office with a view to removing any jurisdictional overlaps.

While there could be no principled defense of the budget cuts, the move towards regionalization had some grounding in both the Gove Inquiry and Review Panel's belief in the efficacy of local service delivery. Framed as empowering communities, the general idea was approved by many community and advocacy groups who had previously endorsed this aspect of Gove and the Review Panel. However, in the light of announced budget cuts there was concern that regionalization was less an exercise in community empowerment and more a means of hiding or justifying the cuts. Similarly, the view that there were too many children in care resonated with those who supported the Review Panels' least intrusive approach and those who had observed the startling increase in numbers of children in care that had followed in the wake of Gove's insistence on child centered social work practice. In any case, during Sherry Charlie's lifetime, the prospect of radical budget cuts and another major reordering of the child welfare system preoccupied senior management within the ministry. Further, with respect to the

regionalization of child protection there was by no means consensus within senior management as to whether the model was useful or practical (Morley 2006, pp. 4, 15).

Meanwhile, Jane Morley's core review of the Children's Commission and Child and Youth Advocate had indeed found overlaps and functions which she believed were not part of the core functions of government. Accordingly, both Offices were abolished and Morley was soon installed as a new Child and Youth Officer. Both Morley and the government claimed that the new position was independent but, in fact, it was designed more as an arm of the Attorney-General's office since the position reported to the Attorney-General rather than the public at large. Responsibility for reviewing children's deaths was transferred to the Coroner's Office (although, in fact, only three were done due to budget cutbacks in that office) (Hughes 2006, p.133), little or no direct advocacy on behalf of specific children or groups was contemplated (in the belief that the Ombudsman could fulfill that role although, here too, budget cutbacks made it unlikely), and there would be no more "second guessing" of ministry policies and practices (Morley 2001, p.15). Instead, the Child and Youth Officer would be restricted to reviewing internal ministry processes in order to ensure that the ministry was, in fact, following its own policies.

Regionalization

In British Columbia responsibility for the investigation of child abuse and the care of children found to be in need of protection has been traditionally vested in the office of one person. Under the CF&CS Act (passed in the wake of the Review Panel's Report), it was possible for more than one Director to be

appointed. This possibility was not realized by the NDP government because the appropriate section of the Act was never proclaimed. However, when the Liberals began to pursue regionalization the usefulness of multiple Directors was obvious. The province would be divided into semi-autonomous regions each with its own Director. This goal was partially realized insofar as five regions were organized and each had a Director appointed as part of their executive responsibility. For First Nations, the creation of five regions is presently contemplated (Hughes 2006, p.69).

While the Directors are nominally responsible for children captured under the CF&CSA, it is useful to remember that Gove had introduced a new category of child to child protection discourse in British Columbia; the "child known to the ministry". This child may have had very little contact with the ministry but insofar as contact had been established a kind of responsibility 'creep' had taken place. This 'creep' had been exacerbated by the activities of the Children's Commission whose investigations covered all child deaths and therefore any circumstances under which a child might have been "known to the ministry" with a corresponding expectation that such knowledge ought to have prevented a child's death. Nigel Parton (2006) notes a similar kind of expansion of responsibilities in the U.K. where he claims child welfare agencies are no longer predicated upon protecting children but rather are charged with 'safeguarding' children from non-specific and speculative harm. Thus, the Director's responsibilities had subtly expanded well beyond the strict letter of the law. More will be said about this below in connection with kith and kin agreements.

In the event of a child's death, the new regime designed by Morley assumed that if the death

was suspicious it would be investigated by the Coroner's Office, any claims by the child's estate would be represented by the Public Guardian and Trustee, any implication that the death could have been avoided by the child protection system would be internally investigated by means of a 'Director's Review', and each apparatus' conduct would be monitored by the Child and Youth Officer. Sherry Charlie's death exposed the weakness of this organizational structure insofar as the Coroner's Office was not routinely carrying out investigations into children's suspicious deaths[10], the Public Guardian and Trustee had no reason to know Sherry Charlie had died, the Director's Review was lost in a kind of limbo for three years, and the Child and Youth Officer appears not to have known that the Director had commenced an investigation.

Sherry Charlie was a Nuu-cha-nulth child "known to" Usma, the Nuu-cha-nulth child protection agency. However, she and her family were also "known to" MCFD who, in fact, had access to many, perhaps most, of the pertinent records with respect child welfare concerns[11]. Since responsibility for reviewing Sherry Charlie's death fell to the Director, the immediate question was which Director would conduct the review. On the one hand, as an Aboriginal child in receipt of services from an Aboriginal child protection agency, responsibility fell to David Young as the provincial Director. On the other hand, since the child had received services and was part of the records of the Port Alberni MCFD office, responsibility fell to Jane Cowell, the Director for the Vancouver Island Region. Yet, since Usma was an independent agency operated under the auspices of the Nuu-cha-nulth Nation, Usma claimed equal standing with these provincial officials. Officially, the review

was to be conducted in "partnership" between Cowell, Young, and Usma. Indeed, Usma agreed to help pay the costs of the Director's Review. However, in the event, the terms of reference for the Review were finalized by Cowell and Young. Usma was not consulted about the final terms of reference and was, effectively, sidelined from the process[12].

Director's Reviews

Directors do not conduct their own Reviews. Rather, they rely on staff assigned to the task to investigate the facts, write a summary of the facts, provide recommendations, and then submit their report for the Director's signature. Perhaps due to the intense criticism internal reviews had received from the Gove Report, the Ministry had developed a template for Director's Reviews which ensured a similarity of format, issues addressed, and presented a reasonable face to the Child and Youth Officer. The central issues of any Director's Review were: Did Ministry staffs adhere to policy? And, if they did not, or if there were mistakes, has the Ministry learned from the mistakes? In effect, a Director's Review was part confessional and part learning device. It was, however, purely internal except for the possibility of the Child and Youth Officer querying its factual base or its interpretation of those facts. Director's Reviews were never designed to be public documents.

The delays associated with the Director's Review into Sherry Charlie's death appear to have been the result of a disagreement as to who retained authorship of the Review. The Ministry decided to retain Nicholas Simons to conduct the Review. Simons was apparently trusted by senior Ministry staff but he was also the Director of a delegated First Nations child protection agency. According to Jane Morley's (2006) report, Simons was untrained

in the normal format of Director's Reviews and already had serious reservations about the way kith and kin agreements were arranged by the Ministry. Thus, the delay of the Review is explicable within two separate contexts. On the one hand, Simons did not feel himself bound by the 'template' he was given during a one day meeting with Ministry staff, and on the other hand, he felt the Review was 'his' Review which gave him the freedom to make whatever recommendations he saw fit. This led to endless debates as to whether his Review fit the format of what a Director's Review ought to look like, and further debates as to whether his recommendations exceeded his mandate insofar as Simons did not see his task as limited to the question of whether Usma staff had adhered to policy but whether the policy was, in itself, problematic.

Simons' position was tenuous. He was simultaneously the voice of at least two Directors, but he was also the voice of Aboriginal social work. Indeed, while the documents do not support the assertion, it seems reasonable that the selection of Simons as the 'voice' of the Director was largely predicated upon his position within First Nations' social work and protection apparatuses. Therefore, his 'untrained' status was, on the one hand, a liability since he had not been disciplined within the formats of the Ministry's internal workings and expectations but, on the other hand, his position within First Nations' social work added a legitimacy and prestige unavailable to the usual MCFD functionaries. Reading the Morley account, one gets the impression that Simons was bewildered by what seemed to him needless bureaucratic nitpicking while the bureaucrats complained that Simons did not seem to realize his role was not to question policy but merely to determine whether

policy had been adhered to. Yet, as Simons attempted to demonstrate, a serious problem connected with the death of Sherry Charlie was what, exactly, constituted policy in the first place. This was so because the terms of reference included the question of whether Usma was in compliance with a draft policy, delivered by fax, and accompanied by no training or interpretation. Given that Usma is a First Nations agency whose masters are not provincial bureaucrats but members of the Nuu-chah-nulth Nation, it is entirely reasonable to question why Usma social workers should be held responsible for a draft policy which they did not draft and which at least one of their colleagues (albeit from a different Nation) had serious reservations about.

Kith and Kin

Child protection legislation has always been closely circumscribed within liberal states. This is because liberal states value the family as both the primary source of socialization, and the ultimate location of responsibility. Families are both the final bastion against state interference, and the primary means by which affective relations are installed and promulgated. The child protection project is also informed by the traditional European notion of children as possessions of their fathers. Hence, to remove a child from its family is amongst the most serious actions a state can take. Yet, the child abuse "movement" (Hacking 1995) has argued for unfettered state power to prevent harms being visited on children. The debate between the privacy and efficacy of the family, and the necessity of preventing harm to children created by those families, is apparent in the differing positions of the Gove Report's concern for 'child-centered' social work practice and the Review Panel's call for 'least intrusive' practice. Almost no one will claim that families are inherently abusive. Rather the claim is that

some families contain pathological members, or some families suffer sufficient social exclusion that, despite best intentions, they cannot be trusted to protect children.

Kith and kin agreements are based at a midpoint between these assumptions. The theory of kith and kin agreements accepts that some parents are unable to care for their children (but may well be able to care about their children) but this does not preclude other family members being able to care for such parents' children. Much of the rhetoric in favor of an 'Aboriginal' approach to social work is predicated upon the view that Aboriginal children are linked to extended family in a way that children in modernist states are not. Kith and kin arrangements are predicated upon this linkage between children and their extended family.

In British Columbia, kith and kin arrangements are permissible because the CF&CSA allows for the transfer of custody of children between adults[13]. Thus, as was the case with Sherry Charlie, parents of a child may lose, or agree to, the transfer of the custody of their children to any other person who is 'kith and kin'. Not surprisingly, such agreements are attractive to any parent faced with the possibility of losing custody due to protective action on the part of the state. From the state's perspective, this form of solution is attractive since it not only upholds the sanctity of the family; it also alleviates the state of the full costs and responsibility of taking children into its direct care. As Donzelot (1979) would describe it, kith and kin agreements occur within the 'social', the mobile and boundaryless area where the state and the family overlap.

In the tradition of the Review Panel with its emphasis on least intrusive social work interventions, kith and kin agreements are desirable because they maintain family and community integrity. However, as Simons and the British Columbia Association of Social Workers (BCASW) (2006, p.11) observed, they are also attractive to governments predicated upon curtailing government expenditure. Kith and kin agreements re-place responsibility for children 'at risk' from the state and onto family members – even where the 'risks' experienced by children are demonstrably created by the activities of the state. In the case of First Nations, this means First Nations family members are 'responsibilized' for the genocidal tendencies of the Canadian state. In British Columbia, the number of children in kith and kin agreements equals the number of children in care of the state (ibid). The reduction of children in care envisioned by a cost cutting government has been realized by an emphasis on placing children with their kith and kin.

That said, while kith and kin agreements may be free, there is a provision for minimal support[14]. In Sherry Charlie's case, the particular fiscal agreements required by the tripartite agreements between Usma, the federal government, and the provincial government meant that a kith and kin agreement was the most cost effective and politically defensible strategy. Hence, the provincial government underwrote the placement of Sherry Charlie with the male caregiver who eventually killed her. Sherry Charlie's death, then, represents an intersection of interests; the desire of First Nations to take control of their own child welfare, the desire of parents to maintain some degree of control over their children, the federal government's desire to leave child welfare costs to First Nations and provincial governments, and the desire of a provincial government to reduce the costs of children in care as part of its drive to reduce overall child welfare costs.

My reading of Jane Morley's report into the delays associated with the Director's Review of the death of Sherry Charlie indicate that this was precisely what Simons was worried about. Simons realized that kith and kin agreements, underwritten by a provincial government more worried about cost cutting than good social work practice, would inevitably result in children placed with unreliable and potentially dangerous caregivers. His emphasis on the problematic nature of the 'draft' policy suggests he was well aware that the provincial government was using kith and kin agreements to do child protection 'on the cheap' while protecting itself from responsibility for any harms that might flow from decisions made, not by local social workers, but by policy-makers in Victoria. After all, how can one be held responsible for not adhering to a 'draft' policy – let alone how could one's head roll?

In theory, the kith and kin agreement under which Sherry Charlie came to live with non-parental kin was an entirely voluntary and private arrangement between relatives. However, it is clear that the child's parents were under the scrutiny of both Usma and MCFD social workers. In this sense, Sherry Charlie occupied the category "child known to the Ministry" which implied that even though she was not in the care of the Director, her safeguarding was nonetheless the responsibility of the child welfare system. Moreover, while her placement was in some sense 'approved' by Usma, the lack of federal funding available for kith and kin arrangements meant that the placement was funded by the province. It is this multiplicity of authorities and responsibilities that confuses the situation.

It is important to realize that Sherry Charlie (and her sibling) was already living with her relatives before the formal kith and kin arrangement was set up. This means the choice and monitoring of placement was the parents' responsibility. However, as a child "known to" the ministry, Usma (as the Director's delegate) had an interest in whether the placement was reasonable. Given that there was no actual policy in place (merely a 'draft' policy faxed to the Usma office), the articulation of Usma's interest was unclear. Was Usma approving the family's private decision? Was it matching the home against some standard and, if so, what was the appropriate standard? If kith and kin arrangements are truly private arrangements then the appropriate standard must be the protection standard of safety and well-being. In other words, Usma would have no legal right to intervene unless it had reason to believe Sherry Charlie was being, or was likely to be, abused[15]. If, however, a kith and kin arrangement is a sort of foster home then Usma and/or MCFD had a responsibility to ensure the placement was appropriate and safe prior to placement. As we have seen, Sherry Charlie was already in the home prior to the kith and kin agreement. If, as the 'draft' kith and kin policy seems to have expected, the home should be approved prior to placement then, in this particular situation, the child would have had to be removed from the home until the necessary checks had been obtained. Obviously, such an action would be hard to justify as anything more than bureaucratic nitpicking. Certainly it would have been contrary to the least intrusive ethos and would not have been in step with the government's direction that there were too many children in care.

In the event, it was decided by Usma to conduct three kinds of checks. First, adults in the home would be subject to criminal records checks. Second, references were to be provided (primarily by family members). These had not been

completed at the time of Sherry Charlie's death. Third, MCFD was asked to do a 'Prior Contact Check" to see if MCFD knew the family. MCFD had to do this check because Usma did not have access to the provincial database. Unfortunately, MCFD's check was incomplete and inaccurate. A complete check was eventually sent to Usma the week after Sherry Charlie's death.

Are Kith and Kin Agreements Necessary?

In British Columbia the possibility of transferring custody between kith and kin has always been legally possible under Section 30 of the Family Relations Act (FRA). In this sense, the kith and kin provisions of the CF&CSA merely replicate what was already possible. However, the FRA does not provide a mechanism for government to subsidize custody transfer. Where such financial support was a barrier, the usual solution was to bring the child into the care of the Director and recruit family members as 'restricted foster parents'[16]. Here, restricted meant the foster home was limited to fostering particular children with whom the foster parents had a prior relationship. Usually this meant family members but could also include friends, teachers, or any other person with an interest in a particular child. While foster payments to such homes were made, the actual amount paid was uniform and the lowest of all foster parent rates. Other forms of financial assistance or assistance in kind might be available if they were for the child's benefit, but such support was always subject to the variability of available budgets.

Custody transfer under the FRA is ideally predicated upon the private nature of families and their internal decision-making ability. Where family members are in dispute the Court makes a determination of the basis of the child's best interests. The Director is not a party to such agreements or determinations[17]. By contrast, restricted foster placements were purely at the discretion of the Director because custody and guardianship rested with that office. The restricted foster parents may have been family members, but their decision-making ability with respect to their foster children was limited by the Director's policies and the practices of the delegated social worker. The important feature of both these types of arrangements was that authority, responsibility, and custody was never in doubt. Put bluntly, the child was either in the custody of the Director or it wasn't[18].

The new wrinkle presented by kith and kin was to combine elements of the private family with elements of (minimal) public support. The central problem with this approach, and the one that preoccupied Simons, is the problem of responsibility. If kith and kin agreements are voluntary and private then neither the Director nor his Aboriginal delegates have any formal reason to intervene. Indeed, to intervene is to intrude into the private world of family. On the other hand, if government is going to subsidize such arrangements does it not have a responsibility to ensure its funds are being spent wisely? Further, is the responsibility limited to how the funds are spent, or does this responsibility suggest a larger responsibility to inspect the conditions of the subsidized child? Indeed, is the child being subsidized, or the family? To whom does the child belong? And, who is responsible for his or her safeguarding?

The problem with Sherry Charlie's kith and kin arrangement was not simply whether somebody should have known she was likely to die, nor that there was no actual policy in place. The problem is inherent in the conflicting ideologies at play in the very concept.

Arguably, all social work practice engages with ambiguities and it is on that basis social work stakes its claim to professionalism (Abbott 1988). But, it is disingenuous to claim that Sherry Charlie's death was a consequence of professional decision-making under ambiguous circumstances when, in fact, the problem is not one of professional ambiguity, but of legal and policy ambiguity. In other words, what was the basic purpose of kith and kin agreements, and what responsibilities flowed from that purpose? Was it merely to save money? Was it to create a population of 'hidden' foster children? Was it to preserve the integrity of extended families?

The Director's Report

There is no little irony that it is Jane Morley's report that tells the saga of the various problems and delays in the production of the Director's Report into Sherry Charlie's death since, in her core review, she had assured the government that the Child and Youth Officer – the position she has inhabited almost since its inception – would ensure that such problems would not occur. In any event, it is clear First Nation's agencies had no control over the format of Director's Reviews, the recommendations of the Reviews, or the scope of the Review's circulation. Similarly, there is no indication First Nations were consulted about whether the Director should, in effect, investigate his or her own errors.

Further, as mentioned above, neither the Director's Review nor the subsequent Report from Morley were originally conceived as public documents. Hence, if Berland's observation was true – that heads would roll – there is no guarantee the rolling heads would know why they had been rolled. This is particularly true since the terms of reference for the Review were altered after Usma had agreed to participate and help pay the cost. Finally, limiting the Review to whether policy had been followed rather than whether the policy was flawed indicates a tendency for Director's Reviews to locate scapegoats rather than be self-reflexive about the Director's own policies and practices and the political imperatives that drive them. The net effect is to isolate political decisions about budget cuts and the diversion of children from care from their practical day-to-day effects. In general, this was Simons' view and it was his struggle to escape from the narrow, scapegoating style of Director's Reviews to a more expansive consideration of the entire policy context which seems to have fueled the delay in the Review's completion.

Two versions of Simons' Director's Report are available. One appears to be a complete version of Simons' own report with a number of deletions in order to protect personal privacy. This version contains all of Simons' recommendations and, significantly, gives Simons' name as author. The second version is a six page summary of the original forty seven page report but also contains the ministry's response to Simons' recommendations. Both Simons' recommendations and the ministry's response are highly directive. For example, recommendation four states:

> The provincial Director MCFD, to review Kith and Kin guidelines to determine whether they were intended as discretionary guidelines or as a policy requirement. The revised November 2003, Kith and Kin guidelines should be forwarded to all Aboriginal Agencies (Simons 2005, p.38).

The ministry response is:

> The Kith and Kin guidelines were initially revised in 2003 and forwarded to all agencies. Since then, they have been reviewed and replaced with Child Protection

Standard #5 Kinship Care in the revised AOPSI. All agencies have received copies of the revised standards, and an orientation program has commenced (Summary n.d., n.p.).

All the recommendations and all the ministry's responses have this directive tone and none demonstrate any particular concern for First Nations' issues. This is not because Simons was unaware of the particular issues facing First Nations. For example, in the much disputed "context" section of his report he tries to show how First Nations social work practices are shaped by the particular nature of First Nations' communities. For example, he notes "the inherent difficulties that exist including transportation, communication and safety issues. They do not have access to vehicles when they travel, and their cellular phones do not work" (Simons 2005, p.4). Moreover, the small size of First Nations' communities presents severe impediments for social work investigations; the endemic level of poverty means social workers cannot reference any absolute notion of "community standards", and the "woefully inadequate" resources "do not address underlying social problems" (ibid. p.4-5). By contrast, the Summary deletes the context section in its entirety.

Similarly, the Summary does not mention any of Simons' principal concerns with respect to kith and kin agreements. Simons notes kith and kin agreements are a least intrusive form of social work action and that they are "a *less costly* option than foster care, and an option that is being promoted by MCFD as a way to keep children out of care" (emph. added. Simons 2005, p.27). Instead, the Summary emphasizes the degree of adherence by Usma to the draft kith and kin guidelines and the lack of training in the policy as contributing to "some confusion in the Agency re the use of Kith

and Kin Agreements" (Summary n.d., p.4).

Morley's review of the Director's Report continues this theme. Morley suggests that where First Nations are involved in such reviews, they should be consulted by the ministry with respect to terms of reference, fact gathering and practice analysis, and the development, implementation and monitoring of recommendations. She further recognizes that such reviews demand more funding and staff resources than most First Nations' agencies can afford and implies the ministry should reimburse them – although she is not specific as to how this would be done (Morley 2006, p.68). Yet, Morley does not really seem to have given much thought to First Nations' agencies capacity to organize their own reviews. The 'partnership' model she seems to be advancing is virtually identical to the model used for the Sherry Charlie review.

Morley also reinforces the theme of expanding social worker responsibility for safeguarding children. Her first recommendation states:

> Expand case reviews to cover deaths and critical incidents not just of children in care or children known to the MCFD under the CFCSA, but also of children and youth who have received services under MCFD's broader mandate, when those services and the practice related to them may have significantly affected the outcome of the case (Morley 2006, p.68).

Expanding case reviews seems to contradict Morley's previous position during the core review. However, she is still supportive of internal reviews. In the core review she wrote that "there is minimal value added by an external investigation and review of the deaths of children who die of natural causes in the care of MCFD or who have received service from MCFD" (ibid 2001, p.44). Her reasoning was that such events were best handled internally and specifically

disputed the Children's Commission's view that external reviews were necessary because "these issues include quality of life, quality and responsiveness of services and *funding issues*." (emph. added. ibid). Further, while agreeing these were important issues, Morley asserted they could be best addressed by internal reviews. Hence, the political aspect of policy direction and budget allocation are internalized and hidden within the responsible ministry. This position was endorsed by the independent review conducted by Ted Hughes (Hughes 2006, p.26).

The Politics of Aboriginal Child Welfare

Morley's opinion was not supported by the Coroner's jury at the Sherry Charlie inquest. Their last recommendation is directed at the Premier of the province and consists of a single sentence: "To re-instate the Children's Commission" (Coroner 2006, n.p.). Nor was the press convinced. Story after story in British Columbia's press accused the government of trying to cover-up Sherry Charlie's death, shift the blame for delaying the Director's Report onto Nicholas Simons, and avoiding responsibility for budget cuts. Indeed, the government's 2006 budget which found an additional $100 million or more for the child protection system has been dubbed 'Sherry's budget' (Smyth 2006, p.A7).

Usma has also come under public scrutiny. Writing in the Victoria Times-Colonist, Jeff Rud (2006) noted: "Few people outside the Aboriginal and social work communities are aware of their [First Nations agencies] role, but these agencies have direct responsibility for more than 1,300 B.C. children in government care and will spend more than $40 million in taxpayer dollars this fiscal year alone" (ibid, D1). This statement is not strictly true since the children are, in fact, in the care of the Director

– a provincial functionary. Moreover, in addition to totaling the tax dollars spent on First Nations' agencies, Rud found a skeptic within the British Columbia Association of Social Workers (BCASW). According to Paul Jenkinson, who is described as a "spokesman", "The problem is how little information the public has about these agencies and how they function and whether the public can expect a uniform level of child protection across the province" (ibid). This argument was subtly supported by Berland who is quoted as saying "But just because the ministry demands equal or better standards from these agencies doesn't mean it can dictate policy" (ibid). Assistant Deputy Minister Lenora Angel is quoted as describing the relationship between First Nations' agencies and the ministry as "an ongoing kind of quality-assurance improvement" (ibid).

This article captures the kind of doublethink with which First Nations' agencies must cope. The 1,300 children are not the legal responsibility of First Nations, but neither are they ordinary members of the British Columbian 'public'. First Nations agencies manage these children because they are First Nations' children. These children do not live lives common to all children in British Columbia due to the disproportionate number and type of social problems they experience. It is disingenuous of government functionaries to emphasize agencies' supposed independence when, in fact, they are captured by provincial law, policy, and budgetary initiatives. Moreover, there is no reason to suppose that given the particular situation of First Nations a 'uniform standard', predicated upon non-Aboriginal circumstances, would be effective.

As the concept of safeguarding all children "known to" agencies became entrenched, the boundaries of responsibility also expanded

while budgets were cut and an ethos of family responsibility was promulgated. Inevitably this meant children occupying the border area of "known to", but not in the care of, the Director presented a challenge for Usma in deciding what level of intrusion "least intrusive" practices required. Sherry Charlie was not in care, but Usma nevertheless gained responsibility for her safeguarding through the simple act of knowing she existed and with whom she lived. This odd situation is understandable (though perhaps not rational) in the context of mainstream Canadian society where extended family care may need to be actively encouraged by the state, and the privacy of the family is a paramount value. Whether this has any application to First Nations is irrelevant since the mobilizing the safeguarding principle has little or nothing to do with First Nations' traditions and safeguarding capacity.

The Hughes Report reveals another irony. In a section entitled "Modern Approaches to Child Protection" he lays out a series of "least intrusive" measures described as "service transformation". He contrasts this with an "old model" of many years standing (Hughes 2006, pp.98-99). In fact, in principal, the "modern approaches" he describes are almost the same as those described by the Review Panels (which Hughes never cites). Going even further back in time, the principals of least intrusiveness, family support, and reliance on 'community support' were fundamental to the Community Resource Boards that operated in British Columbia between 1973 and 1977 (Cradock 2003). Meanwhile, the 'old model' he describes has only been British Columbia's guiding model since the release of the Gove Report and the 'defensive' social work that was its consequence.

If there is anything new at all in Hughes' "new approach" it is the recognition that jerking child protection between the poles of least intrusiveness and aggressive child removal requires large and stable amounts of public funding. Similarly, funding is required if all agencies involved with children are to engage in information sharing. However, as with the various reports that have gone before, Hughes pays little attention to the ethical shift from protecting children from child abuse to safeguarding children from harm. What this shift in responsibility means for First Nations agencies is anybody's guess. Given the specific conditions of exclusion, isolation, and poverty under which First Nations agencies operate, how reasonable is it to suppose they can expand their function to incorporate a safeguarding ethos? And, given the particular tripartite relationships First Nations operate under, how reasonable is it to suppose federal funding – still predicated on child protection – is going to grow in accordance with this increased responsibility? Ian Hacking (1995) observed that the one stable thing about child abuse is that the boundary of what counts as child abuse keeps expanding. Parton's (2006) safeguarding thesis suggests an exponential expansion insofar as child welfare agencies become responsible for all manner of threats to children's safety. In British Columbia, this expansion is occurring in the context of a 'regionalization' of responsibility which can only have the net effect of shifting responsibility away from the provincial government and on to these regional agencies. In turn, the funding and policies upon which these regional agencies depend is subject to the whims of provincial politics.

As I write this final paragraph, a new Deputy Minister for the Ministry of Child and Family Development has been appointed. Initial

reports indicate she has begun to work with First Nations and, having set up child welfare systems in South Africa after the collapse of apartheid, may well be more understanding of the global problems facing First Nations and their effect on First Nations' children's safety. Will this goodwill extend to long term practical budgetary and policy commitments on the part of the federal and provincial governments? Only time will tell. Child protection – and now child safeguarding – are fundamentally political arenas. What's here today is often gone tomorrow.

Endnotes

1. The view that child welfare is too important to be subject to politics was famously articulated by Thomas Gove in his Inquiry Report on the death of Matthew Vaudreuil. In his letter of transmission he wrote: "[M]any of the changes to British Columbia's and other jurisdictions child protection systems over the years have, by and large, been driven more by political considerations than by a principled assessment of what will best meet the needs of children" (Gove 1995, 3: 31). This view was echoed by Joy McPhail the minister responsible for receiving the Gove Report. "This is not about politics. It's about the protection of our children" (Times-Colonist 1995, 1). Then opposition leader Gordon Campbell claimed he would exempt child protection from budget cutting should he become Premier. As we will see, Campbell reneged on this promise as soon as he did, in fact, become Premier.

2. The exact circumstances of Sherry Charlie's death remain subject to interpretation. They are described in the summary case review as:

The child was born on January 17, 2001, the second of two children of the mother, aged 19, and the father, aged 27. The parents' first child, a boy, was born on January 18, 1999. The family lived intermittently in Ahousat, Port Alberni and Victoria. There were eleven intake calls relating to the child, her brother and her mother and father received either by the

Ministry or the agency. On August 14, 2002, the child was placed with the caregivers by her mother. On that date, there was a discussion between Ministry staff and Agency staff regarding a Section 8 (Kith and Kin) agreement. The caregivers and family agreed to a plan for both children to be placed with them under a Section 8 Agreement. The Agency placed the brother with the caregivers on August 21, 2002. On August 26, 2002, the caregivers signed the Section 8 agreement.

The child died on September 4, 2002. She was 19 months old. The caregivers' explanation for the death, as reported by the investigating police officers from the Port Alberni RCMP detachment, was that she was pushed down five stairs by her older brother during what was described as a "sibling fight" and died as a result of her injuries. Between September and November, the Ministry conducted a safety assessment of the other children in the home and found them to be safe. Between September 2002 and January 2003, the agency and Ministry received information that the coroner was suspicious about the explanation for the child's death. On January 17, 2003, the coroner released the official pathologist's report indicating that the cause of the child's death was homicide. The RCMP met with the coroner on January 21 and began a homicide investigation. On January 24, 2003, the Agency director met with the RCMP and the coroner. Following a consultation between the Agency and the Ministry, the boy was removed from the home on February 3, 2003. On June 5, the male caregiver was charged with second-degree murder and remained in custody until October 2003, when he was released pending the preliminary hearing. He is allowed no contact with the family. On Oct. 4, 2004, he pleaded guilty to manslaughter and on Oct. 5, 2004, he was sentenced to 10 years in jail. (n.a. 2006, 2-3).

3. An anonymous reviewer pointed out that the term "kith and kin" may suggest a variety of differing arrangements across the country. For the purposes of this paper, the definition is the legal definition contained in British Columbia's Child, Family, and Community Services Act

(see footnote 13 below). To be clear, the purpose of this paper is not take a particular stand on whether kith and kin arrangements are a good practice (although I think they are), but rather to draw attention to the way kith and kin agreements can muddy lines of authority and responsibility for children.

4. At the time he made this statement, Jeremy Berland was coordinating the Director's Review into the death of Sherry Charlie. His official title at the time was Executive Director of the Aboriginal Services Branch of the Ministry of Children and Family Development.

5. Usma is the Nuu-cha-nuth Tribal Council's child welfare agency. It was the first such agency to receive full child protection delegation from the British Columbia government.

6. This section is largely based on my dissertation research in which I reviewed all of the submissions to the Gove Inquiry, the Legislative Review Panels, and a third Report (The Korbin Commission) not relevant here. Readers are directed to Cradock (2003), especially chapter 4 for a full description of the Inquiries, their approaches to child welfare, and their implementation.

7. When Ted Hughes wrote his review of B.C.s child protection system he mentions the Advocate but not the Review Panels. A reader of Hughes who is unfamiliar with this aspect would gain the impression the Advocate's position was created in isolation from the child welfare model advanced by the Review Panels. This helps to explain why Hughes is able to claim the model of 'modern' child protection he advances is somehow new. See below for a further discussion.

8. In earlier research I recall one submission from a First Nations agency that specifically chastised Gove for approaching First Nations on the grounds that a) the Aboriginal Review Panel had already reported and the agency endorsed its recommendations, and b) Vaudreuil was not an Aboriginal child but many members of the public thought he was. Gove's extension of his inquiry into First Nations' child welfare was thought to be problematic because it furthered the public's misconception. (See: Cradock 2003).

9. In this context, 'defensive' social work refers to child protection practices predicated upon social worker's fear of being scapegoated for children's injuries or deaths. These fears coincide with the dominance of risk thinking in child protection. It is no accident that the number of children in care in British Columbia almost doubled after the release of the Gove Report.

10. The scandal around Sherry Charlie's death is part and parcel of the revelations that, in fact, the Coroner's Office was neither conducting investigations into children's deaths, nor had it done anything with the 955 open files it had inherited from the abolished Children's Commission (Hughes 2006, 129).

11. Sherry Charlie's family was also "known to" other agencies such as the police. In his review, Hughes suggests child protection authorities should use information technologies to link with other agencies for the purpose of acquiring information necessary to pursue its safeguarding mandate. This echoes recommendations for a national database of U.K. children by the Lamer Report into the death of Victoria Climbié. Such a linkage would, of course, exponentially expand the number of children "known to" child protection authorities.

12. For some 18 months Usma thought MCFD's use of the terms 'joint' and 'partnership' meant Usma was one of three equal parties to the review and each would sign off on its contents. Charlotte Rampanen of Usma is quoted by Morley as saying: "And so it was – I was waiting for a conversation that was never going to happen and realized the major decision-maker for some time had been Jeremy [Berland]" (Morley 2006, 27).

13. The provision reads:

Agreements with child's kin and others: A director may make a written agreement with a person who (a) has established a relationship with a child or has a cultural or traditional responsibility toward a child, and b) is given care of the child by the child's parent. (2) The agreement may

provide for the director to contribute to the child's support while the child is in the person's care. (CF&CSA).

14. The BCASW states the maximum support for kith and kin agreements is $450 per month. By comparison, regular foster care can reach up to $10,000 per month depending on the severity of the child's difficulties. Note this ceiling is not statutory but a policy decision.

15. Reliance on protection standards for intervention into foster homes – let alone kith and kin agreements – was the conclusion of the Children's Commission's Tribunal Panel ruling in its case PD-008. At the time, the Director strenuously argued the Tribunal had erred but was overruled by the Minister. The 'independence' of foster homes was further underwritten by the Supreme Court of Canada in K.L.B. v. A-G (B.C.). In each of these cases, the overriding concern is with the sanctity of the family and the belief that child protection authorities should be severely restricted as the degree of control they exercise over foster children and foster homes. See Cradock (forthcoming) for a detailed discussion of these cases.

16. I should add that the Child in Home of Relative Program permits the subsidization of children in relative's homes. However, this program is part of the provincial income assistance program and therefore unavailable on reserve. Also, the program has no standing in statute – it appears to be a creature of policy.

17. Where the Court requires a 'report' to advise itself on the best decision, the report is composed by an Officer of the Court.

18. However, as noted in footnote 15 above, the actual degree of control the Director could exercise over children in foster homes has been undermined by K.L.B.

Bio

Gerald Cradock spent some twenty years working in British Columbia's child welfare system, including almost a decade as a child protection worker. In the early 1990s, Dr. Cradock left social work to enter graduate school where he initially studied First Nations' political economy in British Columbia.

His later graduate work concerned the problem of defining child abuse in the context of the Gove, Korbin, and Legislative Review Inquiries in British Columbia. At present, Dr. Cradock is conducting research on the question of whether it is possible or useful to describe contemporary children as 'neo-liberals'. As part of this project, his paper "The Responsibility Dance: Creating Neo-liberal Children" is forthcoming in the journal *Childhood*.

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Reflections of a Mi'kmaq social worker on a quarter of a century work in First Nations child welfare

Nancy MacDonald and Judy MacDonald

Introduction

A cursory examination of the child welfare systems for First Nations children during the past twenty-five years demonstrates that colonialist ideologies have not changed significantly in Canada (Crichlow, 2003; Johnson, 1983; Monture, 1989). Within this paper First Nations child welfare will be explored through my lens as a First Nations social worker, where I begin my story reflecting on my relationship with a First Nations child, who I will name Cheyenne, that I met when I first began my career. Her story tells of multiple losses, including loss of cultural identity, loss of self and loss of location in the world. Tragically, her story is not an isolated case but could be one of many First Nations children's stories in Canada, who have been taken into care by child welfare authorities. Residential Schools resulted in children being 'scooped' away from their parents, community and culture (Johnson, 1983); the child welfare systems today fulfills that same purpose of assimilation of First Nations children (Crichlow, 2003). First Nations children experience racism and become 'lost' within the system (Palmer & Cooke, 1996).

Through the storying of my own experiences as a First Nations social worker and through reflecting on the story of one First Nations child, I envision culturally appropriate services and legislations for First Nations children and their families, housed within a social justice perspective. Critical discussions of First Nations child welfare

Abstract

First Nations people would argue that the 'Sixties Scoop' of removing their children from their homes and culture never ended. First Nations children entering 'care' of child welfare agencies has increased significantly since the 1960s and 1970s. Storying the journey of a Mi'kmaq social worker working with a First Nations child, aspects of the child welfare system will be theoretically and historically located and critiqued from a social justice perspective. Schools of Social Work will be challenged to provide an education inclusive of decolonization, understanding the historical limitations of the child welfare system and its impact upon First Nations peoples.

agencies, National First Nations Organizations, and Schools of Social Work will highlight areas of concern and potential for change.

Autoethnography and the Process of Storying

Storying within the narrative tradition is becoming a recognized medium of expression within the social sciences (Bruner, 2002; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Riessman, 1993, 2002). Social work's feminist association with the 'personal and political' linkage of experiences (Beverley, 2000; Levine, 1982; MacDonald, 2004), along with Indigenous traditions of honoring and learning from personal stories (Smith, 2001) makes the selection of this method most appropriate. According to Jerome Bruner (2002), a well known educator and psychologist, storying reveals the human condition, specifically attending to "what people are like and what their world is like" (p.90).

Autoethnography is the storying of one's own experiences of the world. It is "an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p.739). Using an autoethnographic process of storying allows the text to weave through historical, cultural and political nuances associated with the emotional, spiritual and relational aspects of the story (Ellis & Bocher, 2000). Within this process it becomes important to move beyond the personal lens to one's story to examine the interplay of experiences within their social context. The story shared below is an example of this interconnectedness, for told outside the political context multiple layers of understanding, along with complex cultural nuances, would be lost. Through detailed reflection I wrote and thought about my early work experiences; I researched

the literature and current practices, hence returning to the reflection process with new insights. Subsequently, a iterative backward and forward process of analysis emerged (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), by examining the personal, cultural, political and social implications and fractures of the story. Finally by specifically associating them with one particular case that resonated through all aspects of this journey new insights and understandings surfaced.

Beginnings of a Mi'kmaq Social Worker

My story begins as a very young Mi'kmaq woman when I came into contact with the provincial mental health and child welfare systems in working with a First Nations child. This contact became the point of origin for the journey that I was about to undertake for the next quarter of a century in my professional social work practice. Following my interest, I became an assistant welfare officer with a government department that was responsible for Native welfare. This office was located in a visible site, easy for Mi'kmaq peoples to locate when they came to the 'big city' in search of employment. Often, I was involved in social work related issues with Mi'kmaq people, such as housing, education, and employment; however, as I reflect on my experience, I have come to realize that I was not prepared for the teachings that I was about to receive.

One day my supervisor approached me about a situation that she had encountered with a twelve-year-old First Nations child (whose tribal ancestry was not from this geographic location) who was a resident at the local mental health institution. My supervisor was Mi'kmaq and her cultural identity was more easily recognizable than mine to the non-Aboriginal public sector. She explained to

me that she received a telephone call from the mental health staff working with this child, requesting assistance in the development of a treatment plan. They had diligently tried to reach her for six months, to no avail. My supervisor had scheduled a meeting with this young girl to discuss her concerns and the potential of working together. However, this meeting never materialized as the young girl had an extreme physical reaction immediately upon coming into visual contact with my supervisor. We later found out that this pre-teen had never seen another Aboriginal person and upon visual contact all the stereotypical and prejudicial conditioning came flooding back to her consciousness. As my supervisor could not get physically close to this child, she asked if I would try. I agreed and subsequently made arrangements to go see her. Immediately I recognized the institutional barriers and asked if she wanted to go for a walk, in order to talk in a natural environment devoid of the sterile hospital sights, smells and noises. Our time together became her only reprieve from that brick walled institution. We would go for walks, go bowling, grab a donut or just drive around: we developed a relationship.

Her Story

Cheyenne was taken from her parents, community, culture and heritage when she was one- years-old by the local child welfare agency in her territory. She was adopted into a non-Aboriginal family when she was just two-years-of-age. The adopting family was in the Canadian military and relocated to a new province shortly after the adoption had become finalized.

The family had two biological children who were both male and much older than Cheyenne. They had not lived at home for some time, as they were both in the Canadian military, following in their father's

footsteps. Cheyenne was not connected to them emotionally as siblings and had no real relationship with either of them.

Shortly after the family's relocation, her adoptive mother was diagnosed with cancer, which in the end was terminal. Her mother was a stay-at-home mother while her father traveled extensively with his work. Cheyenne remembers spending most of her time at home feeling very alone and scared, as her mother was very ill. Over time, she had become her mother's caretaker. As her mother became increasing ill, she would be the person in charge to prepare food and provide the personal care needs of her ailing mother. She also remembers the family being isolated within this community for her mother was not able to participate in community events and the father was often unavailable. Cheyenne could not recall friends of the family or relatives visiting at their home.

Her school experiences did not provide a positive source of self-development. She remembers being the only child with a brown face in her school, even in her community. Cheyenne was told "Indians were drunks and bums", and therefore could not care for their children. The stereotypes were reinforced within her own family, as she was told she was 'saved' by being adopted into their white middle class family. She had no friends in school, nobody visited their home. She remembers the mean things the children would say to her because she had a brown face, because she was the Indian. Her mother was her only source of love, but she passed away when the child was just eleven-years-of-age, leaving Cheyenne to feel totally alone in the world.

Within six months of her mother's passing, her father remarried. He married a woman from the community who had three younger children. This blended family had their difficulties, least of which was how they treated Cheyenne. She was the scape-goat, blamed for any family difficulties and considered a negative influence on the younger children. Within six months

of this new marriage, this child began to exhibit self-harming behaviors. Her father and step-mother drove her to the mental health hospital, dropped her off, and never looked back. They abandoned her.

By the time of my first contact with Cheyenne, she had hundreds of scars on her body, where she tore at her own skin. She literally tried to tear her Indian identity off her body. She had no connection, pride or understanding of her own culture. The stereotypes she had been taught about Indians echoed in her head. The one person who loved her and whom she loved was gone. Cheyenne had given up on life, she did not care about what was happening; she could not envision a future.

As I had grown up with a parent who had attended the Shubenacadie Indian Residential School, I was aware of the destruction and dysfunction that the residential school system caused to Mi'kmaq families and other First Nations families across Canada. What I did not realize was that this child was only the beginning of many children that I would come into contact with as I journeyed down the path of First Nations child welfare work within the Mi'kmaq communities of Nova Scotia. The primary lesson I gathered from Cheyenne's story was the single act of displacement of a First Nations child into a non-Aboriginal adoptive home triggered multiple losses for the child. She was lost to herself, her family, her community, her culture and her heritage. Cheyenne was one of the many First Nations children that became lost in the child welfare system in the 1960's and 1970's. Cheyenne spend one year of her early life in this hospital setting, six months prior to my contact with her, and six months afterwards. Cheyenne slowly decreased her self-destructive behavior and was released into a group home, established for hard to place teenage children who were 'in care'

of provincial child welfare authorities. In the 1970s, there were no mechanisms in place to repatriate or re-connect First Nations children to their biological or extended family, or to their community of origin. Cheyenne did not have the opportunity to re-connect with her biological or extended family, or to her community of origin while in her youth-hood years.

When, Why and How did the Profession of Social Work become involved in First Nations Child Welfare?

In 1946, a Joint Submission from the Canadian Welfare Council and the Canadian Association of Social Workers to the Special Parliamentary Committee would have significant influence on the revisions made to the Indian Act in 1951. Up to this time, provincial child welfare authorities did not provide services to First Nations peoples living on reserves in Canada. For example, in Nova Scotia, after reviewing the provincial child welfare reports between the years of 1944 to 1959, it is apparent that no child and family services were provided to Mi'kmaq children or families living in Nova Scotia. In response to recommendations made by the Joint Submission from the Canadian Welfare Council and the Canadian Association of Social Workers, Section 88 was added to the Indian Act. Section 88 was utilized to provide justifiable reasoning for the expansion of provincial child welfare services to First Nations peoples living on reserves. Initially the changes to the Indian Act made little difference in the provision of child welfare services as the Federal government did not provide for additional 'authority' for funding. As noted by MacDonald, Glode and Wien (2005), "Section 88 of the Indian Act did not clarify the financial obligations of the Federal government to the Provinces, the consequences of which would be enduring conflict between the Federal and Provincial governments" (p.358). Lack of federal

funding to provincial child welfare agencies continued throughout the 1950's and 1960's.

As a result of the lack of clarification on federal funding to provincial child welfare authorities, little change occurred until the 1960s and 1970s in most provinces and Territories in Canada. In 1966, H. I. Hawthorne published a report regarding the disparities in child welfare where he noted that the situation varied from "unsatisfactory to appalling" for First Nations people and recommended "that the provinces should be encouraged to extend all welfare services, including child welfare, and that Indians should be induced to accept them" (Johnston, 1983, p. 3). Through Tri-partite agreements, provincial child welfare authorities began to extend child and family services to First Nations peoples living on reserves in Canada. For example, in 1964, a memorandum of agreement was signed between Canada and Nova Scotia that stipulated that Mi'kmaq people living on reserves would receive the same child welfare services provided to other residents of Nova Scotia. The Federal government agreed to pay 100 percent of all cost incurred for the care and custody of First Nations children living on reserves, as well as the total cost of related administrative services. The same arrangement was extended to First Nations children living off reserve in Nova Scotia. These arrangements continued in other provinces, as a result, First Nations children quickly became over-represented in care of the provincial child welfare authorities during these years. Johnston (1983) found that First Nations children represented 40-50% of the total number of children in care of child welfare authorities, further they were 4 to 5 times more likely to enter care than non-Aboriginal children in Canada.

The provincial child welfare authorities who delivered services to First Nations peoples living on reserves in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s were largely extensions of the previous residential school system, on the continuum of assimilationalist practices towards First Nations peoples and communities. As Johnston (1983) observed that,

> Proponents of this theory point out that in the first half of this century government agencies institutionalized colonialization by removing Indian children from their parents at an early age and placing them in residential schools. In time, it became obvious that education was not the only objective of residential schools. Stories of Indian children being beaten for speaking their own language seeped into the public consciousness and, eventually, began to discredit the residential school system. Gradually, as education ceased to function as the institutional agent of colonialization, the child welfare system took its place. It could continue to remove Native children from their parents, devalue Native custom and traditions in the process, but still act 'in the best interest of the child'. Those who hold to this view argue that the Sixties Scoop was not coincidental; it was a consequence of fewer Indian children being sent to residential schools and of the child welfare system emerging as the new method of colonization (p.24).

Twenty years after the extension of provincial child welfare services on reserve, Johnston (1983) noted that one longtime employee of the Ministry of Human Resources in B.C. referred to the process of removing First Nations children from families and communities as the "Sixties Scoop". This longtime employee "admitted that provincial social workers would, quite literally scoop children from reserves on the slightest pretext. She also made it clear;

however, that she and her colleagues sincerely believed that what they were doing was in the best interests of the children. They felt that the apprehension of Indian children from reserves would save them from the effects of crushing poverty, unsanitary health conditions, poor housing, and malnutrition, which were facts of life on many reserves" (p.23). Provincial child welfare workers held First Nations people accountable for the conditions in which they largely had no control. As a result, thousands of children, particularly, in the western provinces were apprehended by provincial child welfare workers and placed in non-Aboriginal foster and adoptive homes on both sides of the Canadian and United States border. Johnston (1983) notes that "an official from the state of Maine, for example, estimates that almost one-half of Indian children in their care have some affiliation with Canadian bands" (p.19). As a result of First Nations children being placed in foster and adoptive homes in the United States, First Nations leaders, particularly in Manitoba began to express their anger in response to this situation (Johnston, 1983, p.18). These leaders instituted a moratorium on the placement of First Nations children outside the country. "As of mid-1982, therefore, policies and practices in effect in all jurisdictions in Canada prohibited the placement of Native children in foster and adoption homes in the United States except in unusual circumstances. Nevertheless, there continue to be allegations made that Native children from Canada are being 'marketed' in the U.S. in large numbers" (Johnston, 1983, p.18).

How Can the Profession of Social Work be Paved?

There were various factors that led to this phenomenon of mass apprehensions of First Nations children by provincial child welfare

workers once the residential schools began to close their doors in the 1960's. One such factor is that the training and education in Schools of Social Work have not been 'neutral' in their role of developing social work practice standards that are applicable, and perhaps relevant, to First Nations peoples and communities. Sinclair (2004) notes that "the educational agenda for Aboriginal people in Canada was also designed from within an assimilationalist perspective and had the goal of acculturation of Aboriginal people to a western way of living and thinking" (p.51). Many Aboriginal students in Schools of Social Work continue to find these programs to be an alienating place as their cultural values, history and worldviews are not widely represented in curriculum or amongst the faculty (Monture-Angus, 1995; Sinclair, 2004). Aboriginal students are dispossessed from their own race and ethnicity through experiencing the invisibility of the Aboriginal worldview within Schools of Social Work. Cross-cultural perspectives focusing on understanding difference among cultures has recently been the objective of social work training, rather than on decolonizing social work practices in Schools of Social Work in Canada.

Western theory, pedagogy and practice is evidenced in the actions of early social work pioneers who genuinely believed that removing a First Nations child from his or her parents, community and culture due to poverty and poor housing conditions was in the child's best interest. The social workers were acting out of good intentions. They followed the teachings from their educational background in social work and stayed within the mandate of their provincial child welfare agencies.

With the number of First Nations children in care increasing in provincial child welfare

agencies, it is evident that this method of colonization continues today. Crichlow (2003) states, that "the child welfare system as an extension of the Indian Act is, in essence, the new Western colonization disease" (p.92). Schools of Social Work continue to struggle with the concept that the Aboriginal worldview is not just another social work perspective. It is a paradigm, as real to First Nations people as Eurocentric or the Western paradigm is to peoples originating from Europe. Not only do Schools of Social Work need to address the problem of how to educate Aboriginal social workers, they need to address the problem of how to train non-Aboriginal social workers to provide decolonizing social work practices and strategies when working with the Aboriginal populations.

The legal system also contributes to this over-representation. Crichlow (2003) states, "mainstream legal doctrine is dominated by the focus on individual rights, and this is not applicable or relevant to Aboriginal communities, where the rights of the community take precedence over the individual" (p.94). Johnston (1983) argued in the 1980's that First Nations children and families were the recipients of discriminatory treatment and practices. Today, racism and discriminatory treatment continues to be evident in child welfare systems for First Nations and other Aboriginal peoples in Canada (Palmer & Cooke, 1996); as evident in the application of standards for the best interests of the child. Socio-economic factors such as poverty, over-crowded housing, and poor sanitary conditions continue to prevail as justifiable reasons for apprehension.

Racism continues to play out in the child welfare systems in Canada. Crichlow (2003)

and Monture-Angus (1989) have argued that the Canadian courts have negated the importance of First Nations culture, identity, and heritage as a right of First Nations children, thereby, placing children for adoption as a consequence of the 'best interest of the child test'. They have noted that these 'tests' have been developed by judges and are based on the 'colonial western disease' in that they are doomed to fail in application to First Nations people by the very nature of the test itself. As Crichlow (2003) puts forth, "a judge is asked to act in the best interests of a child as an individual. In order to do so, the judge must be able to empathize with circumstances from all parties in question for his or his intuition to be most appropriate, otherwise, her decision is only an uneducated guess" (p.100). It has become evident that in Canada, the courts have adopted a colour, culture and race blind approach to judicial decisions that reflect false underlying assumptions of objectivity and neutrality. The 'best interests of the child test' relies on the presumption of objectivity and empathy, however, evidence indicates judicial decisions to be riddled, time and time again, with the interests of the dominant culture being protected, rather than the protection of the child's rights. Law, provincial child welfare authorities, and Schools of Social Work have preferred white hegemonic philosophies and practices towards First Nations people in Canada. The rights of the individual has preceded the rights of the collective in all of these institutions. Crichlow (2003) has also noted that although some progress may have been made to recognize First Nations culture and heritage in judicial decisions, the progress will be limited until First Nations people have the ultimate right to self-determination, without interruption from government.

Farris-Manning and Zandstra (2003) noted, "Article 2 specifies that all children have a right to be protected from all forms of discrimination" (p.16). Johnston (1983) noted twenty years previously, "the protection afforded by the state has been denied to some children and families for no other reason than that they are Indian" (p.67). In addition to the racism and discriminatory practices observed in Provincial Courts, Provincial child welfare systems, and by Schools of Social Work, the governments also continue to fuel colonialism of First Nations peoples. These jurisdictional disputes continue to be a factor impacting children and families living on and off reserves in Canada. Specifically, in relation to the delivery of culturally appropriate services to First Nations peoples living on reserves in Canada today.

Reflections of a Mi'kmaq Social Worker on Twenty-Five Years of Practice

In the mid 1970's First Nations child welfare programs began to develop. In Manitoba, two Tribal Councils began to run their own child welfare agencies. The first was the Fort

Alexander Band in 1976, when it signed an agreement with the Department of Indian Affairs to begin its own child welfare agency. The second was the Pas Band which followed with a similar initiative in 1977. These two Tribal run agencies set the president for First Nations child welfare agencies to develop across the country. First Nations child welfare agencies began to develop in significant numbers in the 1980's, spreading from reserve to reserve, from province to province. In 1985, the First Nations Child Welfare agency opened its' doors in Nova Scotia and it began to provide child welfare services to the thirteen Mi'kmaq reserves in the province.

My journey into First Nations child welfare continued when I became employed as a 'junior' supervisor of child welfare services at this agency when it opened its' doors in September of 1985. During my fifteen years of providing direct child welfare practice to First Nations children and families at this agency, I had encountered numerous children that shared similar stories of adoption breakdowns in non-Aboriginal homes as did Cheyenne, the First Nations child storied in this paper. As a result of First Nations peoples hearing similar stories from children and adults in their communities, First Nations people have come to distrust social workers and are suspicious of 'good intentions'. Sinclair (2004) stated "social work has negative connotations to many Aboriginal people and is often synonymous with the theft of children, the destruction of families, and the deliberate oppression of Aboriginal communities" (pp.33-34).

Even though First Nations communities have been providing their own child welfare services for twenty plus years, First Nations children continue to represent the fastest growing percentage of children in care of child welfare authorities in Canada (Blackstock, APTN National News, November. 9, 2004). Cindy Blackstock (2004), Executive Director of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, reported that First Nations children have a one in seventeen percent chance of entering the child welfare systems in this country, as compared to one in two hundred percent for non-Aboriginal children. Manitoban First Nations children (status and non-status) represent the highest proportion of children in care in Canada, as they represent 78% of the total number of children in care in that province. Nationally, the average of First Nations children entering care is 40%. Clearly the numbers have

drastically increased since the 1960's and 80's. Many First Nations people would argue that the Sixties Scoop never ended, it just increased with intensity, each year, each decade. Racism and colonial practices in provincial child welfare systems continue to be challenges for First Nations children and families.

Palmer and Cooke (1996) noted that the over-representation on First Nations children in care reflects a long-term government policy of assimilation, a policy that can be viewed as an "aggressive expression of ethnocentrism" (p.711). The majority of First Nations children apprehended by child welfare agencies in Canada continue to be placed in non-Aboriginal families. Elliot and Fleras (1992) believe, "subtle forms of discrimination continue to interfere with the lives and life chances of various racial and ethnic minorities" (p.44). Palmer and Cooke (2003) further acknowledged;

> Caucasian foster careers or adoptive parents have no natural supports for First Nations children, and the children are vulnerable to internalizing ethnocentrism and prejudice. The records of Native children in foster and adoptive homes contain repeated stories of their efforts to scrub the brown color from their skins (p.719).

Cheyenne's story continues to be retold.

McKenzie and Morrisette (2003) state the current era in child welfare systems is characterized by three factors; the growing acknowledgement of self-government rights as sovereign or absolute rights; the importance of land claim settlements based on Aboriginal title which confers Aboriginal rights over the use of land and resources where ownership has not been legally extinguished and transferred to the Crown; and the increased recognition and

awareness of an Aboriginal worldview and of related cultural practices and traditions as an important strength in First Nations communities. Although these factors may be contributing to the lack of development to culturally appropriate and relevant child welfare services, they do not speak to the increasing numbers of First Nations children entering care each year as a result of racism, discrimination and culturally inappropriate 'tests' when determining the best interests of First Nations children and families.

In 2004, a quarter-of-a-century after beginning my journey into child welfare with First Nations children and families, I attended the 5th Annual National Child & Family Services Conference, in Calgary. This conference was primarily focused on permanency planning issues for children in care. At this conference, I witnessed Phil Fontaine, National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations state, that "child welfare legislation for

Aboriginal Peoples in Canada is not acceptable, until we can exercise full control over our children, anything else is only an interim". First Nations child welfare agencies, as well as National First Nations and other Aboriginal organizations, given their wisdom and experience need to play an active role in the development of culturally appropriate child welfare services and legislation. Action must be taken, for our children will continue to suffer, feeling the strains of racism and deep-seeded losses of family, culture, community and identity.

Conclusions about Schools of Social Work from a Mi'kmaq Perspective

Schools of Social Work must take an active leadership role in the preparation of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students for professional social work practice. Culturally appropriate

perspectives along with decolonizing social work practices need to be taught to all students so that they can work effectively with First Nations peoples in Canada.

In addition to the First Nations child welfare agencies and National First Nations Organizations, Schools of Social Work need to play an active and lead role in the development of culturally appropriate and relevant social work education. Through a social justice lens, the Schools of Social Work need to examine their role in the colonial processes that continue to impact on First Nations people in this country. It is clear that the social work profession and the Schools of Social Work have not been 'neutral' in the education and training that produced the social workers in the profession of the past. As noted by Sinclair (2004) "western theoretical hegemony manifests primarily in educational institutions. The most harmful assumptions are that western thought ought to be the standard educational platform, is automatically relevant and valid, and is universally applicable" (p.51). These are difficult challenges for Schools of Social Work to undertake, for it must be understood that "the Aboriginal approach to education is more than a difference in perspective" (Sinclair, 2004, p.55). In critically examining the non-neutrality of social work education, Schools of Social Work, through the principles of social justice, can take a lead role on becoming a decolonizing agent to First Nations peoples in Canada.

Child Welfare courses in social work programs have been long in existence in Schools of Social Work in Canada. Some Schools are providing courses on child welfare with Aboriginal populations; however, they are not offered on a continuous basis and are usually classified as an elective course. This seems ironic

considering the percentage of First Nations children in care of child welfare authorities in Canada. Schools of Social Work need to take a lead role in acknowledging the necessity of Aboriginal faculty in Schools of Social Work to teach decolonizing practices to all students in social work programs. Through a social justice lens, schools could be more proactive in producing social workers who are equipped to address colonial practices and are capable and motivated to collaborate with First Nations child welfare agencies and National First Nations Organizations. Schools of Social Work, through the principles of social justice, have an obligation to provide social work education that is relative and appropriate to First Nations people in Canada, which is not currently being achieved in Schools of Social Work across Canada.

Sheafor and Horejsi (2006) define social justice as one of the most fundamental values for social workers, where fairness and moral rightness in how social institutions such as governments, corporations, and powerful groups recognize and support the basic human rights of all people. Social workers have long believed the fundamental principle in child welfare that children should not be removed from their families solely on the basis of poverty, however, this same fundamental principle has not been applied in provincial child welfare practices towards First Nations parents and children. Furthermore, Sheafor and Horejsi (2006) stated:

> Every human being is intrinsically valuable. This worth is not something that must be earned or proved, nor is it a function of one's skin color, nationality, gender, social status, health, education, political affiliation, occupation, or other external characteristic or life circumstance. Simply by virtue of being human, every person has a right to be

treated with fairness and respect, protected from the abuse and exploitation, and granted opportunities to have family, a basic education, meaningful work, and access to essential health care and social services (pp. 23-24).

Cheyenne did not experience fairness and moral rightness in the child welfare system, nor do many other First Nations children, therefore, it is an issue that Schools of Social Work need to seriously reflect upon when decisions of programming and curriculum are made. As a Mi'kmaq social worker and now as a Mi'kmaq woman who teaches at a School of Social Work, I can envision the connections and opportunities that could result, if we advocated for the inherent rights of First Nations children and families in Canada. However, First Nations faculty can not do this alone. We all need to take responsibility, to respond to historical and current injustices that have affected our most vulnerable community members, our children. As my journey continues, I revisit the stories of the children I have worked with, again hearing through their pain, messages to act, to challenge and to change the system that continues to colonialize First Nations people. In closing, I have storied Cheyenne's life in hopes that it will serve new generations of social workers lessons from First Nations children in hopes they will not have to hear similar stories being retold.

Bios

Nancy MacDonald is a Mi'kmaq woman, and a registered social worker in the Province of Nova Scotia. Since 2000, she has been employed as a Lecturer at the School of Social Work, Dalhousie University. From 1985 to 2000, she was employed by Mi'kmaw Family and Children's Services of Nova Scotia. Currently, she is completing her Ph.D in Interdisciplinary Studies in Health Professions at Dalhousie University. She has recently become the winner of The Quest Award for 2006-2007 from the Nova Scotia Health Research Foundation and Capital Health for research she is conducting on kinship care in Mi'kmaq and other First Nations communities in Canada throughout her Ph.D studies.

Judy MacDonald is an Assistant Professor at the School of Social Work, Dalhousie University. Her primary areas of work include (dis)Ability, anti-oppressive social work, social work in health care and specifically chronic pain. Judy recently defended her Ph.D. dissertation at Memorial University entitled: "Untold Stories: Women, in the Helping Professions, as Sufferers of Chronic Pain (Re)Storying (dis)Ability". Judy identifies as a woman with a (dis)Ability and has lived with chronic pain for over 20 years.

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Promising practice for maintaining identities in First Nation adoption

Jeannine Carriere

Introduction

This article describes a journey of First Nation adoption through the eyes of First Nation adoptees. While some historical background is necessary to describe the context, this will be kept brief as the intent is to honor the voices of those who know, those who have personal testimonies to assist in the deconstruction identity as it relates to First Nation adoption. The article has been adapted from my PhD dissertation, Connectedness and Health for First Nation Adoptees. This exploration was based on personal and professional experience in the area of adoption.

As an Indigenous scholar, I wish to present my connection to this research. I am a Metis woman, adopted at birth in the Red River area of Manitoba. I was reconnected to my original family at the age of 12 when I met one of my sisters for the first time and life, since then, was never the same. Throughout my life I have met a large extended family and know through our genealogy that I am connected to the strong and courageous Metis history of Manitoba. This gives me great pride. In my life I have chosen western education as a means to survive and to get some important messages out to others through my social work practice about our ways

Abstract

The purpose of this article is to explore the importance of identity in First Nation adoption. It is adapted from a PhD study completed by the author in 2005. The objectives of this study were: (1) describe how connectedness relates to health for First Nation adoptees, and (2) explore legislative, policy and program implications in the adoption of First Nation children. The findings suggest that, for First Nation adoptees, there is a causal relationship between connection to birth family, community and ancestral knowledge, adoption and health. The major finding is that loss of identity may contribute to impaired physical, spiritual, mental and emotional health for First Nation adoptees. This article provides suggestions on how identity can be preserved in First Nation adoption through programs, policies and practice.

of knowing and being. This is which is why I enjoy teaching at the University of Victoria in the Indigenous Social Work program. I also believe it is important to use Indigenous methodology as much as possible and will describe some of my research process within the limitations of this article. The topic of adoption

being near to my heart and soul became the topic for my dissertation and it continues to be a driving force in my scholarly work and community affiliations.

When selecting my research topic, I specifically chose First Nation adoption as I began this work in Alberta, where there is a Policy Directive for First Nation Adoption, which in my opinion has not served First Nation children particularly well. Since I was involved with the Ministry of Children's Services when this policy was implemented, I used it to reflect upon throughout the study as the rationale and hope the findings will also prove useful for other Indigenous peoples throughout Canada, including my own Metis community.

As history always sets the context, the article begins with a brief overview of historical background for First Nation adoption and moves on to the issue of identity. The methodology for the study is described briefly, and the participants and talking circle are introduced. The article concludes with key findings and recommendations for practice, programs and approaches which will honor and preserve identity in First Nation adoption.

Background

Although some Aboriginal scholars have examined the impact of adoption and First Nation children, Locust (2000) finds that "there is a lack of sufficient research dedicated specifically to the investigation of this issue" (p.11). Much of the literature leads a reader through an often painful journey that poignantly reveals that adoption is not a positive experience for many First Nation people (Anderson, 2000; Fournier & Crey, 1997; Samson Flood, 1997; Spears, 2003). This difficult journey is echoed in Crey's (1997) reference to social

workers as "wolves in sheep's clothing." As well, Flowers on My Grave (1997) is the story of Lester Desjarlais, a Dakota Objibwe boy from Manitoba, who committed suicide after experiencing extreme abuse. In this book, one of the Elders from his community, Maggie Blacksmith, tells of the days when private adoption agencies would receive funds between $5,000 to $10,000 for each child:

> Big shiny cars would come onto the reserve, followed by the social worker's car. When they left, there'd be a little Indian child sitting in the back of the American car, bawling their eyes out. The social worker always had a piece of paper saying it was legal. We know the social worker was paid but we'd have known right away if any parents got money, because we lived so close together and we were all so poor, money would have been very conspicuous. If parents tried to keep their kids, the social worker would call the Mounties. (Teichrob, 1997, p.41).

Samson Flood (1995) describes the impact of adoption on Lost Bird, a Sioux child who was adopted by a general in the American army after retrieving her from underneath the body of her dead mother at Wounded Knee. Eventually, Lost Bird, herself, died a tragic death after years of appearing "tormented" with mental health problems. Samson Flood writes "the cost of being taken from the Lakota was more than the loss of her language, her music, her food, her kinship; it was the loss of her identity as a human being" (p.210). Anderson (2000) writes about being confused as a result of growing up away from her First Nation relatives and compares the experience to what she refers to as the adoption syndrome experienced by First Nation children who are emotionally, physically and spiritually driven to find themselves. Spears (2003) describes her troubled experiences in

meeting her birth family and community while searching for her identity.

Researchers have suggested that alienation from this knowledge may be a causal factor for damaged health in First Nation adoptees. Locust (2000) observes that American Indian adoptees experience an adoption syndrome that she describes as the Split Feather Syndrome. In her study with 20 American Indian adoptees, she found that "the cluster of long-term psychological liabilities exhibited by American Indian adults who experienced non-Indian placements as children may be recognized as a syndrome, or set of symptoms" (p.11).

Adoption breakdown or dissolution is described as the rejection by adoptees of adoptive parents and adoptive identity (Child Welfare League of America, 2000). Since there is no formal mechanism in Canada to follow up with any adoptee once the adoption order is granted in court, there is no official record of the number of adoption dissolutions with First Nation adoptees. For example, if a birth mother relinquishes her child to a private adoption agency or does not disclose the identity of the father, this child will not be recognized on Indian and Northern Affairs Canada's (INAC) A-List, which is an official record of First Nation adoptees in Canada (Bennett, 2002, p.23).

First Nation child and family services agency staff across the country can provide examples of testimonials from adoptees who have shared their stories with them. In Manitoba, adoption dissolution had been occurring at an uncomfortably high rate, leading to the development of the Manitoba First Nation Repatriation Program in 1994. This agency continues to exist today to serve as an advocate for First Nation adoptees who are searching

for their birth family and community. Over the years, thousands of adoptees have come through their doors; however, to date INAC has refused to fund this service (Fournier and Crey, 1998, p.91). In fact, there are a limited number of government-funded programs in Canada that help Aboriginal adoptees find their birth families and communities which indicates a deplorable gap in service funding.

Lazarus's (1997) research draws comparisons between American and Canadian adoption systems, particularly as the systems pertain to the adoption of tribal children. Lazarus (1997) reports that adoption reformers argue that Canadian adoption laws should be amended to consider a child's culture in adoption cases. One of the biggest challenges with adoption and child welfare for First Nations in Canada is that the judicial standards are based on the best interest of the child, which often conflicts with the First Nation view that a child is a tribal member of an extended family. Lazarus explains "In Canada, as in the U.S., the problem is partly attributable to the application of culturally biased values in evaluating the ability of First Nation families to take care of their children, exacerbated by the ambiguity of the law at this time" (1997, p.266). Some examples of these cultural biases include standards for adoptive homes (e.g., space), financial status, and past child welfare or legal involvement. For instance, housing shortages on reserve sometimes necessitate that three generations live in one home (Royal Commission Report 1996). However, this practice may not be viewed positively by mainstream standards. In Alberta, the Adoption Regulations ensure that home assessment requirements include the exploration of space, financial capacity and others in the home. Adoptive homes are defined as having 'parents' without emphasis on extended families

or kinship structures. In a section entitled 'Family Dynamics" there is no mention of grandparents or extended family. The autonomy of family members is explored (Alberta Regulation 187/2004. Adoption Regulations). These regulations imply a western view of family and child caring practices.

Lazarus views the National Indian Child Welfare Act in the United States as a tool that assists tribes to prevent the adoption of Native American children by non-Indian parents, giving increased jurisdiction in matters of child welfare services to Indian families (1997, p.270). The National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA) in the United States, which has been prominent in advancing research and practice for Aboriginal child welfare services in Canada, was instrumental in lobbying for the proclamation of the National Indian Child Welfare Act in the United States. NICWA has held a number of annual conferences addressing a range of topics related to practice with Aboriginal children and families and continues to advocate for the rights of Native American children and adoption. For example, the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act (P.L. 103-82) was passed in 1994 "in response to a belief that policies which gave consideration to race, color or national origin in making foster care and adoptive placement decisions often created a barrier to achieving permanency for children of color" (NICWA, 1999, p.1).

A major limitation of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) is that it does not apply to children who are not registered with the Bureau of Indian Affairs. This also means that Indigenous children from Canada such as Metis, Inuit or First Nation children who are not from recognized tribes and adopted in the U.S. are not protected through this legislation. The

only exception is the State of Washington where steps have been taken to broaden the scope of ICWA. Without protection under ICWA, Indigenous children are not given any cultural considerations under the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act (1994).

Unfortunately, a guarantee for an Indigenous child's cultural rights is not generally applied in Canada either. For First Nation children, Canadian provinces continue to administer adoption programs with little or no consideration to the inherent rights of a First Nation person. Canadian policy places the issue of adoption and First Nation children within a context of cross-cultural adoption, failing to recognize the contradictions in this practice. The issue is not about race, colour or national origin; it is about the preservation of First Nation self-determination within a continuing colonial context. The federal funding formulas for on reserve service delivery do not provide any funding for the range of adoption services and as a result, there are very few culturally based adoption programs.

The next section provides an overview of key literature on identity and First Nation adoption, leading into the key findings of this study.

Identity and First Nation Adoption

The issue of identity has been discussed as a prevalent issue in cross cultural and First Nation adoption literature and is a theme in this study. It is important to understand the importance of tribal identity in order to recognize the impact of separation or disconnection from tribal knowledge and connection for First Nation children. Cajete (2000) explains that:

> Relationship is the cornerstone of tribal community, and the nature and expression of community is the foundation of tribal

identity. Through community, Indian people come to understand their "personhood" and their connection to the communal soul of their people (p.86).

In a recent article published in Adoption and Ethics (2000), the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) attempts to analyze the National Indian Child Welfare Act as it relates to race, culture and identity. The CWLA states that, "although race and culture have played important roles in the adoption of African American, Latino and other children of colour, culture – by virtue of both history and legislative action, it has played a unique role in the adoption of American Indian children in the U.S." (2000, p.57). The National Indian Child Welfare Act (NICWA) recognizes the importance of Indian children's cultural heritage and was enacted to "halt the systematic separation of Indian children from their families and cultural communities" (CWLA, 2000, p.57).

The CWLA also discusses the work of some prominent American researchers in this area. For example, Fanshel (as cited in CWLA, 2000) reports that outcomes for Indian children adopted by Caucasian families are related to problem areas of personality rather than structural or systemic issues. In other words, the dynamics of poor matching resulting in strained relationships and personality conflicts are more crucial to the wellbeing of children than any other systemic malfunction. Fulcher (2002) asserts that child welfare authorities with a duty of caring for the health and well-being of children need to produce services that guarantee cultural safety, which Fulcher defines as "the acknowledgement of and attendance to a child's needs and cultural frame of reference" (p.689).

Yeo (2003) states that "Spirituality is the cornerstone of identity" for Aboriginal children

(p.294). Practitioners who have advocated for adult First Nation adoptees concur. In their study, An Evaluation of the Southern Manitoba First Nation Repatriation Program (Bennett, 2001), researchers interviewed First Nation adoptees who have been repatriated to their family and community. A notable response among a majority of interviewees was that they felt that it was important to know about their ancestral background (2001, p.31). One of the most common reasons that First Nation adoptees wanted to be reconnected to family and community was to gain "official recognition of who they are, as an Indian person" (2001, p.14)[1].

Anderson (2000) illustrates her search for her identity as an Aboriginal woman who grew up away from her family and community. She describes how she struggled with increased knowledge about Aboriginal people, especially while taking university classes and examining issues from the voice and writings of others. Anderson proposes a theory of identity formation for Aboriginal people that includes four steps: (1) resisting definitions of being or rejecting negative stereotypes, (2) reclaiming Aboriginal tradition, (3) constructing a positive identity by translating tradition into the contemporary context, and (4) acting (e.g., using one's voice) on a new positive identity (p.229).

Kral (2003) discusses identity in his study on meanings of well-being in Inuit communities. He notes that Aboriginal people have collective selves and that "collective selves see group membership as central to their identity whereas individualistic selves are more autonomous from any particular group and may value individualism quite highly" (2003, p.8). This collective worldview values kinship as the foundation of social life. Kral proposes that

in Inuit communities, kinship is viewed as an important area of traditional knowledge. The importance of family and kinship was the most prominent theme across Kral's 90 interviews with Inuit people who explained that this connection was a determinant of well-being and prevention.

Grotevant, Dunbar, Kohler and Esau (2000) challenge the argument that adoption policies related to confidentiality enable a severing of ties with birth families in order to promote attachment to adoptive parents (p.379). Grotevant et al., in support of other researchers, refute this notion and, in particular, the pretence that adoptive parents can replace biological parents by erasing all existing pertinent information about the biological parents. Grotevant et al. conclude that changing policy can challenge this assumption and that an openness in adoption likely will have an impact on a variety of complex adoption issues, including identity formation, which they describe as "central to the emerging understanding of adoptive identity" (2000, p.385). Grotevant et al. also identify a need for further research in adoption and, in particular, investigation into the diverse social contexts that can influence identity formation.

In summary, the complexity of identity as it relates to adoption and First Nation children is enhanced by various political and legal dynamics. For example, what would be the impact on adoption policy and practice for First Nation children if culture and identity were viewed as protective factors for resilience? Indigenous scholars have proposed that individual identity is inseparable from the collective identity of Aboriginal people (Anderson, 2000; Bennett, 2001; Brendtro, Brokenleg ,Bockern, 1990; Kral, 2003). Some

of the adoptees in this study spoke at length about identity confusion and the need to reconstruct themselves from a continual flow of new information as they met their extended family members.

Methodology

To understand the experience of First Nation adoptees in terms of connectedness and health, participants involved in this study were asked to reflect on meanings attached to the adoption experience. The strength of this type of qualitative approach is described as emancipatory social research (Lather, 1991) in which both the researcher and participants become changed. Olesen (1994) describes it as "giving voice to the voiceless" (p.169). One of the strengths of qualitative research is the focus on how humans make sense of their surroundings and interpret phenomena to provide the context, and a complex and holistic picture of an event or situation (Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Patton, 1990).

The entire research process was reviewed by and received guidance from a First Nation Community Advisory Committee, which represents the five First Nations of the Yellowhead Tribal Council, comprised of Elders and staff from the Yellowhead Tribal Services Agency's Open-Customary Adoption Program. Its role was to provide suggestions to me regarding the research process, including community protocols and political or cultural matters that informed this study. The Committee recommended potential adoptees and key informants for inclusion in this study and provided feedback on research questions. This feedback was considered carefully in developing the interview guide. The Committee also made recommendations regarding the dissemination of research results.

Throughout this study, the Community Advisory Committee provided important information about cultural boundaries which are identified as important in the literature (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Furthermore, the Committee expressed caution about how I should present myself as a researcher to the interview participants, the adoptees. In other words, they encouraged me to be honest and 'speak from the heart' led by a clear mind (NAHO, 2003). This involved a process in which I provided my cultural credentials as to who I am in the community as a Métis woman and who my relatives are. It also required me to be very clear in describing the potential benefits to the First Nation community. It is with thanks to the Community Advisory Committee that I was able to develop a research protocol for the study and a cultural safety protocol for interviewing adoptees.

Talking circles were used to gather information from key informants. Key informants included Elders, staff, adoptive parents and board members for the Yellowhead Tribal Services Agency Open Customary Adoption Program. This information, in turn, enhanced the adoptee interviews. The use of talking circles, as an indigenous method of knowledge building, replaced the conventional use of western focus groups.

Cultural Process

Several cultural practices were observed for receiving permission and spiritual grounding for this study. As explained earlier, I received a vision of this work at the onset of my PhD program through an experience in a sweat lodge. This experience was influential in ensuring that the cultural process was honoured and that the blessings of the Elders were received as crucial elements of this work, which has been a profound spiritual experience for me. These elements are part of the foundation or epistemology of indigenous thought and knowledge, demonstrating the recognition that spiritual forces, described as energy, guide our daily lives. This energy influences the environment in which we live and interact with other living beings. Indigenous science also informs us that we are not separate from our ancestors and that we can connect with them through dreams, prayers, ceremony and prayer. For this study, I felt it was essential to engage in a process that honoured these ways of knowing and being since I felt that the ancestors have played a critical role in which I am and ultimately, in how this work was conducted.

The data gathering process for this study has been impacted significantly by this indigenous paradigm. Sinclair (2004) stresses, "from an indigenous worldview the offering of tobacco and engaging in ceremony and prayer is actually the beginning of a research project" (p.124). Not all indigenous people use tobacco in their spiritual work. However, the importance of spiritual processes appears to be a common approach to healing work. Cajete (2000) states that indigenous people believe that the real test of living is to establish harmonious relationships with nature and this is the "source of one's essential spiritual being" (p.179). For this study, I received strength, wisdom and vision through reflection, prayer and ceremony, and thereby, was able to create a positive energy for the participants in the study. And, at the beginning of this process, one of the first opportunities for me to honour this way of being was with Elder Bluestone Yellowface.

Elder Bluestone is Saulteaux and is from the O'Chiese First Nation in central Alberta. While her age is unknown to me, what I have recognized and experienced is her wisdom, knowledge and kindness. She has

been instrumental in the development of all Yellowhead Tribal Services Agency programs since the first priority in her work is children. Elder Bluestone has raised many children through customary adoption in her own tribal customs as well as through the Alberta child welfare system. At the beginning of the study, Elder Bluestone advised several of us that long ago children who had no parents were called Aski-awass or children of the earth because it was thought that Mother Earth would look after them. Her words are exceptionally inspirational, affirming that spiritual forces or energy guide our daily lives. If we believe that the earth is our relative and that we have a mutual responsibility to each other, to the earth and to ourselves, we have a different view of processes, such as child-rearing and caregiving. In other words, these responsibilities are not sanctioned or administered through court work and the intrusion of foreign law. They are a natural part of life or living in balance with natural laws that encourage us to walk in balance with the universe and care for each other as a natural part of life.

It has taken me some time to understand some of these concepts since I am one of those children of the earth who, thankfully, was looked after by loving adoptive parents. As my life has evolved, I have come to appreciate the ancestral knowledge that is part of my make-up and that reminds me that in my work and other areas of my life these beliefs and processes must be respected. For this reason, sitting in ceremony throughout this study was essential.

The Participants

Eighteen First Nation adoptees participated in this study. Their background varies by gender and age. Four of the 18 adoptees are male while the remainder are female. Their ages range from early 20s to mid-40s. Sixteen adoptees were adopted at age 5 or younger while two were adopted at age 10. Seventeen had their first original family contact during their adolescence or in their twenties while one adoptee met her birth family at age 11. Three adoptees are university students and two are homemakers. Thirteen are employed in professional or para-professional occupations. Their geographical locations include the provinces of British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba and Ontario.

Within the adoptive family systems, 15 adoptees were placed with Caucasian families and three were placed with First Nation adoptive parents. Some of the prevalent issues in the adoptive families are that for 12 of the 18 adoptees, their adoptive families fostered or adopted other children. Six adoptive parents supported the reunion experience. Individually, seven of the 18 adoptive fathers had alcohol problems. Three of four male adoptees reported that they had conflict with their fathers while nine out of 18 female adoptees reported conflict with their mothers.

Within original family descriptions, sixteen adoptees described drug and alcohol problems with one or both birth parents. Thirteen reported that they had met their biological mothers and ten have not met their birth father, including four who described their biological father as unknown. Most adoptees have good rapport with at least one sibling, but there was limited mention of extended family, such as grandparents, aunts or uncles. Two adoptees mentioned aunts or uncles. Ten of the adoptees described their birth family as disappointing, unhealthy or dysfunctional. Seven reported one of their birth parents as deceased.

The in-depth interviews with each of the eighteen adoptees were enhanced by two talking circles

composed of Elders, staff, board members and adoptive parents for the Yellowhead Tribal Services Agency (YTSA) Open Customary Adoption program in Alberta. I wish to acknowledge their valuable input into this work but for the purposes of this article will focus on findings from participant interviews at this time as it relates to identity and adoption. It is important to note that each participant was asked to choose a name to represent themselves in this study in order to protect their anonymity and that of their families.

What Adoptees in this Study Said About Loss and Identity

Loss became the core category in this study. Loss was expressed to some degree by each of the adoptees and often was manifested in their health, which for this study has been organized into physical, emotional, mental and spiritual health sub-categories.

The most challenging task in defining a core category for this study was to determine if identity superseded loss or if loss was an overarching category that encompassed identity as one form of loss. By using a qualitative method of constant comparison method of analysis while reading and re-reading the transcripts, it became clear that loss was the overarching core category. Each adoptee experienced loss in several areas of her or his life. This loss prevailed in profound ways throughout an adoptee's life, eventually manifesting itself in emotional, physical, mental and spiritual areas. In this study, loss is described as having many characteristics.

In this study, identity was viewed by all 18 adoptees as the main loss that they experienced through adoption[2]. Eagle shares a personal analysis of her loss:

They just took us, shipped us off, put us somewhere else and forgot about us; that's it. I think they should be accountable for that, because – I know there were good adoptions, and a lot of kids probably had good lives, but I would say the majority of the adoptions were – and foster home placements were not so good. I hear so many stories of things that happened. I hear very few success stories. You know what I mean? I always hear adoptees saying how lost they felt and how disconnected and "Who am I? Who are my people?" Lots of emotional instabilities, like, I put down right here, there's a lot of unrest and I think – I don't know what the government was thinking, what their reason was that they felt they had the right to do this. (Eagle)

All 18 adoptees explained that their drive to seek out their birth family stemmed from questions about and a longing to know who they are, where they come from, and where they belong in this world. Molly explains:

For me, I grew up thinking that I was a nobody, like, I didn't know my identity. So, when I was a teenager, I went through an identity crisis because that's when I started realizing I WAS different. There was something different about me. (Molly)

The search for identity encouraged some to begin observing First Nation people for the first time in their life. Mama Bear states:

When I was 12, that's when I started questioning. I wanted to know more about native people. There was a Hudson Bay store, and I knew they did all their groceries. I was always going there to sit on a bench and watch them. I wanted to know things. I wanted to be a native person so badly. (Mama Bear)

Eagle, who grew up in the U.S. expressed a frustration that she couldn't find anyone to identify with:

Actually, the schools I went to, yeah, was mostly Hispanic and white people. I always knew I was native, but I didn't know anything about that – like I never even heard the term Aboriginal until I came up here. (Eagle)

For Donna, finding out about her identity is now central to her life:

So right now, it's identity issues. It's becoming a bigger part of my life, of finding out who I am and putting all the pieces together and finding out about my culture, and I am drawn more to Aboriginal communities. (Donna)

Mona believes that if she perhaps had been placed with her same cultural group, her life might have been different:

Because if I had been adopted into an Aboriginal family…(pause)…how would you say it? I'd be the same as them I guess. (Mona)

In contrast, Christina was adopted by First Nation parents. However, she did not know about her biological family background until she began her search. Her greatest fear was that she would date someone she was related to:

Like I said, finding out that I was adopted, the only thing it did for me was confuse certain things, that's all. The other thing I was afraid of is, "Who am I related to? Who can I go out with?" You know, "Who's my relative?" (Christina)

Similar to Christina, most of the adoptees in this study asked themselves the same questions: Who am I? and Where do I come from? This explains part of the excitement in meeting people you are related to for the first time in your life.

For those adoptees who discovered people who looked like them, for the first time in their lives,

the impact of the experience was overwhelming. In meeting her aunt, Rose explains:

Oh, it was just like coming home! I mean, she looks a lot like me. We have the same eyes – she's only a couple of years older than I am. We have the same quirky sense of humor. Her son would be a year older than my son. (Rose)

Similarly, Billy remarks:

It was finally a relief because I knew that I actually looked like somebody. Because maybe as a kid and teenager and as an adult, I always went, "I don't look like anybody." I mean, people would say, "You sort of look like your adopted mother and brother – but upon closer examination you see we don't…(pause)…I don't look like them. Now, I know there are people out there who I look like. (Billy)

Jane enthusiastically acknowledged how the resemblance made her feel:

I felt happy. I'd look at her, and I'd say, "That's where I got my nose from. That's where I got my hands and feet, things like that. Just to see her (birth mom) and be able to take pictures of her with the kids and stuff like that, and I thought, "That's my mom. That's where I came from." (Jane)

The search and reconnection with original family members provided a number of adoptees with a sense of belonging that they described as missing from their childhood.

Other adoptees during their childhood anxiously sought out a place to belong even if their actions potentially placed them at risk:

I barely ever came home. If I did come home it was like late at night which got me into more trouble and got me into more confrontation with my (adoptive) dad and then it was like when

I turned 15, I just, I just couldn't take it any longer. I just packed my bags. They asked where I was going, and I just looked at them and I said, "I don't know. I just know I don't belong here." (Marty)

Reunions however, are not always a positive experience for adoptees. Some adoptees described their birth families as dysfunctional or unhealthy, but the urge to maintain ties remains a traumatic bond that is difficult to break. This experience caused deep emotional pain for each adoptee who had witnessed this other face of reunion. Sarah describes the disappointment:

Yeah, sometimes my sister would say; "Ya, I'm going to take you on a trip. We're going to go here, and we're going to go down." And then, she'd promise me she'd come pick me up to do stuff with me and then she'd never show up. (Sarah)

Paris shares this experience with her mother:

I met my mom. I got to know people in the family and a lot of them don't talk to each other. There's always that fighting going on, which I don't understand, because I can't imagine not ever talking to my kids or my brother for any length of time. Sure, we get mad at each other, but this family, they get – you say something the wrong way, and they won't talk to you. And, my mom has pulled that off on me since I met her. I express myself, I confront, and I share my feelings and she's the type that thinks that's wrong and then I won't talk to her for two years. (Paris)

In discussing various losses, most adoptees in this study remarked on the need to preserve identity for First Nation adoptees.

Angel felt that if she could have had more cultural teachings, it might have helped in her emotional healing in finding herself:

If I could at least know about what kind of person I was, where I came from, what band and all those things – what my mother's name was and my dad's name and all those things – I needed more interaction with Aboriginal people, instead of white people giving me their idea of what Aboriginal people do. (Angel)

Other adoptees like Mama Bear expressed a similar frustration of not knowing yet feeling like they should have known:

I would have liked to learn my language and know more about my tradition. That's what I miss; my language and my tradition that I lost it, and it's hard to get back. I'll probably never get it back and my kids lost it, too. (Mama Bear)

Billy, Rose and Christina wished they had been exposed to more cultural events, such as pow-wows and other cultural traditions. Some adoptees, such as Arthur, Eagle, Molly, and Sierra, did not know what tribal background they were from, which they often found confusing or humiliating. Sierra recounts:

I never really knew until I was eighteen where I was from. I thought I was told that I was Cree, and it wasn't until I was talking with my biological dad one day and he said, "You're not Cree. You're Ojibway. You're from (community) and that's all Ojibway land. I had heard for so many years that I was Cree because that's what I had been told by my adoptive parents and that's what they were told. So, it was a shock, it really was. So, all over the place, I had been learning Lakota tradition thinking I was Cree, but really Ojibway. (Sierra)

A Summary of Recommendations

The following summarizes the recommendations provided by the participants in this study.

Information

1. Information on birth family should be made available to adoptees as soon as they desire it.

2. Health information from birth families is preserved for adoptees.

3. Post-Adoption registries need to be revised to (a) allow access to other birth family members, such as extended family, and (b) provide information to adoptees when they want it.

4. Pictures should be available to birth families and to adoptees.

5. First Nation adoptees need to know which tribe and First Nation they are from.

Adoption Practices

1. Adoption of First Nation children should be in First Nation or Aboriginal homes if at all possible.

2. Connection to extended family and community should not be severed through adoption.

3. If First Nation children are not placed in a First Nation home, cultural training needs to be provided to adoptive parents.

4. Cultural mentors should be provided to First Nation adoptees to assist in reconnecting to their cultural heritage.

5. Adoptive homes need to continue to be monitored by child and family services agencies somehow.

Legislation

1. The legislation on adoption of First Nation children needs to be explored further. At minimum, it needs to be open.

2. Customary adoption requires further support.

3. The rights of adoptees to receive all information about their identity, extended family and community of origin need to be defined further in adoption legislation, policy and standards.

Support

1. Adoptees involved in search and reunion require support services to assist them in these processes.

2. Peer support groups for First Nation adoptees need to be established.

3. Counseling services should be made available to First Nation adoptees.

These recommendations have implications for First Nation adoption practice with policy and program implications. The analysis of adoptee recommendations lead to proposals for program, policy and practice captured as follows:

Recommendations for the Development and Delivery of First Nation Adoption Programs

1. Open and Customary Adoption Programs across Canada

Throughout this study, all the participants, both the adoptees and key informants, discussed the importance of openness in adoption practices. Openness could prevent the secrecy and hidden information that was discussed at length by the adoptees as one of their major barriers to their search. This secrecy and lack of information created undue stress about personal health information and not knowing possible relatives.

Furthermore, while some provinces in Canada, including Alberta, boast of having open adoption programs (Alberta Child Welfare Act, 2000; Ontario Child and Family Services Act, 2002), these programs continue to be developed and implemented under provincial legislation

based on a non-First Nation perspective. Open adoption programs for First Nation children must be redefined based on an indigenous paradigm that is anchored in the reality of delivering child and family services both on and off reserve. A case in point is the recently publicized court hearing for five First Nation children in Saskatchewan that challenged the provincial policy on First Nation adoption. Saskatchewan's policy, similar to Alberta's Policy Directive in the Adoption of First Nation Children, prevents First Nation children from being adopted without consent from the child's First Nation. In this case, the Court of Queen's Bench judge refuted the First Nation agency's claim that it had the authority to "speak for the children" and ruled that there is no constitutional basis or Aboriginal rights related to equality, liberty and security in this matter (Province of Saskatchewan Queen's Bench Family Law Division 503, 2004, p. 28). This legal precedent marks yet another instance where the right to culture and birth family connection are highlighted in a judicial process in which an individual judge makes a decision based on what he/she perceives as the lack of evidence to support an alternative decision. I would suggest that this study may have given her additional considerations for this matter. Without doubt, this case will be appealed. The disturbing irony in this situation is that the focus is being misdirected. First Nation rights are being discredited while the same child welfare practices, such as poor matching and support, and the resulting untenable foster care drift for these children, are being ignored.

As well, customary adoption practices need to be revived in First Nation communities with adequate financial support (Alberta Children's Services, 2000; D'Aguayo, 1995; YTSA,

2001). Although customary adoption is a traditional extended family value and practice for First Nations, the reality of poverty and the shortage of resources in extended family networks should not be insurmountable barriers. Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) must stop patronizing First Nation Child and Family Services by proposing that they develop adoption programs on menial budget allocations.

2. Financial Support for First Nation Adoption Programs

The recommendation for First Nation adoptive homes also requires adequate financial support (Rechner, 2001; Trocme, Knoke & Blackstock, 2004) for First Nation adoption programs. INAC's financial allocations for adoption must be reviewed by a Standing Committee on First Nation adoption comprised of First Nation Child and Family Services National Directors and representatives from the Assembly of First Nations (AFN). The Standing Committee could make recommendations based on research and statistics regarding the social costs of adoption breakdown compared to the benefits of financial support in the area of adoption to First Nation agencies. As well, child and family services on and off reserve should include adoption services instead of being limited to child protection services.

3. Adoption Registries

Some of the participants in this study discussed problems and experiences with adoption registries. Adoption registries should be revised to address the enormous demand for First Nation "friendly" adoption registries. This type of registry would clearly identify a child's First Nation ancestry and be expanded to include extended family members. Also, registry staff should receive training in working with First

Nation communities to provide the type of counsel required for First Nation adoptees pursuing a search.

3.1 Veto

Veto issues related to registries need to be revised based on consultation with First Nation communities. The issue of treaty and collective rights need to be considered in developing policies around veto issues.

4. Adoption Social Work Practice

Adoption workers need to begin adoption work with a consultation session with the child's First Nation community through delegated child protection workers or others who represent the interests of the leadership and community. Mirwaldt (2004) discusses the high number of Aboriginal children needing permanent care; "meaningful case consultation with the Aboriginal community is stressed as being fundamental to good permanency planning practice" (p. 18).

4.1 Relinquishment Counseling

Participants recommended the need for counseling for their birth family members. This would include relinquishment counseling for both birth parents to ensure that adoption is the best choice. It also includes some encouragement to birth parents to provide as much information about each of the birth parent's family and health histories. Any information about extended family and community of origin also should be collected at this time. For birth parents, there also is a need to ensure that relinquishment is truly the option of choice. A study focusing on young mothers involved with the BC child welfare system reports that, "In BC today, as has been true throughout the last century, those who are most likely to lose their children are poor, young, Aboriginal and come from families that have historical involvement with child welfare" (Rutman, Strega, Callahan & Dominelli, 2001, p. 6). Relinquishment counseling requires further study, but it is relevant for adoptees and birth parents due to life-long implications for those involved.

4.2 Photos

A number of participants mentioned that photos of birth families are precious. Photos of birth parents, siblings and/or extended family members should be saved for the adoptee. Photos of the adoptee saved in a resource, such as a Life Book, would be a valuable source of information and comfort to facilitate a future reunion for both adoptees and birth families. Adoptees in this study described the importance of 'looking like someone' for example. Life books can take the form of scrapbooks or collections of photos and history which can enhance connectedness for adopted children (Fulcher, 2002; Society of Special Needs Adoptive Parents, 2003).

4.3 Information on Birth Fathers

As discussed in this study by some participants, knowledge and information about birth fathers is critical for adoptees because it essentially is the other half of the parental equation (Coles, 2004; Menard, 1997). It is imperative that birth mothers provide this information to the best of their knowledge and that it becomes part of the relinquishing file documentation. This information can be a legislated requirement, but will require further consideration in light of privacy legislation.

4.4 Registration for Indian Status

Registration for Indian Status requires birth parents and adoptive parents to

ensure that children, who are eligible, are registered as Status Indians at the Indian and Northern Affairs Canada registry. In order to preserve a child's treaty rights as a First Nation person, adoption workers need to be diligent about identifying First Nation children who are placed for adoption. Some participants in this study described some difficulties in being registered.

4.5 Training for Adoptive Parents and Adoption Workers

Some participants in the study suggested that training might have assisted their adoptive parents to understand their background and culture. Training for adoptive parents and adoption workers should involve the development of a module that explains the rights of a First Nation child, shares historical information, and identifies resources where additional information can be obtained (Society of Special Needs Adoptive Parents, 2003). As well, a First Nation person should deliver this module. Additionally, research and training regarding culturally competent adoptive care of First Nation children is of great importance. Some of the adoptees in this study suggested that this training be included as part of the services provided to adoptive parents. In particular, non-First Nation adoptive families need information about the child's home community, language and history. While sharing this information may be difficult in closed adoptions because of stringent confidentiality rules, adoption legislation and policies must address this issue. Adoption workers also need to be trained to be culturally competent in working with Aboriginal children and families. For example, some of the adoptees in this study

were not sure which tribal background they were from so they assumed a tribal ancestry which was inaccurate. They suggested that training for adoptive parents might have alleviated this.

5. Cultural Plans

Cultural plans should be mandatory for First Nation children. These plans contain provisions to maintain contact with the child's First Nation community and culture and are signed by both the adoptive parents and representatives of the child's First Nation community. This practice should be mandatory in the adoption of all First Nation children (Fulcher, 2002).

6. Repatriation Services

First Nation agencies need to be supported in repatriation services for adult adoptees. This support should be provided through Indian and Northern Affairs Canada in their funding for child and family services. This is a critical service that should be free for adoptees who wish to be reconnected to their First Nation community.

7. Counseling and Peer Support for Adoptees

If needed, First Nation adoptees should be provided with therapeutic supports and interventions to assist with loss issues connected to adoption. These interventions can range from Western approaches, such as individual counseling and peer support to traditional indigenous methods, such as ceremony and meeting with Elders. There are resource implications for any of the approaches, and resources should be provided as part of the repatriation services for First Nations on and off reserve.

8. First Nation Community Mentors

First Nation Child and Family Services Agencies (FNCFA) need to establish a resource list of community mentors for adoptees who

return to their home community. The names of these individuals can be recorded at the Band Office of the child's First Nation. Mentors could provide family history and other required information to adoptees or assist in making linkages with extended family. Training for mentors should be funded and provided by FNCFAs through resources from repatriation budget allocations.

9. Health Information

Adoption files should contain family health history for both birth parents as a mandatory requirement and be provided to the adoptive parents during the adoption process. Adoptees in this study provided examples of how this lack of information impacts their lives and the life of their children.

10. First Nation Adoption Legislation

FNCFAs, First Nations, provincial governments and the federal government should keep working toward legislation in Canada that would contain provisions for First Nation adoption. The rationale for this recommendation has been spelled out clearly in this study – First Nation communities across Canada have jurisdiction over First Nation adoption. How this ensues however may vary by jurisdiction and a number of options may be explored depending on the customs and traditional community-based laws and protocols around adoption.

Conclusion

For the most part, the story of First Nation adoption remains mostly in the hearts and minds of adoptees themselves, and the body of literature is incomplete without these valuable stories. However, First Nation adoption is a sensitive subject that has presented several challenges to scholars. For example, there are legal issues related to privacy legislations

that must be considered. Legislators view the privacy of all parties in the adoption triad as important. In fact, some adoptees do not want to speak about their experiences because it is too painful. However, scholars may overcome some of these barriers by working with local community agencies, such as the Yellowhead Tribal Services Agency in this study.

The best interests of First Nation children are part of a debate that stems from a colonial legacy. Alfred and Corntassel (2005) state that:

Contemporary Settlers follow the mandate provided them by their imperial forefathers' colonial legacy, not by attempting to eradicate the physical signs of Indigenous peoples as human bodies, but by trying to eradicate their existence as peoples through the erasure of the histories and geographies that provide the foundation for Indigenous cultural identities and sense of self (p.2).

Societal issues of racism and poverty with health-related outcomes are priorities that need to be addressed in First Nation communities, but issues related to First Nation children are not addressed by simply implementing 'culturally relevant' programs and services.

For natural parents and for adopted people, it is not forgetting your past and your history that allows you to move forward with your life. Rather, it is acknowledging the past and honoring its impact that makes the present more meaningful and allows you to look to the future with confidence (Robinson, 2000, p.57).

I reflect on my research question and the research results, now knowing that connectedness and health for First Nation adoptees are related in a significant way. There is a link between knowing who you are, where you come from and how you feel as a

whole person. This connectedness has been explored and described through the voice of those who know. I trust that it may assist you in positions of power and decision-making that the responsibility to change someone's life is the Creator's work, not ours as mere human beings.

All my relations!

Endnotes

1. Some of the adoptees interviewed for this present study were involved with the Manitoba First Nation Repatriation Program. As such, some of the findings in this study replicate the findings from the Evaluation of the Southern Manitoba First Nation Repatriation Program.

2. Identity is a sub-category under the core category of loss.

Bio

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Identity lost and found: Lessons from the sixties scoop

Raven Sinclair

Introduction

According to the adoption literature, transracial adoption (adoption of a child from one ethnic group into another ethnic group) usually concludes with positive adjustment outcomes for adoptees (Bagley, 1993; Fiegelman and Silverman, 1984, 1990; Bagley, Young, and Scully, 1993; Bagley and Young, 1984; McRoy, Zurcher, Lauderdale and Anderson, 1984; Simon and Altstein, 1981, 1992). The implications of these findings might be that they are applicable to all transracial adoptions and that the experience of success is life-long. Aboriginal transracial adoption, however, presents a problematic situation. Although transracial adoption in general results in positive outcomes for the adoptee and their adoptive family, for Aboriginal transracial adoptees, adoption tends to result in consistently negative outcomes (Adams, 2002; Fournier & Crey, 1997; Bagley, 1993; RCAP, 1996; Stevanato and Associates, 1999). The success rate and outcomes in the teen years are extremely poor regardless of age of placement. For the most part, these adoptions start deteriorating relatively quickly and current statistics indicate a breakdown rate of 95% (Adams, 2002) by the time the adoptee is in the mid-teens. Of course, adoptions that do not breakdown are going to be a hidden

Abstract

The "Sixties Scoop" describes a period in Aboriginal history in Canada in which thousands of Aboriginal children were removed from birth families and placed in non-Aboriginal environments. Despite literature that indicates adoption breakdown rates of 85-95%, recent research with adults adopted as children indicates that some adoptees have found solace through re-acculturating to their birth culture and contextualizing their adoptions within colonial history. This article explores the history of Aboriginal adoption in Canada and examines some of the issues of transracial adoption through the lens of psychology theories to aid understanding of identity conflicts facing Aboriginal adoptees. The article concludes with recommendations towards a paradigm shift in adoption policy as it pertains to Aboriginal children.

statistic since a forum for those statistics to be compiled has not yet been created. Exceptions to the statistics on disruption are now emerging as more research is undertaken with adults who, as children, were adopted transracially. Those

stories are currently being told in dissertation and thesis research nation wide (Carriere, 2005; Sinclair, nd; Nuttgens, 2004; Swidrovich, 2004).

In the Aboriginal transracial adoption literature, there are factors that the research has yet to account for. These include socio-economic factors, as well as psychological, emotional, and mental factors that confront the adoptee as an adult. Most importantly, racism and racial identity issues that are alluded to in the literature are not yet adequately addressed in terms of impacts and remedial approaches. These dynamics combined create tremendous obstacles to the development of a strong and healthy sense of identity for the transracial adoptee. Although recent studies are indicating that many adoptees may develop strong identities in adulthood despite the challenges and turmoil alluded to in the literature (Sinclair, nd; Nuttgens, 2004), for the children who are currently in adoption placements or will be in the future, specific changes in adoption theory and practice are needed to address the problematics of Aboriginal adoption in Canada. The historical context of the adoption of Aboriginal children provides the framework from which Aboriginal transracial adoption has evolved.

The Sixties Scoop

The adoption of Aboriginal children in Canada between the years of 1960 and the mid-1980s was first coined the "Sixties Scoop" in a report written by Patrick Johnston (1983) published as Aboriginal Children and the Child Welfare System by the federal department of Social Policy Development. Johnston undertook extensive and thorough research and his findings were vetted through the many groups that provided him with statistical data, including various levels of government, Aboriginal organizations, and band councils,

(Johnston, 2005). The term, "Sixties Scoop", was appropriate because, first, Johnston observed in the statistics that adoption as the mechanism to address problematic child welfare issues had resulted in notable increases in Aboriginal child apprehensions in the decade of the 1960s. Secondly, in many instances, Aboriginal children were literally apprehended from their homes and communities without the knowledge or consent of families and bands (Johnston, 1983 Timpson, 1995; RCAP, 1996, Saskatchewan Indian, 1977). Johnston recalled being provided with the term by a BC social worker who told him "…with tears in her eyes – that it was common practice in BC in the mid-sixties to "scoop" from their mothers on reserves almost all newly born children. She was crying because she realized – 20 years later – what a mistake that had been" (Johnston, 2005).

At that point in time, Aboriginal children were apprehended in disproportionate numbers throughout Canada and adopted primarily into non-Aboriginal homes in Canada, the United States, and overseas. Approximately 70% of those children were adopted into non-Aboriginal homes (Fanshel, 1972, York, 1992; Timpson, 1995; Fournier & Crey, 1997). By the 1970s, one in three Aboriginal children were separated from their families by adoption or fostering (Fournier & Crey, 1997). This decade marked a rapid increase in Aboriginal children in care in Canada – 44% in Alberta, 51% in Saskatchewan, and 60% in Manitoba (McKenzie and Hudson, 1985, p.126).

At the same time as we may be alarmed by the statistics, it is important to recognize that the "Sixties Scoop" was not a specific child welfare program or policy. It names one segment of a larger period in Aboriginal child welfare history

where, because questionable apprehensions and adoptions figured prominently, a label was applied. The "Sixties Scoop" has evolved as a descriptor that is now applied to the whole of the Aboriginal child welfare era, simplistically defined here as roughly the time from the waning of residential schools to the mid-1980s period of child welfare devolution and last closings of Indian residential schools. Sadly, the involvement of the child welfare system is no less prolific in the current era. Dr. Lauri Gilchrist of Lakehead University noted that given current child welfare statistics, the "Sixties Scoop" has merely evolved into the "Millenium Scoop" and Aboriginal social workers, recruited into the ranks of social services and operating under the umbrella of Indian Child and Family services, are now the ones doing the "scooping".

Resistance

In 1981, a young, charismatic Aboriginal leader of the Shushwap Band in BC, Wayne Christian, was outraged at the high numbers of apprehensions and subsequent transracial adoptions of children from his own community. His efforts initiated a movement among Aboriginal leaders to voice discontent about child welfare approaches (McKenzie & Hudson, 1985). Aboriginal people charged that government authorities were adhering to the assimilationist colonial model that assumed Aboriginal people were culturally inferior and unable to adequately provide for the needs of their children (Kimmelman, 1985; McKenzie & Hudson, 1985; Timpson, 1995; Sinclair, Phillips, & Bala, 1991). These authors describe the forced removal of the children as an act of genocide, which was deliberately implemented upon the demise of the residential school system to perpetuate the governments' assimilation

policies (see also Chrisjohn & Young, 1997). The UN Convention on Genocide (1948), Article 2 (e) states that "forcibly transferring children of the group to another group" constitutes the deliberate destruction of a culture, and defines an element of genocide that is punishable (UN Convention, 1948; Chrisjohn & Young, 1997). Children were apprehended by the thousands, in questionable circumstances, with economic incentive rather than neglect or abuse emerging as the motive for removing children from their homes.

The white social worker, following on the heels of the missionary, the priest, and the Indian agent, was convinced that the only hope for the salvation of the Indian people lay in the removal of their children (Fournier & Crey, 1997).

Economic incentive for newly established child welfare agencies fit well with ongoing government political agenda towards Aboriginal people (Fournier & Crey, 1997). Adams (2002) elaborates, "the obscene marketing of Aboriginal children had stopped in the 1960s and 70s. These children were marketed in local newspapers and on television, but it was done in a way that did not draw attention to the government policy of assimilation". Rather, adoption was touted as a way to provide a loving and secure home for a "disadvantaged child" (Wharf, 1993; Johnston, 1983).

Resistance to child welfare involvement emerged during the Indian social movement of the 1960s that came on the heel of the 1960 Bill of Rights in Canada. Perhaps as a result of the Bill and then acquiring the franchise in 1961, Aboriginal people became more politicized in matters concerning them. Lobbying efforts of the social movement that began in the field of education with the dissemination of the position paper "Indian Control of Indian Education"[1]

by the National Indian Brotherhood (1972) had a direct influence in the area of child welfare. Assuming "control" thus extended to other social spheres.

The discontent with child welfare practices vocalized by Aboriginal people across North America led to two actions that culminated in moratoria on Aboriginal transracial adoptions in the United States and Canada. In the United States, tribes forced in implementation of the 1978 Indian Child Welfare Act which disallowed the transracial placement of Indian children without band consent. In Canada, growing unrest and dissent about the transracial placement of children led to two publications that voiced the concerns of the Aboriginal population and led to moratoria on the adoption of Aboriginal children. The first, already mentioned, was Johnston's (1983) report that provided the first statistical overview of child welfare concerns pertaining to Aboriginal children. The second was a judicial review of Aboriginal adoption in the province of Manitoba led by Justice E. Kimmelman in 1985. The report of the review was a harsh condemnation of some of the child welfare practices in apprehending and placing Aboriginal children and the province placed a moratorium on Aboriginal adoption[2]. Subsequently, other provinces followed suit and long-term foster care has been the norm in most provinces since that time.

Colonial Context

As we look back on that dark period in Aboriginal child welfare and critique the fact that child in care statistics increased rapidly, and many children were removed under questionable circumstances, it is important to remember the context in which the child welfare system became heavily involved in Aboriginal family life. The context referred to is the history of government-Aboriginal colonial relations, specifically, the residential school system. The ideology behind the residential school system was to "civilize" Aboriginal people and to assimilate them into the mainstream body politic (Milloy, 1999; Miller, 1996). Consquently, Aboriginal communities and families have now faced several decades of fall-out from the Residential school period, which included, as by-products of an assimilationist agenda, the deliberate destruction of traditional family, social, and political systems, intergenerational abuse, and social pathology in many communities. A logical consequence of the replacement of traditional socialization with institutional abuse and trauma[3] over several generations is the current high level of child welfare involvement in the Aboriginal population. Child welfare intervention that began in the late 1950s, referred to in retrospect as the Sixties Scoop, was the tip of the emerging iceberg of what is now the institution of Aboriginal child welfare. Currently, Aboriginal children are still "in care" in disproportionate numbers, but for a multitude of reasons beyond just apprehensions by "overzealous social workers"[4].

A significant difference, however, exists between the Sixties Scoop era and the current "Millenium" era of child welfare. Currently, Aboriginal children are being institutionalized through long term foster and institutional care with little chance for adoption. This is perhaps the most deleterious outcome of the moratoria on transracial adoptions. Long-term childcare and foster care statistics for Aboriginal children have skyrocketed while transracial adoption statistics have plummeted. In the United States, an attempt to address this issue took place through implementation of the Multi-ethnic

placement Act (MEPA) of 1994, along with the 1996 Removal of Barriers to Interethnic adoption (IEP)[5]. These pieces of legislation were designed to reduce the practice of race matching in adoptive placement and the MEPA-IEP relies on the notion that it is better for a child to be in a transracial adoptive home rather than languish in long-term foster care. The policy was designed to "eliminate discrimination in the practice of adoptive and foster care placements on the basis of race, colour, or national origin" (Adams, 2002). In Canada, no such legislation was implemented, and as a result, there are extremely high numbers of Aboriginal children in long-term foster and institutional care, with limited possibility of adoption placement. Optimistically, there is the potential that this situation will shift given a recent Saskatchewan Court of Queen's Bench ruling (December 2004) by Justice J. Ryan-Froslie, who argued that denying a child the opportunity for an adoptive home is unconstitutional[6]. As a result, the provincial government is in the early stages of developing strategies to address transracial adoption in ways that will meet the needs of adoptable children and First Nation communities.

Repatriation

Many transracial adoptees of the Sixties Scoop era, now adults, have encountered Aboriginal child welfare agencies as they seek to repatriate (reunite) with birth families. A large proportion of former adoptees' first point of contact is through addiction services and street agencies (Gilchrist, 1995). Many adoptees are facing identity issues because of being socialized and acculturated into a middle-class 'white' society (Hall, 1995; Gilchrist, 1995; Richard, 1998). For transracial adoptees, identity issues are exacerbated by the factors that arise in seeking

out birth family and cultural ties (Fournier & Crey, 1997; Hall, 2003). According to Bagley (1993), the crux of the issue for adoptees is being "reacquainted with the most marginalized and oppressed group within Canadian society". This, he argues, exacerbates the already problematic identity issues that Aboriginal adoptees experience.

Literature on Aboriginal Adoption

A review of adoption literature, Aboriginal transracial adoption in particular, is important in understanding how transracial adoption practice has played out and impacted on Aboriginal children. Reviewing the early literature might lead one to believe that adoption outcomes for "Indian" children were positive (Fanshel, 1972; Simon and Altstein, 1983), although Simon and Altstein (1992), in a follow-up study, concluded that Aboriginal adoptions seem to comprise a "special case". Adjustment to adoption in Aboriginal children appears to deteriorate as the children get older, with a reported adoption breakdown rate of 85% (McKenzie and Hudson, 1985) with Adams (2002) noting that rate is as high as 95%. No studies examine the experiences or long-term adjustment of Aboriginal adults who were transracially adopted as children (Jaffee and Fanshel, 1970; Bagley and Young, 1981: Hall, 2003). The most recent research and literature on Aboriginal adoption express growing concerns about the damaged self-esteem and identity confusion in Canadian adolescent Aboriginal adoptees (Bagley, 1993; Hall, RCAP, 1995; Stevenato and Associates, 1998, 1999; Adams, 2002). The voice of adult Aboriginal transracial adoptees has been absent in the literature, with the exception of a small body of grey literature that can be found on the internet (see, for example The Aboriginal Adoptee website at http://www.

ncf.carleton.ca/~de723/adoptee.html). There are also an increasing number of dissertations and Master's theses recently completed by and with Aboriginal adoptees across Canada and the United States (Carriere, 2005; Sinclair, nd; Nuttgens, 2004; Swidrovich, 2004).

Within the early literature, quite outdated at this point, the political agenda was evident in the unequivocal support of Aboriginal transracial adoption (Lyslo, 1960, 1961). Fanshel's (1972) Far from the Reservation, study examined the experiences of 97 adoptive families. The Bureau of Indian Affairs as well as the Child Welfare League of America, which wanted to promote the Indian Adoption Project, funded this study. Although the authors hypothesize that parents who adopted transracially would be politically more liberal than same race adoptive parents, it appears that the true intention of the study was to promote the adoption project itself. A summary of the project reported, "It has been gratifying to see the opportunities afforded these Indian children through adoption, as well as the full acceptance which they have received" (p.18).

The fact that the creators of the Indian Adoption project commissioned Fanshel's study makes the results of the study questionable, as is the author's reference to the money saving aspects of adoption. He notes that each adoption saved the government $100,000 per child, who would have otherwise ended up in foster care or a boarding school.

The study also implicates negative social attitudes. Fanshel gathered demographic data on Aboriginal birth mothers based on adoption agency data. Fanshel states that "almost 45% were described in terms which indicated that they suffered from quite severe personality disorders", although out of 95 birthmothers,

only 3 had self-identified as having mental health problems (p.59). This type of reporting in research seems more indicative of racial bias than valid research.

The evidence of prejudice in studies is frightening in its implications for Aboriginal adoptees, particularly when the bias is evident from the responses of adoptive parents. Simon and Altstein (1992) questioned parents about their child identifying with their Aboriginal culture. One couple responded that it was unlikely their child would identify with their culture because "there is no contemporary American Indian culture…" (p.88) [emphasis is mine]. Such an attitude might have serious consequences for a child's ability to identify with and feel positively about their ethnicity given the implication that a parent who holds the belief that there is no Aboriginal culture is highly unlikely to be able or willing to teach the child anything about that culture. Conversely, several studies found that a positive parental attitude towards the child's ethnic group, as well as some form of social involvement with that ethnic group in the family's life, is significantly correlated with a child's positive adjustment and positive sense of ethnic identity (Ladner, 1977; Morin, 1977; McRoy and Zurcher, 1983, 1984: Lee & Quintana, 2005).

Christopher Bagley, an adoption researcher out of Canada, found in many studies that outcomes for transracial adoption are generally excellent. He noted, however, that outcomes for Aboriginal adoptees in Canada were distinct from the norm. Bagley's (1993) research on Aboriginal transracially adopted youth concludes that outcomes for this group were extremely poor. Bagley suggested that, as the result of widespread discrimination and prejudice, adoptive parents cannot transmit

an adequate sense of ethnic identity to their children. This concept is supported in several studies that theorize that adoptive parents cannot adequately role model coping skills for the discrimination that adoptees face in society (Bensen, 2001; Triseliotis, 1989); skills which may be vital for minority adopted children (see also Kim, 1978). Bagley's study found that by the age of 15, 20% of the Aboriginal adoptions had broken down, and two years later this figure had risen to 50%. He found that Aboriginal youth had extremely poor self-esteem and an extraordinarily high rate of suicidal ideation. Aboriginal adoptees who did not exhibit any outward signs of behavioral or emotional problems, also scored lower on measures of self-esteem and higher on suicidal ideation scales (p.26). Significantly, he found that non-adopted Aboriginal youth had self-esteem rates comparable to non-adopted white youth. From this study, we can infer that something intrinsic to transracial adoption merits scrutiny.

Bagley's work provides a vital reference point for research on adult Aboriginal adoptees. The research supports what is common knowledge among Aboriginal people, adoption workers and others who have been exposed to Aboriginal adoptions over time; that for Aboriginal children, adoption is problematic. One Aboriginal scholar, in a doctoral study of street youth, found that the majority of the homeless Aboriginal street youth that she encountered were Aboriginal adoptees (Gilchrist, 1995). Kenn Richard, the Executive Director of Toronto Native Child and Family Services, has expressed his concern for years about the high number of adoptees who come to agency in crisis (1998). Informally, those involved in the adoption field know that the levels of substance abuse, homelessness, incarceration, and suicide among adoptees in the last thirty years have been alarming.

Racial and racial identity issues discussed sparingly in the research shed some light on the challenges facing Aboriginal adoptees and serve to highlight that attention to the area of transracial identity development is needed. Hayes (1993) criticizes the measures used in many studies of transracial adoption as inadequate and unable to "get at the richness and complexity of a sense of identity" (p.303). It is this complexity that contemporary studies need to theorize about and address. For example, Bausch and Serpe (1997) in their study of transracial adoptees who exhibit high levels of discomfort with their physical appearance or racial heritage, theorize that this is largely attributable to the fact that most adoptees live in predominantly white neighborhoods and are, therefore, isolated from inter-ethnic contact. From studies like this (and Kim, 1978), we can glean some understanding of the transracial adoption experience and identity conflicts for adoptees.

Theorizing about Identity Conflict

The lack of literature and research in the area of Aboriginal adoption means that to this point we rely largely on common knowledge in order to influence policy and develop programs for adoptees. There are some answers to be gleaned from contemporary literature in the social sciences, particularly psychology and race theory, as to why the transracial adoption of Aboriginal children, in particular, is problematic. Bagley (1993) was perhaps exceedingly accurate to articulate that systemic racism and the general denigration of Aboriginal culture may provide impossible socio-cultural contexts for adoptees.

Identity is an extremely tumultuous journey for all adoptees (Sorosky, Baron, & Panner, 1975). Developing a cultural identity related

to one's biology when raised in a different cultural context is exceedingly difficult. In contemporary society, there are very few redeeming characteristics attributed to "Aboriginality". The Canadian ethos has been that Canada is not a racist country and racism does not occur. Indeed, Canada has been very proud of its international reputation as a land of equality. Unfortunately, people who live on the other side of the "colour line" in Canada have a different perspective (Frideres, 2001). Adoptive parents who buy into a belief that racism does not exist may not be able or willing to prepare a child to deal with issues that "do not exist." The child, who may experience racism and discrimination in their social encounters will learn quickly that their experiences do not necessarily match with what they are told or what they have been socialized to anticipate that life will be like. They may believe that they are inherently "different" because they know that their parents and family do not experience those same things (Kim, 1978). Rue & Rue (1984) astutely recognize the challenge of racism for the adoptee:

"Racism, even its non-violent forms, is still pernicious. The difficult thing about racism in our particular situation is that when it is directed at [our adopted son] Carl, he must deal with it alone. He does not have the comfort of knowing that the rest of the family shares in his experience. If we were an entire family of minorities, his situation would be much different in this respect. And [sic] since neither of us has ever been the victim of racial prejudice, we are ill-prepared to help him develop the skills useful in combating it (p.249).

Further, an adopted child who experiences racism and discrimination may not share that with their family because it is not part of their family ethos. Kim (1978) explains that for a child who wants to fit in, bringing in information that highlights their difference might be emotionally challenging. The family provides an element of safety; a secure enclave from their experiences of the outside world. This redeeming factor for the transracial adoptee may, however, also be the source of tremendous conflict. Once the adoptee leaves the enclave of their adoptive home environment, unless they have learned to adequately cope with the realities of being an Aboriginal person in this country, they may find their identity to be a source of conflict.

Many adoptees experience a lack of cultural mirrors in their adoptive social environments. Within their adoptive context, their roles and expectations are understood, and most likely, there is no aura of 'otherness' surrounding their existence. However, once they walk out the door, their social status alters drastically, as do the expectations of them and the treatment accorded them by others. The adoptee may eagerly and readily embrace and adapt to the culture of their adoptive family, but socially, they may be excluded from enacting that culture and those roles out in the social arena.

The adoptee, like any child, does not question their socialization; they just live it. Many adoptees are raised in an environment of privilege, power, and status (Sinclair, nd; Nuttgens, 2004, Swidrovich, 2004). Their economic status may be higher than the average "white" person and yet they do not carry that status on their own. At some point, they are inevitably forced to confront a socially ascribed inferior status associated with their ethnic minority group (Kim, 1978). Not only are Aboriginal adoptees' ethnic and cultural identity wrapped up in cultural stigmatization,

their identities are most likely associated with poverty, alcoholism, and other negative stereotypes. The conflict that results from the need to constantly adapt is likely a source of angst from which many adoptees engage in destructive and harmful behaviours to themselves, their adoptive family, and their environment (see, for example, Adams 2002; Gilchrist, 1995). For many adoptees, the tensions have led to incarceration, substance abuse, or suicide7. Recent Corrections Canada data indicates that 63% of Aboriginal offenders stated that they were adopted or in foster care (Trevethan, Moore, Auger, Macdonald & Sinclair, 2005).

In response to the growing awareness of identity conflicts in Aboriginal adoptees, adoption agencies and adoptive families sought to find solutions. Some of conventional adoption literature emphasizes the importance of instilling a cultural heritage in the child through books, movies, and culturally relevant events such as pow wows (Adams, 2002). Unfortunately, these are idealized versions of Aboriginal culture and not realistic as means for instilling identity. What the child sees when they venture out into the world as an adult is not necessarily going to match with idealized versions of Aboriginal culture. Indeed, chances are high that what they observe will more readily match the negative stereotypes learned in the course of their daily lives through media and education. What child is going to want to identify with negative stereotypes; the derogatory names they have been called, the destitute individual on the street? What the adoptee may not know is that they are not seeing Aboriginal culture; they are seeing the vestiges of colonization and a neo-colonial society's construction of Aboriginal culture. However, who is available to explain that context to them?

There are aspects of some social and human behaviour theories that can assist in contextualizing and understanding the experiences and the negative reactions of Aboriginal adoptees.

Contemporary Theoretical Links

Socialization, according to Kim (1978) refers to "the process [that] enables individuals to participate effectively as members of interest groups, local communities, and larger society". Kim says that, according to Erickson, identity crisis in socialization consists of people asking the question "who am I?" Erickson argued that this is a crucial developmental task during adolescence and was the "final establishment of a dominant positive ego identity" (p. 306). Without this development, one will confront identity diffusion. Young (1969) adds "as racial and cultural minority group members, minority children have more and more particular difficulties in defining a positive identity because minority status carries with it goal restriction." (p.1103). Ascribed inferior status and negative stereotyping occurs in the forms of name-calling and social exclusion. The most insidious problem, however, is the compounding of daily prejudice and rejection with "the pervasive restraining force operating in parts of American society, which is now commonly called institutional racism" (Young, 1969). These socialization dynamics relevant to minority people are essential in understanding transracially adopted Aboriginal children and youth who grow and develop in unique contexts. The unique context is described by Kim (1978) as a paradox. "Adoptive parents are faced with a dilemma; they have the contradictory task of incorporating a child fully into a family and simultaneously promoting a sense of distinct ethnic identity. The very "success" of transracial

adoption, is indicative of its failure as this success has been achieved at the expense of the development of an ethnic identity" (p.485).

We can understand more clearly the dilemmas and paradoxes facing adoptees by looking at the assertions of various social theorists including Kohlberg, Ericsson, Mead, and Cooley. For example, Kohlberg's model of moral development (Schriver, 2001) includes a stage that refers to "maintaining the good relations and the approval of others", while Erickson's epigenetic model, stage six, discusses competence as arising out of "identification with and acceptance of peers". In a social context where discrimination may be a regular occurrence, the problem for the Aboriginal adoptee is how to achieve 'good relations', 'approval', and 'acceptance' of others when racial exclusion is the norm. If a child is deemed deficient by virtue of their ethnicity, the chances are high they will be excluded and ostracized by peers. According to Ericsson, failure to achieve these goals leads to feelings of inferiority and incompetence. Of course, Ericsson's theory and other conventional theories of human development do not include ethnicity as a consideration.

[Ethnicity] may be especially significant if we are attempting to develop a positive sense of who we are in the context of a hostile environment. Such a hostile environment exists for many members of the diverse groups with which we are concerned as social workers (Schriver, 2001, p.251).

One of the mitigating factors for minority children existing in a 'hostile environment' is the comfort afforded by close contact with family, friends, and their community. In this safe context, children can develop strong and positive self-identification. Aboriginal adoptees,

however, usually do not have the safety nor security of an enclave afforded by same-race relatives and community, but as indicated, a safe, nurturing and positive adoption context may provide the necessary comfort and contradiction.

A final theory that lends a great deal of insight into the world of the Aboriginal transracial adoptee is symbolic interaction. Symbolic interaction holds that "people are seen first and foremost as beings who interact with one another based on shared meanings and symbols. Thus human interaction is symbolic interaction" (Robbins, Chatterjee & Canda, 1998, p.268). People assign social meanings to their experiences, and human behaviour is a function of social behaviour. Cooley (cited in Robbins, Chatterjee, & Canda, 1998) theorized that we are dependent upon the reflections that we receive in interactions with others and from them we make judgments of ourselves. If reflection, according to Symbolic inter-actionists, is the means by which we come to our self-concept and self-conceptions, the implications for Aboriginal adoptees are quite frightening. If we create meanings and symbols in our interactions with other people, what happens when those meanings and symbols are constantly changing, or worse, primarily negative? For Aboriginal people in Canada, social interaction is, at times, a guessing game. Young argues that "only rarely does a child of minority status escape the damaging effects of racism" (p.43). One individual may be extremely friendly and engaging, and the next individual may be blatantly hostile, contemptuous, and even violent. For the Aboriginal adoptee that is in their formative years, it would be difficult to create, and then rely upon, consistent interpretations of meanings and symbols in that social environment.

In the context of these contemporary theories of human behaviour and social development, the traumatic experiences of adoptive families (see for example, Adams, 2002) who adopted Aboriginal children may be more easily understood8. These theories help us to understand the behaviours in terms of the mental and emotional turmoil that would result as the individual attempts to develop a sense of identity and self-concept.

In the final analysis, one might assume from these discussions that, generally speaking, Aboriginal adults adopted as children would be terribly maladjusted. It is true that in some instances adoptees have suffered horribly. It is also true that in other instances, they have not. Aboriginal adoption outcomes fill the entire spectrum from deleterious outcomes that include homelessness, addictions, incarceration, and suicide, to successful outcomes that include economic and academic achievement, happiness and contentment.

Adult Adoptees

A recent doctoral research project is finding that many adult Aboriginal adoptees, some of whom experienced adoptions fraught with abuse and trauma, have developed exceedingly strong and well-articulated identities (Sinclair, nd) while other studies indicate that many adoptees are content with their adoptive experiences (Nuttgens, 2004; Swidrovich, 2004). The preliminary findings of the study indicate that despite sometimes horrific stories of familial and social trauma, many adult Aboriginal adoptees express contentment with their current lives, have deep and meaningful insight into the social and psychological dynamics of Aboriginal adoption, and are exceedingly socially capable. The majority of adoptees in this study (N=17) are employed in professional capacities, are well educated, lead stable lives,

and are exceptionally attentive parents to their children. Some report difficulties in dealing with emotional upheavals as adults and many identify relationship difficulties as a consequence of their adoptive experiences. However, many adoptees also acknowledge having acquired advantages as the result of being adopted. Some of the advantages include being able to traverse both Aboriginal and 'white' worlds with ease, a sense of personal efficacy in terms of education, and career and economic success (Sinclair, nd).

The question is, therefore, why are the majority of adult adoptees in current research reporting successful life outcomes despite the reported problematics of Aboriginal transracial adoption in the context of the Sixties Scoop? Sampling bias may be an obvious answer but even amongst these "success stories", we see evidence of traumatic identity crises, psychological trauma, and behavioural problems. Many adoptees suffered extreme forms of abuse. Many marvel at their very survival.

Obviously more research is needed. Resiliency amongst Adoptees is an area that beckons inquiry. The influence of repatriation to birth culture is another that needs exploration. It appears that many adoptees, at some point along their journey, found a level of truth and certainty within Aboriginal culture that provided a critical source of healing and renewal (Sinclair, nd; see also Nuttens, 2004; Stolen Generations, nd). Perhaps by reconnecting with their birth culture, the individual provided for themselves vital cultural mirrors necessary for self-validation; a cultural reframing from which to review and re-perceive their experiences. From this perspective, many adoptees learned about their adoption experiences in the context of Canadian colonial history which, for many, was a powerful catalyst for reframing

their personal experiences (Sinclair, nd). In this study, some of the participants were, for the first time, able to perceive their experiences as a socio-political act rather than as a consequence of personal deficiency. Relieved from a burden of self-blame, many adoptees have integrated a unique self-based identity that is, of course, relative to their own context and experiences and some adoptees have unique perspectives of their identities as multi-faceted and multi-cultural (see Nuttgens, 2004; Stolen Generations, nd). Indeed, there is no single group identity label or theory that can be applied to adoptees of the Sixties Scoop as a whole. Although there are some personality and identity characteristics that many adoptees share as the result of the similarity of their experiences, each individual's sense of identity is unique and derived from their own combination of experiences and perspectives (Sinclair, nd; Nuttgens, 2004). Each adoptee in the stated study, despite the losses and traumas experienced, found and created their own cultural and identity niche.

As we close the door on the "Sixties Scoop" and struggle to not perpetuate the status quo in the Millenium era of child welfare with Aboriginal populations, we must reflect on the lessons of the past. Despite the evidence of tremendous resilience in the human spirit that has allowed many adoptees to survive and thrive, children will always deserve the highest level of protection and consideration. As the result of the concerns raised in reviewing the literature, and the stories shared by adoptees, there are several recommendations for changes in policy and perspective of Aboriginal transracial adoption in Canada.

Towards a Paradigm Shift in Aboriginal Transracial Adoption Ideology

There are three recommendations (Sinclair, nd) for approaching Aboriginal transracial adoption issues. They include taking an ideological

stance that incorporates a cultural-racial identity matrix; rejecting the myth that cultural and ethnic heritage can be instilled through books and pow wows; and constructing a bi or multi-cultural family stance which, in effect, reconstitutes the cultural entity of the entire adopting family identity.

Baden (2002) presents a racial-cultural identity matrix as a method of helping transracial adoptees assess their own cultural identity. In a research study of cultural identity, Baden stated that the findings of her study indicate that "heterogeneity exists among transracial adoptees and because a particular way or ways of identifying was not associated with better or worse psychological adjustment. Neither the proponents or opponents can purport a "best way" to identify as a transracial adoptee" (p.189). This is very interesting because this model is a cultural-racial identity matrix. There is no identification dichotomy facing adoptees, i.e. that the adoptee must choose either their birth identity or their adoptive identity. There are enough factors in a cultural-racial matrix from which to choose so that the individual will fit somewhere within the multi-dimensional continuum without being pathologized and without having to alter their identification to fit the model. Adoptees do have a cultural identity; it is a unique mix of their birth heritage, the adoptive heritage, combined with their personal experiences, choices, and understandings of the environment. An approach that honours the multi-faceted nature of adoptee identity will be a welcome shift. This approach is person-focused rather than ideologically focused. In terms of intervention, the model could help social workers to "start where the adoptee is at" in terms of their unique cultural identity.

The second recommendation is to completely do away with the myth that cultural and ethnic

heritage can be instilled through books and weekend cultural activities. Repeatedly, the literature suggests that exposing the adoptee to their culture through pow wows and books and cultural camps, will alleviate their distress. In fact, there is likely the risk that these acts only contribute to conceptions of "otherness" and difference, not only from the birth culture but also from the adoptive family. Approaching culture in this way will lead the individual to learn about the façade of the culture, not the culture as it actually exists. Adoptees who are now adults suggest that birth family, including extended birth family, and birth culture contact during their formative years might have helped alleviate the sense of difference and the cultural isolation that many of them experienced (Sinclair, nd). These notions lend support to exploring the benefits and drawbacks of open adoption for Aboriginal children. At the very least, new directions must be taken in preparing adoptive families to meet the needs of their Aboriginal child. Indeed, in order for a child to learn about their culture, the people most significant to them must also learn about the culture. This leads to the third recommendation.

The third recommendation is the concept of constructing a 'bicultural family" or "multi-cultural" identity. This requires a paradigm shift in the perspective of adoption personnel and potential adoptive families. This perspective may be essential to the well being of Aboriginal transracial adoptees. In one study, the third group in the three groups of families studied described themselves as "bicultural" as the result of bringing an interracial child into their home (McRoy, Zurcher, Lauderdale and Anderson, 1984). Rue & Rue (1984) articulated the same concept. "When the Rue family decided to adopt a child from Thailand, they immediately conceived of themselves as a

Thai-American family". The generally accepted, indeed unquestioned, perspective taken by social workers and prospective adoptive families has been that the child is to be integrated into the adoptive family; the 'minority' is absorbed into the 'majority'. Adoption ideology has never assumed that because the child of one ethnicity will be entering into a family of another culture, that the whole family becomes a blend of all the cultures involved. However, the implications of an adoptive family taking on a bicultural identity as opposed to the child standing alone in their "transraciality" might be significant. Such a paradigm shift might influence how an adoptive family conducts itself with respect to their adopted Aboriginal child including, for example, where they live, their choice of schools, and their general family "culture". At a policy level, such an ideological shift might influence adoptive parent/family screening strategies as well as general transracial adoption procedures, specifically in terms of adoptive family preparation.

Conclusion

According to the literature, although transracial adoption results in positive and favourable outcomes for both child and family, Aboriginal transracial adoption has been a notable exception. The statistics indicating a high breakdown rate are frightening for adoptive families who have a young Aboriginal adopted infant or child because, if the statistics hold true, chances are very good that by the time that child reaches adolescence, the family will encounter serious complications. The question of why Aboriginal adoption results in poor outcomes can be understood from the perspective of several cotemporary theories of human and social development. Symbolic interaction, in particular, provides several key concepts and

perspectives to understanding the conflict and turmoil that adoptees experience. The literature helps one understand the tremendous challenges for an Aboriginal child in North America to develop a healthy identity and sense of self in the current ideological and social context. The denigration of Aboriginal culture and racism abound in both subtle and blatant ways for Aboriginal people. For Aboriginal adoptees, in particular, these experiences may be a harsh contrast to their experience of a safe, privileged non-Aboriginal environment. For Aboriginal adoptees, they must deal with the contradictions of being a member of the marginalized group, despite having a socialization, identity, and role expectations of the dominant group.

Although Aboriginal transracial adoption results in both positive and negative outcomes, recent research appears to be indicating that many Aboriginal adult adoptees from the era of the Sixties Scoop and beyond have developed strong and positive identities despite, or in spite of, the challenges of their experiences (Carriere, 2005; Sinclair, nd; Nuttgens, 2004; Swidrovich, 2004). Hence, it is apparent that some of the long-term outcomes for Aboriginal transracial adoption contradict the statistics contained in the literature. Many adoptees do recount difficult and traumatic adoption experiences and the turmoil seems to manifest in the teenage years and in young adulthood. As more research is completed, we are hearing stories from the other end of the spectrum. According to the emerging research, we can conclude that in many instances transracial adoption can have positive and successful long-term outcomes, and that Aboriginal cultures in Canada are sources of solace and healing for adoptees. Adoptees who choose to reacculturate to their birth culture, find needed belonging and cultural validation. The act of repatriation often assists adoptees in

reframing their experiences within the context of Canadian colonial history. The adoptees, insightful of the transracial adoption experience, concur that changes must take place in the adoption field and they are supportive of further research in the area. The recommendations provided in this article are based upon the small emerging body of research on Aboriginal transracial adoption, combined with information collected in stories, newspaper articles, and grey literature. How these recommendations manifest in policy and practice will depend upon the quality of collaboration amongst the stakeholders in transracial adoption. It is suggested that Adult adoptees will be the best source of information to direct the future of adoption research and policy.

In closing, it is not the contention of this article that Aboriginal transracial adoption should not take place. It would be naïve to place the blame for current child welfare involvement solely on government and child welfare authorities. In the context of historical colonial policies of assimilation that saw child welfare intervention follow upon the heels of the residential school system, the extensive involvement of child welfare authorities into Aboriginal lives is more clearly understood. Aboriginal communities now recognize that the responsibility for child welfare outcomes from this point forward rests with Aboriginal communities who have fought long and hard to have control of child welfare. In an ideal world, all Aboriginal children will remain with their families of origin. Until that happens, Aboriginal communities, child welfare agencies, and families will continue to make decisions to place children for adoption transracially, because those decisions are sometimes made in the best interests of the child. However, we do not need to perpetuate the wrongs of the past. As we look forward from

the Sixties Scoop and learn the lessons of that era, the field of social work must be proactive, adaptive, and creative. With core changes in Aboriginal transracial adoption ideology, it is asserted that policies and practices will follow suit, to the benefit of adoptive families and, most importantly, Aboriginal children.

Endnotes

1. The position paper asserts, "Unless a child learns about the forces which shape him: the history of his people, their values and customs, their language, he will never really know himself or his potential as a human being." See http://www.afn.ca/article.asp?id=830.

2. The report refers to W. Christian's statement that 150 children were removed from his band of 300 over a period of 25 years. In 1995, the author was privy to viewing the A-list, (a record of status children adopted) for one band in Manitoba where over a period of several years, almost every child had been apprehended and adopted.

3. It is important to note that not all residential schools perpetrated abuse and trauma. For more information, see either Miller (1996) or Milloy (1999).

4. For a comprehensive look at Aboriginal Child Welfare literature, see Bennett, Blackstock, & De La Ronde's (2005) literature review and annotated bibliography http://www.fncfcs.com/docs/AboriginalCWLitReview_2ndEd.pdf.

5. For more information on the MEPA-IAP, see http://www.ssw.umich.edu/tpcws/articles/legal_MEPA.pdf.

6. For a summary of the case, see http://www.lawsociety.sk.ca/judgments/2004/QB2004/2004skqb503.pdf and for a discussion of the implications, see http://www.adoption.ca/news/050105sk.htm.

7. In my casework in Aboriginal adoption repatriation, a disproportion number of inquiries came from adults incarcerated in prisons in the U.S.

8. Adams' stories recount some experiences of children who are Fetal Alcohol affected. It's beyond the scope of this article to delve into FASD and its relationship to adoption outcomes/success, but it is clear that FASD can play a significant role in Adoptions.

Bio

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Indigenous knowledge and research: The míkiwáhp as a symbol for reclaiming our knowledge and ways of knowing

Michael Hart

While not readily recognized or respected by Amer-European societies, Indigenous[1] knowledge exists. Indigenous knowledge has contributed to the well being of not only Indigenous nations, but the world population in general. Yet, little has been done to support its continuing development, particularly in academia. Instead, Indigenous peoples have faced life times of colonial oppression that has impeded, trivialized, and oppressed our knowledge and ways of coming to know. While there have been generations of Indigenous peoples working in ways that counter this oppression, there have been recent writings calling on the need for Indigenous people to take greater control of, and provide direction and support for the continuing development of our ways of coming to know and our knowledge. In an effort to support this call, I have attempted to identify some understandings of what is Indigenous knowledge through a review of literature and the use of a symbolic image, the míkiwáhp (Cree for lodge; also referred to as a teepee). I present the structure of the míkiwáhp as a means to picture the symbols and ideas various Elders have shared with me about our Indigenous knowledge. With this picture in mind and understandings in place, I then discuss the relation of Indigenous

Abstract

This paper is based on the unique learning that the author obtained from various Cree and Anishinaabe Elders regarding Indigenous knowledge. The author's experience with learning about Indigenous Knowledge is expressed through a review of the literature conducted on Indigenous knowledge and through symbolic imagery using the míkiwáhp (or "lodge"). Included is a discussion on appropriate considerations to utilizing Indigenous knowledge and its development in the context of colonial oppression over Indigenous peoples.

knowledge to some research paradigms, particularly the naturalistic paradigm. I follow this discussion with a review of some points that should be considered when addressing Indigenous knowledge and its development in the context of the colonial oppression Indigenous peoples have faced.

Identifying Indigenous Knowledge

Battiste and Henderson (2000) have suggested that there is no short answer to explaining what is Indigenous knowledge. They identified that it is not an extension of the European based knowledge system, but a distinct knowledge

system in its own right. While there are connections that exist across and within this system, variations exist between the methods, concepts, experiences, and values used by various Indigenous peoples to gain their knowledge. Thus, there are differences in interpretations and applications of Indigenous knowledge (Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Cajete, 2000). As such, it is important to note that an umbrella Aboriginal world view does not exist (Simpson, 2000a) and that pan-Indigenous references should only be seen as stepping stones in Indigenous peoples' progress.

With these points in mind, several authors have identified significant aspects to understanding what is Indigenous knowledge. One of the dominating features is its holistic base (Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Cajete, 2000, 1999). Unlike the positivistic empiricism paradigm that dominants Amer-European knowledge, Indigenous knowledge does not separate realities into disciplines, such as religion, philosophy, art, physical sciences, and social sciences. Instead, these systems are often looked at and addressed together. Understandings stemming from these various sources are seen as being mutually dependent upon one another, thus making it irrational to divide them.

Being holistically based, Indigenous knowledge is dependent upon the relationships within personal and social contexts. On a personal level, Indigenous knowledge relies upon subjective interpretations and experiences. The primary goal is self-knowledge (Cajete, 1999). Giving a more detailed explanation, Henderson (2000) identifies that the goal of Indigenous knowledge is to understand and attempt to contain the energies that infuse everything in order to create a lifestyle that is harmonious with the local ecosystem. Knowledge is

developed on a personal level through subjective reflection and participating in ceremonial and stage based processes (Cajete, 1999; Ermine, 1995). Thus, it is gained through experience and all the senses and instincts (Henderson, 2000). On a social level, Indigenous knowledge is highly localized in that knowledge is based upon the environment and situations encountered by learners (Cajete, 2000, 1999). It has a focus on "the web of relationships between humans, animals, plants, natural forces, spirits, and land forms in particular localities, as opposed to discovering particular 'laws'" (Battiste & Henderson, 2000, p. 44).

Indeed, Indigenous knowledge is dependent upon people's experiences with their local ecosystems (Henderson, 2000). Battiste and Henderson (2000) have even suggested that the changing ecosystem is the ultimate source of knowledge and that the common expression of Indigenous knowledge lies in the vibrant relationship between the people, their ecosystem, and the other living beings and spirits that share the land. Indigenous knowledge is developed through people's attempts to understand their relationship with local ecosystems, thus Indigenous ways of coming to know are orientated to a space and place (Cajete, 2000). As such, the ecosystem itself is another key aspect of the holistic base of Indigenous knowledge.

This holistic base also includes the physical and spiritual realms since there is no division between science and spirituality. Indeed, every act and every being is seen as sacred (Peat, 1994). There is a recognition of Indigenous ways of learning through the physical world which includes such methodologies and practices as observation, experiential learning, and apprenticeship (Cajete, 1999, 2000).

Importantly, these physical world practices are augmented by ways of learning and knowledge development that are based upon spiritual practices. As stated by Ermine (1995), "the culture of the Aboriginal recognized and affirmed the spiritual through practical application of inner-space discoveries" (p. 110), or what Peat (1994) referred to as "experimentation of the mind" (p. 251). These applications include fasting, reflecting upon dreams, and ceremonies (Cajete, 1999, 2000; Peat, 1994). The knowledge gained through these applications is used to guide one's life in both the spiritual and physical world.

Significant to this guiding process are Elders. Elders have taken the time to learn the practices and ceremonies of their Indigenous ancestors and are seen by their community as holders of knowledge (Cajete, 1999; Peat, 1994; Simpson, 2000a; Stiegelbauer, 1996). Through apprenticeship like training, Elders guide the transmission of Indigenous knowledge from previous generations to future generations. With their guidance and support, they facilitate learning through ceremonies, stories, and role modelling (Cajete, 2000; Couture, 1996; Stiegelbauer, 1996). Thus, as the present reflection of generations of Indigenous knowledge they are key links in the multi-generational aspects of Indigenous knowledge.

From this brief review of literature on Indigenous knowledge, it can be said that such knowledge is holistic, personal (subjective), social (dependent upon inter-relations), and highly dependent upon local ecosystems. It is also inter-generational, incorporates the spiritual and physical, and heavily reliant on Elders to guide its development and transmission. While these descriptive features are unlikely to completely encompass what is Indigenous knowledge–indeed several authors have identified some additional points (Cajete, 2000; Henderson, 2000; Simpson, 2000a) – these features are evident in stories presented and processes followed by Cree and Anishinaabe Elders in Central Canada. The following reflections serve to symbolically illustrate some of these features of Indigenous knowledge.

Picturing Indigenous Knowledge

As I attempted to find my way in the Euro-Canadian based helping and educational systems, I have sought out the support and direction of Elders knowledgeable in our ways of learning and helping[2]. In part of this search, I have listened to them discuss the míkiwáhp (Cree—meaning lodge; also known as a teepee) metaphorically in relation to knowledge and meaning. They described how the lodge was erected. Three, sometimes four poles were initially tied together with a rope. The narrow ends of the poles were raised into the air while the other ends were firmly placed upon the earth. Each pole's base was placed so that it stood apart from the others, while the opposite end was placed so that it leaned against the other poles. One by one, additional poles were placed to lean upon the initial poles and tied in by having the rope wrapped around the added pole. Soon, there was a circle of poles leaning and dependent upon one another. All were connected by the rope. A final pole, of which was tied the lodge's cover, was place to lean upon the already standing poles. The cover was pulled around all of the poles to encompass the circle. The ends of the cover were joined together with wooden pegs, like the seam of a skirt. Openings remained at the top of the lodge which acted as a venting system, and the cut out at the bottom which acted as its entrance.

The Elders also spoke of the different aspects of the lodge. One focussed upon the fire in the middle of the lodge and how it maintained the warmth. Another talked about how a person standing on the outside could see parts of the poles that extended from the inside through the top opening to the outside, and how the part that could be seen was on one side of the lodge while the part which could not been seen was on the opposite side. Another commented on how you can only see the outline of each pole from the outside since the covering shielded the details within the lodge. The openings of the lodge were also discussed. The opening on top of the lodge allowed for the sky to be seen, while the opening near the ground acted as the doorway for others to enter the lodge.

In listening further to these Elders, I came to see that each pole represented the understanding and perspective of a person. These understandings stand strongest when they are firmly grounded on the earth, thus reflecting the importance of locality and dependence upon the ecosystem. As with much understandings, there are core elements which are central to the development of the collective knowledge. This is represented by the first poles that are tied together. Each additional pole is the understanding contributed by each additional person. The unification of contributions is developed and reflected by the rope that encompasses all of the poles. The collective understanding is as strong as the tied rope and dependent upon how well each contributing understanding is grounded on the earth. Recalling that each pole is on one side of the lodge at the base and on the other side as it extends past the rope to reach outside the upper opening of the lodge, it can be seen that a person not only contributes to the collective knowledge, but develops a new perspective and understanding. While this new understanding

becomes visible to others, the base of the understanding is not always understood since it is not seen.

Since the lodge is covered, it is difficult to see from outside the lodge any details other than the impressions of the poles pressing against the covering, the top of the poles reaching outside the lodge, and part of the rope which ties the poles together. Similarly, people who are not part of the collective are unable to get a full appreciation of the details presented in the development of the collective knowledge. They can form impressions of the views held and, like the visible rope and pole tops, they can get a partial understanding of the emerging collective knowledge and individual views. One of the ways to develop a better view of the entire lodge is to enter it, thus, the lower opening of the lodge acts to welcome people into the lodge to get this view. Similarly, outsiders can develop a fuller understanding of the collective and individual understanding by entering and joining with the people. Upon entering the lodge, a person can get an immediate sense of how the fire acts to maintain the warmth of the lodge. This fire represents the spirit of the collective. Like fire, the spirit has to be nurtured and, in turn, this nurturing helps maintain the collective understanding. Intimately connected to the fire is the opening at the top of the lodge, which reflects our spiritual reach to the Creator. Without the opening, the smoke of the fire could cause the lodge to be uninhabitable, reflecting the need of the proper spiritual direction and guidance.

From the symbolism and understandings presented by the Elders, I have come to recognize that our ways of coming to know have identifiable and distinct features. These features are reflected in many activities stemming from

Indigenous cultures. For example, the sharing circle directly reflects these features. Sharing circles have many purposes, amongst them being learning and teaching (Hart, 1996, 2002). Sharing circles provide the context for the presentation of each participants' thoughts and the development of a shared understanding. This example emphasizes the importance of these features to Indigenous cultures. Thus, these features need to be considered when continuing the processes of developing Indigenous knowledge, whether these processes are within academic institutions or elsewhere. Within academic institutions, Indigenous knowledge should be considered in regards to research generally, and research with Indigenous peoples specifically.

Relating Indigenous Knowledge to Research

Weshues, Cadell, Karabanow, Maxwell, and Sanchez (1999) have presented basics beliefs associated with social work research paradigms. The paradigms included were positivist, naturalist, transformational, and heuristic. While it can be demonstrated that the aspects of Indigenous knowledge can be linked readily to naturalistic, transformational, and heuristic paradigms, the aspects identified here demonstrates closer links to the naturalist paradigm. This paradigm sees constructed, multiple, and holistic realities. It sees researcher and the participants interactively involved in mutual learning and sharing responsibility for the research. Findings are bound by time and context, and rest upon the individual reader's assessment. As such, credible or valid research is dependent upon the context of the changing social interactions. It sees inquiry as value-bound and the purpose of research as understanding and descriptive. The process of doing research is emergent, thus follows an inductive process leading to qualitative types

of data. Finally, it views the nature of people as social beings who create meaning and make sense of their world.

Clearly, the aspects of Indigenous knowledge presented here reflect these points. However, Indigenous knowledge branches further than these points as evident in the following considerations. Its holistic perspective is much larger in that it is intimately linked to matters of spirit. Spiritual ceremonies are seen as significant, if not vital, pathways to gaining, demonstrating, sharing, and/or respecting knowledge. It makes direct and dependent links between knowledge and the earth. It follows, reflects, and relies upon cycles and patterns found throughout the ecosystem and as such incorporates the earth as a primary part of the context. It is multi-generational. While Indigenous knowledge recognizes the fluidity of social actions and developing meanings, it holds strongly onto traditions and set methodologies (such as particular ceremonies), and relies on Elders to pass on the ever developing knowledge from previous generations.

Appropriate Considerations

In light of these comparative points, attempts to consider Indigenous knowledge as a reflection of already established paradigms do not serve it respect or justice. Indeed, concerns have been raised of the manner which Indigenous knowledge has been addressed by European based knowledge systems and representatives of such systems. Battiste and Henderson (2000) have noted that the Eurocentric based research community espouses universal principles, thus devaluing diversity. This lack of value of alternative perspective serves those with the power to place their "universal" perspective as front and centre. As Smith (1999) suggested, "the globalization of knowledge and Western

culture constantly reaffirms the West's view of itself as the centre of legitimate knowledge, the arbitrator of what counts as knowledge and the source of 'civilized' knowledge" (p. 53). In turn, Indigenous knowledge is relegated to outposts of obscure and/or relatively unknown journals and classes. When it is incorporated into the mainstream and acts as a contributing factor in the development of our societies, there is little, if any, recognition that the contribution stems from Indigenous knowledge (Simpson, 2000b). When it is recognized, it is often taken as a commodity to be bought and disenfranchised from Indigenous people (Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Smith, 2000). This commodification is supported by the compartmentalization based within the positivistic approach. Indeed, this compartmentalization or fragmentation not only supports the commodification of Indigenous knowledge (Smith, 1999), but impedes Indigenous peoples progress towards, and capacity for, holism (Ermine, 1995) and is used to continue the "colonization of the mind" (Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Smith, 2000).

In light of these concerns, there has been calls for Indigenous people to be preemptive and pro-active (Smith, 2000). This includes identifying Indigenous peoples' needs in regards to knowledge development and research (Gilchrist, 1997). While Simpson (2000b) suggests it may be premature to be calling for the development of Indigenous paradigms due to the primary need of addressing the continued colonial oppression that exists, Gilchrist (1997) suggests Indigenous peoples need to follow Indigenous research paradigms for the development of Indigenous knowledge. Similarly, others have called for the following of not only Indigenous paradigms, but also Indigenous research practices (Cajete, 1999; Ermine, 1994). Such paradigms and practices should be viewed on

their own basis (Henderson, 2000). In turn, Indigenous people, indeed all people, will have to consider Indigenous knowledge on its own merits. Ultimately, this will require Indigenous people to gain control over information related to their knowledge, heritage, and themselves (Battiste & Henderson, 2000b). To support these points, Indigenous academics must use their privileged formal education to support Indigenous ways of knowing, methods of knowledge development, research, and social structures (Simpson, 2000a). Otherwise, such academics will only continue to undermine Aboriginal collective intellect and culture.

While these actions are being implemented, if not before, Indigenous peoples will need to address the colonial processes which continue to impede, trivialize, and/or oppress Indigenous knowledge. As Henderson (2000) has stated, "Aboriginal people are daily asked to acquiesce to Eurocentric theories of legal context that are based firmly on fictitious state-of-nature theories and cultural differences. In one way or another, they are asked to validate the colonialists' libel" (p. 248).

This address of colonial process should not be limited to Indigenous peoples. Ideally, all peoples would participate in such an address. In addition, it has been suggested that Eurocentric based scientists need to recognize that their ways are not the only ways to generate knowledge (Simpson, 2000b). Indigenous ways and contributions need to be recognized and affirmed. Indeed, is it not significant that Indigenous nations have contributed to the worlds food staples, pharmaceuticals aids, arts, and goods, as well as produced knowledge in such areas as astronomy, engineering, agriculture, anatomy, botany, and mathematics? Or, are these contributions irrelevant because

they are not based upon the European and Euro-American system of science?

Some authors have recognized Indigenous knowledge and contributions, and call for a broader definition of what constitutes knowledge (Moore, 1998; McDonald and Brownlee, 1995). Linking the call for this recognition to academia, Moore (1998) identified the need to de-emphasize academia's focus on competition of ideas, and replace it with tolerance of the spectrum of human ideas and respect for the holders of these ideas. Thus, the changes that are required to facilitate the growth of Indigenous knowledge are not focussed upon Indigenous peoples. All people are required to make a shift to become more open and sensitive to Indigenous ways of knowing. Peat (1994) has suggested such openness and sensitivity to other than western ideas could be of considerable value to the West in such areas as medicine, biology, farming technology, and physics. For Indigenous people, he suggests that openness and sensitivity could lead to the acknowledgement of the cultural achievements and support Indigenous cultural revival. In other words, such a shift can benefit many peoples, if only we can overcome the fear of differing ways of knowing and the resultant knowledge.

Closing Remarks

Indigenous knowledge exists. It holds identifiable characteristics and processes, and is derived from Indigenous ways of coming to know. While these characteristics, processes, and ways hold similarities to some European and Euro-American paradigms which guide research, particularly the naturalist paradigm, they are also distinct. As such, there is need for recognition, development, and support of Indigenous knowledge and ways of coming to

know. Indeed, Henderson (2000) links the need for Indigenous control, direction, and action over Indigenous knowledge with our continued existence as Indigenous peoples:

As Aboriginal people, we must reclaim our worldviews, knowledge, languages, and order to find the path ahead. We must sustain our relationship with our environment and follow our Elders' advice. We must rebuild our nations on our worldviews and our good values. We must be patient and thorough, because there are no shortcuts in rebuilding ourselves, our families, our relationships, our spiritual ceremonies, and our solidarity. We must use our abilities to make good choices (p.274).

It is my hope that this paper is a step, at least a small one, towards meeting this need.

Endnotes

1. Indigenous refers to peoples who are the original inhabitants of a land since time immemorial. For this article, the particular Indigenous people included are those who no longer control their own territories due to the usurpation of their lands by colonizing people and/or their decedents.

2. The Elders that I spoke with were of Cree and Anishinaabe ancestry. The symbolism and ideas they shared occurred over several visits. I did not visit all the Elders together, but most often individually. Thus, the ideas presented here are an amalgamation of these visits and their ideas. With that said, I understand that my sharing of these words has become my responsibility and reflect the understanding I have adopted from them.

Bio

Michael Anthony Hart, a citizen of Fisher River Cree Nation, currently resides in Winnipeg, Manitoba. As a parent of two young boys, he is concerned about the future of his children and the children of Indigenous peoples, and is committed to supporting the ways and views of Indigenous peoples generally,

and to Cree peoples specifically. To fulfill his commitment, he has worked in the areas of child and family services, addictions, and mental health. More importantly, he continues to spend much time with Indigenous Elders learning about Indigenous ways of helping and supporting. He is presently completing his Ph.D. in social work at the University of Manitoba while working there as a Lecturer.

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A way of life: Indigenous perspectives on anti oppressive living

Robina Thomas and Jacquie Green

For the past five or six years, we have been asking ourselves: "what is anti-oppressive practice?" "And, how would we know that someone was, in fact, living and practicing anti-oppressively?" More specifically, as Indigenous women, we question, what anti-oppressive practice would look like through an Indigenous lens. We have begun to identify some of the key elements of anti-oppressive practice (AOP), which include but are not limited to the following:

- AOP is necessarily complicated and uncomfortable. AOP requires grappling with issues of justice and oppression that can be challenging and frustrating as we explore issues of oppression through our own experiences, our own lives, and locations in the world. These explorations, complexities and tensions are necessary because as helpers, we engage with people's personal

Abstract

The focus of this article is on the key elements of anti oppressive practices as examined by two Indigenous women who practice and teach anti-oppressive ways. Anti oppressive living is characterized as a "Way of Life" that values the sacred and traditional teachings of various Indigenous cultures. The medicine wheel is discussed and highlighted as an effective teaching tool to examine anti-oppressive ways of living, practicing and perspectives.

and intimate lives and well-being; knowing what our values and beliefs are, where they come from, and how they affect specific relations are important in developing a commitment to overcoming injustice in our practice with clients;

- AOP, at its core, must include an analysis of power and strive to work across differences;

- AOP forces us to critically examine how we know what we know and to explore our assumptions not only about helping, but about other human beings. AOP invites us to connect our subjective lived experiences to our knowledges – that is, what we know may be connected to who we are. AOP offers an opportunity to explore the interconnections between 'who we are,' and biases, beliefs, and attitudes towards other (marginalized) groups of people.

Mindful of, and using these key elements, we will discuss our collective perspectives of anti-oppressive practice as Indigenous women. Many people may ask for a definition of anti-oppressive practice; in this paper, we will demonstrate and show that for us, as Indigenous women, AOP means "A Way of Life" – a Way of Life that values the sacred and traditional teachings of various Indigenous cultures. Specifically, we will utilize teaching philosophies of the Medicine Wheel to frame and discuss our AOP perspectives.

The Medicine Wheel is an ancient teaching tool. It has no beginning and no end and teaches us that all things are interrelated. The circularity of the wheel we are utilizing is comprised of quadrants that represent all living things (see Diagram 1). There are many teachings, principles and philosophies of the Medicine Wheel. Our teachings come from our Anishnaabe friend and mentor, Gale Cyr. She is from the East of Turtle Island - Quebec, Canada.
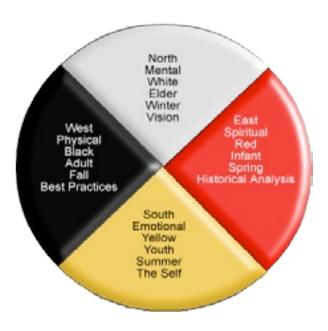

Diagram 1: Medicine Wheel

As stated above, it is important to remember that when we use the Wheel, each quadrant is interrelated. For example, the Eastern direction represents our spiritual being, which is in turn, also connected to the physical being of the Western direction. No quadrant is worth or valued as being greater than the other quadrants; all aspects of our being and place are of equal importance and are positioned in balance and harmony with one another. Moreover, once you have journeyed around the Wheel, you have the opportunity to learn from your experiences and journey around the Wheel again, this time learning from your mistakes. What the Wheel teaches us to be conscious of is that if we remember what the challenges were in our previous journey, then our next journey can be different and more effective. Starting at the East and working clockwise around the Wheel, we have the four aspects of all human beings – the spiritual, emotional, physical, and mental (Bopp et al., 1989, p.12; Saulis, 2003, p.294). The Wheel also has four colours to represent all the races of Mother Earth: red, yellow, black and white. It also provides us the four stages of the lifecycle – infant, youth, adult and elder, as well as the four seasons – spring, summer, fall and winter (Hart, 2002, p.40). As we will show, each of these representations have particular meanings for both life and anti-oppressive practice.

Our teachings about using Medicine Wheel philosophies emphasizes that we are to always to begin in the East because this is the direction of spirituality, the colour red, the life stage of the infant and spring time. This is the direction of new beginnings, of daybreak, and the sunrise. In this paper, we will focus on the Eastern direction to examine the history of Indigenous peoples in Canada and the impact of colonization – the history and beginning

of Indigenous relationships with settlers and their policies. This history of colonization is a vital to understanding the contemporary lives and subjective experiences of Indigenous peoples, and the ongoing relationships between Indigenous people and the Canadian settler state.

The South is the direction of our emotional being, the colour yellow, and the life stage of youth. This is the direction of summer, a time for lots of activity. For youth, this is a time in their life where they are learning much. The Southern direction is also the place where we recognize and honour teachings of our Elders and spiritual leaders. In this direction, our paper will look at the Self and how we know what we know – we will focus on, and examine how heightened and complex our identities have become because of our interaction with non-Indigenous people.

In the West, we have the direction of our physical being, the colour black, the life stage of the adult and the fall or autumn season. This is the direction we look towards when we do our work and our practice. For example, the Western direction is where social workers share their knowledge and work within our communities to help strengthen our children and families. In this direction, our paper will focus on the following issues: the particular skills that AOP requires; the historical analysis of relations as a necessary skill for anti-oppressive practice; and lastly, we identify critical self examination as yet another necessary skill, and demonstrate why this skill is so vital for anti-oppressive practice.

The North is the direction of our mental being, the colour white, the life stage of an elder and wintertime. When we reach the North, we are reminded to revisit our work. This is the time

to focus on what changes we need to make to our lives; a time to re-think and re-evaluate our actions and behaviours. For social work practice in Indigenous communities, this is the direction of vision. This is the time to dream of anti-oppressive living. The northern direction is the time where our language, culture and tradition are revived and become a part of our day-to-day lives.

The text that follows helps us to journal through all the aspects of the medicine wheel which assist us in practicing anti-oppressively.

Beginning In the East We Will Start Our Journey by Our Current/Historical Analysis

Given that "colonialism has racism as it ideological rationale," (Maracle, 1996, p. 89) an analysis of the impact of colonization on the lives of Indigenous people in Canada is absolutely necessary if social workers are to practice in an anti-oppressive way. The *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary: Tenth Edition* describes colonialism as:

> *1: the quality or state of being colonial;*
> *2: something characteristic of a colony;*
> *3 a: control by one power over a dependent and or people b: a policy advocating or based on such control …*

However, as those of us who have lived the experience of colonialism (and continue to live in it) know, colonialism is a much stronger force than these mere words reflect: in fact, it is life altering for the Indigenous people of Canada (and colonized peoples world-wide). In a recent article, Taiaiake Alfred (2004) argues that colonialism "is the fundamental denial of our freedom to be Indigenous in a meaningful way, and the unjust occupation of the physical, social, and political spaces we need in order to survive

as Indigenous peoples" (p.89). This articulation encapsulates the depth and breadth of the impact and effects of colonialism.

Colonization is about taking control of our lives, lands, resources, and people -- at any expense, and at the cost of Indigenous people's lives and livelihood – to make those lands productive in terms of economic rewards (Tuhiwai Smith, 2002, pp.20-22). In other words, capitalism and colonialism have an intimate and necessary relationship. Ania Loomba (1998) describes this interdependent relationship in the following way:

Thus we could say that colonialism was the midwife that assisted at the birth of European capitalism, or that without colonial expansion the transition to capitalism could not have taken place in Europe (p.4).

In Canada, the federal government went to great lengths to ensure that capitalism not only materialized, but flourished. The government ensured the growth of capitalism and solidified their colonial stronghold through the development of extensive legislation, indicating the extent to which Canada was willing to go to guarantee that Indigenous people did not get in the way of progress (capitalism) (Tully, 2000, p.38). In order to subjugate and oppress Indigenous people, the Canadian settler state required the creation and maintenance of violence (Hodge, 1990, p.93); this violence took on a complex and intricate web aimed at destroying the mind, body, spirit and humanity of our peoples. Colonial violence took on different manifestations, including, but not limited to: the Indian Act[1] in its assorted manifestations; biological and germ warfare; theft of cultures, knowledges, traditions, languages and identity; residential school policy; child welfare policies; and various treaty processes.

While capitalist expansion was critical to colonial enterprise, colonialists were equally interested in the moral and cultural lives of Indigenous people (Tuhiwai Smith, pp. 25-26). Through the Indian Act and the residential school policy, the government launched an official policy of dispossession and cultural genocide in 1920. Our children were forcefully removed from their homes, their families, their communities to be Christianized and civilized (Aboriginal Healing Foundation [AHF], 2003, p.27). In these isolated and foreign places, Indigenous children were forced to speak a language they did not know, pray to God they knew nothing of, and be educated in a way that was both alien and purposeless for them. The effect of these policies was to degrade the Indigenous people of Canada and to position them in the lowest strata of society (AHF, 2005, p.43-44). The education received in those institutions was minimal at best [AHF, 2003, p.29); the children were, in fact, being trained to become the working class (AHF, 2005, p.34) – the labourers, housekeepers, and maids for the emerging white nation. This was done in a very deliberated, thoughtful and planned way.

Modern colonialism did more than extract tribute, goods and wealth from the countries that it conquered – it restructured the economies of the latter, drawing them into a complex relationship with their own, so that there was a flow of human and natural resources between colonized and colonial countries (Loomba, 1998, p.3).

In 1887 the Indian Act was amended to ban our potlatch and sun dances. The potlatch and other traditional ceremonies were and still are our traditional governance systems. For example, in the Thi'lelum (Big house) we pass on names,

Chieftainships, songs, dances, masks; performed marriages; supported our families (funerals); and redistributed our wealth through give aways. For Indigenous people, the ceremonies performed in these sacred places constituted both the administration and governance of community members – in effect, these ceremonies served similar functions to Western structures like the Department of Vital Statistics and Parliament. By destroying our community governance, the Canadian state threatened and attempted to eradicate our communal identity and the status of our Nations'.

In many Indigenous languages, there is no word that translates to 'anti-oppressive practice.' However, there are various phrases in our mother tongue that identifies "A Way of Life". For example, phrases and/or terms such as Snuw'uy'ul[2] roughly translates into our 'teachings' - our ways of knowing and being, our governing structures, our culture our tradition, our language, our sacred bathing holes, hunting, fishing and gathering rights, our family, our community, our relationship with Mother Earth and Father sky. Through the banning of the potlatch (and other traditional ceremonies) the government specifically and purposefully attacked and attempted to rupture Our Way of Life[3] (Lawrence, 2002, pp.23-24). Indigenous scholar Lee Maracle (1996) captures the spectrum of these ruptures:

The aims of the colonizer are to break up communities and families, and to destroy the sense of nationhood and the spirit of co-operation among the colonized. A sense of powerlessness is the legacy handed down to the colonized people. Loss of power – the negation of choice, as well as legal and cultural victimization – is the hoped-for result (p.93).

Through their power to define 'Indians' as inferior and the development of racist policy, the Canadian state directly attacked Our Way of Life, Our Way of Being (Simpson, 2000, p.118). Many of our people, both the young ones and the older ones, remember the pain and devastation of the days when the potlatch was banned and residential schools were still open.

The state also used education to push forward Eurocentric beliefs. Maracle (1996) believes, "the appropriation of knowledge, its distortion and, in some cases, its destruction, was vital to the colonial process" (p.89). Education had an assimilationist agenda (Castellano et.al. 2000, p.25), requiring our people to assume the cultural, social and political belief systems of the colonizer as part of the 'civilizing mission' that was directed towards Indigenous peoples (AHF, 2005, p.42). The education process had, as its underlying agenda, to ensure that our people would believe their knowledges and traditions – their Way of Life – to be inferior; this was due in part to the colonialists' own thinking that Indigenous epistemologies were inferior (Tuhiwai Smith, 2002, p.11). Having our knowledges targeted for destruction, and having to assimilate into Western knowledge systems, has had significant psychological impact on our people. As a result of Eurocentric educational indoctrination, Indigenous people began to forego their ways of life in order to be more like the 'superior' others. bell hooks (1995), when discussing colonization of the mind in Black communities, claims that "…through being taught/socialized Eurocentric biases black [people] began to long for the "rewards" that whites had access to (luxury and comfort). To gain access to these rewards, blacks began assimilating white values." However, assimilating white values may be easier than having the dominant society accept our Way of Life. The experience of

racism has meant that Indigenous people have internalized racism, domination and colonization.

Given the colonial history of Canada, anti-oppressive practice with Indigenous people requires an intimate knowledge and understanding of the history of Indigenous people in Canada, including the ways in which the colonization of lands, resources, psyches, and hearts of Indigenous peoples was an integral part of colonizing processes The Indian Tribes of Manitoba (1971) remind us of the significance of linking history to the present and to the future by stating "To deny the past and to refuse to recognize its implications is to distort the present; to distort the present is to take risks with the future that are blatantly irresponsible" (p. ii). As social workers, we must understand the impact these policies have had, and continue to have on the day-to-day lives of our children and families that we work with. It is critical for social workers to question themselves and their knowledge of Indigenous peoples by asking themselves: what have the experiences of the Indigenous children and families been? Did they, their parents and/or grandparents attend residential schools? Have they been involved in the child welfare system and how might they feel about social workers? What is their history with social work? What are their fears? We must always take these questions into account when we work with Indigenous children and families. We must always situate the present within the context of the past, and continuously engaging how the families we support come to know what they know. Maracle (1996) believes that "change must be the basis for education" (p.92). Change can only begin by knowing and engaging the effects of where we have come from and knowing and engaging the effects of where the children and families we support have

come from.

In the Southern Direction We Journey To Reflect On Self

As time went on, we realized that anti-oppressive practice is not enough. We cannot decide when or when not to practice – it must be about living – anti-oppressive living. Anti-oppressive social work, in essence, is A Way of Life. In her book killing rage: ENDING RACISM, bell hooks (1995) discusses Martin Luther King's image of a "beloved community where race would be transcended, forgotten, where no one would see skin color" (p.263). hooks eloquently reminds us that King's dream of a beloved community can only be realized if we resist the need to transcend history and to forget the everyday processes of racialization. A beloved community can only be made possible when we forge individual and collective bonds based on "loving ties of care" (hooks, 1995, p.264).   And so, not only is it critical for social workers to practice and live anti-racism, it must go hand in hand with creating A Way of Life – a "beloved community" cultivated from care that centers differences that is so crucial to the theory and practice of anti-oppressive living.

Others also offer the gift of living in a more just way – of fostering a more just society. In his latest book Wasase, Taiaiake Alfred (2005) encourages us to become warriors again – those who carry the burden to peace (p.51). He believes that behaving 'indigenously' is a personal attribute that is observable. He also states that we need to "recreate a life worth living and principles worth dying for" (p.25). For us, this is also about A Way of Life – how we are and want to be in the world.

We believe that the same is true for anti-oppression – we must live it. Our beloved community would foster anti-racist/anti-

oppressive living. But the question becomes: what do we need to do to get there?; and how do we get to living anti-oppression? hooks (1995) says that, "To live in anti-racist society we must collectively renew our commitment to a democratic vision of racial justice and equality" (p.271). And, Dominelli (1988) believes that:

> …to become fully human and live in egalitarian harmony with black people, white people have to become anti-racist. Anti-racism is a state of mind, feeling, political commitment and action (p.16).

hooks and Dominellis' statements on anti-racism holds true for anti-oppressive living – we must be committed to justice and equality in all aspects of our lives, and be willing to do something about it.   It is not enough to merely recognize that inequalities and injustices exist; that is, anti-oppressive living is neither passive nor something we do in our "job." Rather, it is an active stance and way of being in the world around us. As social workers we must continue to strive for social justice not only to benefit ourselves, but to benefit all our children.

In order to strive for social justice, we must begin this process by asking ourselves how we know what we know. Rarely do we have the opportunity to turn inwardly and look into our life and critique how we have been socialized and what we have internalized from our socialization. We believe that the best helpers are those that know their self best. Dominelli (1988) believes that by "getting rid of the injustice perpetrated by racism we will begin reclaiming our own humanity and establishing egalitarian relationships between black and white people" (14). If anti-oppression is about living, then reclaiming and politicizing our humanity must be a starting point. Seletze (Delmar Johnnie, Cowichan, personal interview)

believes that healing is life long and that every day we can strive to be a better person than we were the day before, and a better person the next day than we were today. Yes, we can all heal and become more fully human. Bopp et al (1984) in The Sacred Tree: Reflections on Native American Spirituality include a Code of Ethics. The first Ethic states:

Each morning upon rising, and each evening before sleeping, give thanks for the life within you and for all life, for the good things the Creator has given you and others and for the opportunity to grow a little more each day. Consider your thoughts and actions of the past day and seek for the courage and strength to be a better person. Seek for the things that will benefit everyone (p.75).

We believe that if helpers thought critically everyday about their ways of living, then we would be a step closer towards committing to anti-oppressive living.

Indeed, being committed to living anti-oppression requires that we not only examine our values and beliefs but live them out as well. As helpers, we must believe that we are good helpers or we would not be in social work. But we need to question our intentions and motivations, and ask ourselves: Are we good helpers? Do we truly value all human beings? When we see the "stereotypical" Indigenous person on the streets, do we value them? Do we care about the poorest people? When we work with people from the gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, transgendered and queer community do we value them? And what about people who live with disabilities? These are tough questions, but they must be examined. Exploring our values and beliefs is very difficult, but a commitment

to anti-oppressive living requires that we do just this. The eighth code of ethic from The Sacred Tree states:

All the races and tribes in the world are like the different coloured flowers of one meadow. All are beautiful. As Children of the Creator they must all be respected (p.80).

A commitment to continuously examine our values and beliefs can be instrumental in living anti-oppression, which in turn, informs how we will practice social work.

Now We Journey To Look At How Our History and Reflective Self Inform "Best Practices" – In the Western Direction

In our examination of praxis we have come to know and understand that praxis must include an analysis of Indigenous histories. We also understand that praxis must include a continuous reflection of self. A research study on best practices in First Nations communities identified the importance of knowing self in practice:

> One worker talked about always having to remember where she was from and why she was doing this work. It was the personal commitment to her community that kept her strong and wanting to do social work, but also remembering that she was, at the same time, a social worker and a First Nations person. She always had to remember the historical issues that have impacted our people while at the same time remember our traditional ways (Green and Thomas, 2005, p.10).

One critical skill in social work practice requires an examination and understanding of our assumptions. For example, there are assumptions around Indigenous people living on or off the reserve system. Non-Indigenous peoples at times assume because one lives on reserve, they are necessarily cultural, culturally aware, and/or traditional. As we explore our histories, we see how for one, reserve systems are colonial regimes (Simpson, 2000, p.126). As well, we understand that while reserves were created to isolate our people from dominant society, our children were simultaneously removed from our 'reserves' to learn how to assimilate into dominant society. Having said this, many people who live within and among the reserve system are truly connected to one another. Moreover, those who live in urban settings gravitate towards, and are connected with one another. The point here is, that no matter where Indigenous peoples live, they/we do make connections with each other and nurture relationships and traditional teachings interchangeably. For this reason, much of our work is based in the communities we live in – our work in closely linked to the issues of our community, and we work hard to pay attention to what our community members tell us. Fostering these relationships is important for our learning, for our teaching, for our practice, and for our communities.

Another set of skills required of social workers is a fundamental understanding of colonialism and colonial relations. In research engaged by Green and Thomas (2005), social workers whom they interviewed believed all social workers must have sound knowledge of the history of Aboriginal peoples. As well, these workers suggested social workers pay particular attention to the history of the geographical area where one is working (p.8). By attending to, and understanding our histories and lives, social workers will come to understand that, in contrast to colonial policies, traditional teachings are rooted in understanding our

connections to Mother Earth and Father Sky. It is through our ceremonies that we understand our identities and our cultures – no matter where we live – and these ceremonies are important to our social, political and economic knowledges. Cajete (2000) goes on to say it is the intimate relationship that people establish with place and with the environment and with all things that make them or give them life (p.183). Thus, skills of reflection and locating our histories are integral to unraveling assumptions we make of Indigenous peoples and the lives we live.

Common assumptions made about Indigenous peoples are based in racist stereotypes and racist attitudes. Sinclair (2004) states that even in the new millennium, the standard for social work education and practice is literature and education based on the worldview, life ways, and reality of the dominant, predominantly white, and mainstream society (p.53). What helpers must recognize is that, due to residential school trauma and other racist policies, many Indigenous peoples have had to deal with multi-generational trauma. For many, substance misuse is an antidote to numb historical pain. It is critical that helpers come to understand history and see how we can work together to heal from our past. Many people fail to see the strengths and resiliency of Indigenous peoples. As an example, if we as practitioners, when working with families focus on, and look for strength of a person (rather than always exerting energy on 'fixing' a person), families may then have an opportunity to recognize and work through their own strengths. We believe that it is the beliefs, stereotypes, and attitudes of social workers that must shift, rather than a constant centering of 'clients' to fix and shift their behaviours and attitudes. Working with families from a strength-based model requires a commitment to valuing and honouring

relationships. Relationships in our practice can be modeled by looking at our own inter-relationships with our families, to our teachings and how we engage with Mother Earth and Father Sky. By understanding how we relate to people, we can then model to families what meaningful relationships could look like. King (1990) speaks to relationships by stating:

> "All my relations" is a first reminder of who we are and of our relationship with both our family and our relatives. It also reminds us of the extended relationship we share with all human beings. But the relationships that Native people see go further, the web of kinship extending to the animals, to the birds, to the fish, to the plants, to all the animate and inanimate forms that can be seen or imagined. More than that, "all my relations" is an encouragement for us to accept the responsibilities we have within this universal family by living our lives in a harmonious and moral manner (in Sinclair 2004, p.54).

In our work, we honour our relationships by inviting Elders to come speak to students. Our Elders are able to share their histories and their experiences, and impart an important and different set of learning to students.

We know and believe that children are the heart of communities and they must be central to how we look at practice. Because children are gifts from our Creator, they must be at the center of love and nurturing from a circle of extended family and community members (Cherrington, 2000, p.29). More importantly, in practice we must remember how children historically have been traumatized by colonial practices and how our children are devastated by racism. We know how policies, legislation and other laws

have harmed our Way of Being as Indigenous peoples. For many helpers we have seen how stereotypes and assumptions have harmed Indigenous families and resulted in the removal of children from our families and communities.

Especially important in social work practice is maintaining relationships with children. Children are precious and must continue to be looked after by our families and extended families. Moreover, children must have strong relationships with people who work for them. Aboriginal children are precious to us because they represent our collective future. Anderson (2000) reminds us that children are not considered possessions of the biological parents; rather, they are understood to be gifts on loan from the Creator (p. 159). It is important to be committed to children-in-care, and moreover, be consistent in how we engage with them. As helpers, it is important to maintain relationships with the children and families we work with to the best of our abilities, most particularly those children who are in child protection. If we reflect on our traditional teachings, there were many people involved with children in our communities; these were life long relationships, which in turn, impact on the Way of Life for children. In our practice, then, we must remember that children receive many teachings, and form a variety of strong, important lifelong relationships; the relationships we forge with children will impact how they 'become' an adult. We must also remember that the children will remember what we do and say. For anti-oppressive living we must critically analyze how our educational teachings and training impact our relationships with children and their families. We must continuously reflect on how legislation, and organizational policies and practices could be used to strengthen families rather than create harm for children and

families.

As an example, social work training and education stresses that we must learn how to be objective. We learn that there are certain standards by which to communicate and document what relationships are like between social workers and their 'clients.' We also learn how to report on the lives of children and families. For anti-oppressive practice, the question becomes, "how do we act and write in a way that is resilient and supportive for children? Can we do this ethically? How do our traditional teachings inform how we work within practice standards?"

To answer the questions posed above, we want to emphasize that to practice in a way that benefits children and who they are as human beings, we as practitioners must journey from our head to our heart.   Elders and traditional teachers have taught us that the longest journey anyone makes is from the head to the heart. What does this mean for practice? And how do we do this? One reason why this head to heart journey is important is because social workers are directly involved in, and influence relationship with families – and, these relationships must be viewed as lifelong. Johnson (2000) encourages professionals to believe that personal uniqueness and differences should be valued and respected (p.133). In our mainstream western educational training we are taught to be objective: we assess, we recommend and we implement – then we move onto our next 'case file.'   However, the 'heart' in our practice teaches us and encourages us to practice differently because we as people, as social workers are responsible for the relations and connections we make. We very well may see this family in another place and time, or perhaps we will share a sacred ceremony with

this family. In our classrooms, the journey from the head to the heart is at times brought together and made present when we share ceremony with our students. Ceremony collectively connects each person, each student and ourselves with the past, present, and future, demonstrating the need to work from a holistic place – connecting the head to the heart. Ceremonies like smudging encourage students, like the teachings of the Medicine Wheel tell us, to bring forward and engage their whole person (spiritual, emotional, physical, as well as mental). When we engage in sacred ceremonies together, relationships are solidified – most times forever. For this reason, it is important that we consider all notes and communications as sacred – where any documentation must be scrupulously respected. Rather than emphasizing objectivity, we need to remember that we are communicating about our community members, our families – not our "cases."

In The Northern Direction of Our Journey We Reflect On Our Practice and We Look At Vision and/or Revisioning

For Indigenous peoples, vision is critical in our lives and for our future. We reflect on our communities, our teachings, and our ancestors to see how their lives impact who and how we are today. So, for us as practitioners, we must remember the strength and resiliency of our grandparents, our ancestors and our children who have been warriors throughout history – because we too hope to be remembered in a similar way. Despite the imposition of colonial policies, our people are alive and well. Our people are re-claiming traditional teachings and persevering our ways of life in regenerating culture, language and ceremony. Our people continue to believe in change. In practice, we understand how policies have affected the lives of so many Indigenous children. Today, we

can re-do practice standards and incorporate traditional teachings into how we do our work. As we continue to re-learn our traditional ways, we know that contemporary practice must be inclusive of varying ways of being. In our relationships with non-Indigenous peoples we know that we must work collaboratively and we must model collaboration through meaningful partnerships.

Partnerships are important and meaningful. However, non-Indigenous workers, politicians and State workers must demonstrate their willingness to truly understand the historical legacies that have harmed our people and to link these to the myriad of issues that our communities are challenged by because of these legacies. As Indigenous people, there are many situations where we have been forced to engage in mainstream policies and practice standards in order to work in our own communities. It is time now for non-Indigenous workers to engage in our ways of being and practice in a way that exemplifies a way of life relevant to the people they work for. What we are invoking, here, is a call for non-Indigenous workers and politicians to shift their own cultural values and belief systems in order to collaborate in a meaningful and positive way with Indigenous peoples. This is a necessary step for re-visioning relationships.

Graveline (1998) states "resistance is essential to our survival" (p.43). Indigenous peoples have resisted assimilating and have survived. A belief in hope and vision for the future of the next seven generations is necessary to continue to challenge dominant systems.

In order to put forward the Traditional worldview, we need to continue to challenge the Western paradigms that guide today's education systems. Continued resistance needs to be mounted, as Western educational models

are still playing a large role in reinforcing altered forms of consciousness. Thinking with the head (cognition) as separable from the heart (feelings) is expected and continuously reinforced in Western schooling (ibid., p.39).

As we reflect on this wheel of practice, we see how Indigenous peoples have resisted and are standing strong. We see how, despite the many different forms of colonial impositions, our spirits and Our Way of Being are strong. We also recognize that there are still places where our people must heal and move forward with their lives. This is true for our lives as workers as well. By collaborating in our practices, we as helpers can resist and re-vision to truly deconstruct colonial practices in our communities. We recognize that it is essential for us to incorporate our regenerative cultural teachings into our practice. We know that historically, culture and tradition were instrumental to healthy communities.

Acknowledging and recognizing that, although our lives, our lessons and our students are seeped in colonial mentality, we still must accept responsibility to teach, and we can rely on traditional forms to do so. I stand strong in my ability and my willingness to accept personal responsibility for understanding power and relationships and to share what I have learned through my own experiences and voice (Graveline, 1998, p.48).

In the northern direction of our work, we reflect on stories our grandmothers have shared with us. We must remember their stories so we can learn from them and live our lives accordingly of our respective traditional places. We must remember the resistance of our grandmothers and grandfathers who lived through residential school trauma and the banning of ceremonial practices. Today, we can incorporate their resistance and practice differently. We must remember that in their lives, children were and are the hearts of their communities. Today, we must ensure that children continue to be the centre of our practice. What will the children say to us if we ask them what a social worker is? How would our ancestors answer this question? As helpers, we know that our helpers were and are our grandparents, our ceremonies, and our relationship to All Living Things.

In conclusion, we want to reiterate that we have come to understand anti-oppression as A Way of Life. Reflecting on our philosophy from the Medicine Wheel, our well being (spiritual, emotional, physical and mental) are critical aspects of our lives. As we write this, we are mothers, grandmothers, students, teachers, and social workers (to name a few). We are always all these things. As such we must live the values and beliefs we embrace all the time. If we always live our values and beliefs, anti-oppressive social work would be based on Snuw'uy'ul – all of our traditional teachings to live a good life, to be the best human beings and helpers we can possibly be.

All Our Relations!

Kundoque - Jacquie Green

Qwul'sih'yah'maht – Robina Thomas

Endnotes

1. The Indian Act is an enforced colonialist, paternalistic legislation that has governed and classified every aspect of the lives of Indigenous peoples in Canada for well over a hundred years. This broad, sweeping Act continues to govern, control, classify, regulate, and dictate our identity, our movements, and the economic, social, and political lives of our people today (Lawrence, 2003, p. 4).

2. A Hul'qumi'num Mustimuhw term by Hul'qumi'num speaking people.

3. Will capitalize Our or A Way of Life to demonstrate the significance of Indigenous relationships to all living things as A Way Of Life.

Bios

Qwul'sih'yah'maht (Robina Thomas) is Lyackson of the Coast Salish Nation. Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work, Robina holds a BSW, MSW, and is working towards a PhD in Indigenous Governance. Robina is committed to First Nations education and her research interests include Storytelling, Residential Schools and Uy'skwuluwun: On Being Indigenous. She is committed to understanding anti-racism and anti-oppression and how these can be 'lived.

Kundoque (Jacquie Green) is from the Haisla Nation. She is an Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work. Jacquie holds a BSW, MPA, and is working towards her PhD in Indigenous Governance. Her teaching is embedded in understanding traditional knowledge and philosophies, thus looking at identity and language through storytelling. Her social work teaching includes methods to center Indigenous livelihoods and to center difference. She focuses her research, writing and teaching to Indigenous Centered knowledges to inform what social work practices could look like.

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Here be dragons! Reconciling Indigenous and Western knowledge to improve Aboriginal child welfare

Jean Lafrance and Betty Bastien

PART I – INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

We are entering what the early explorers described on ancient maps as "terra incognita," an unknown land. The warning that "here be dragons" often followed this. We are suggesting that reconciling Indigenous and Western Knowledge to improve Aboriginal child welfare can lead into uncharted lands that call for uncommon wisdom and guidance. It is also a reminder that while these were unknown lands for the early explorers, this was not true for the original people who served as guides for the newcomers. Perhaps in our search for technical solutions, we have lost sight of the spirit needed to guide us in our search, and we need to turn to our ancient

Abstract

The authors discuss the factors regarding the reconciliation movement in reconciling Indigenous and Western Knowledge to improve child welfare practice with respect to Aboriginal peoples. In particular, a current initiative undertaken in collaboration with various First Nation communities in Alberta involved with the "Making Our Hearts Sing" Initiative is highlighted. This initiative aimed to build on collaboration among child welfare stakeholders and Aboriginal communities to examine issues relating to child welfare that would be more in keeping with traditional Aboriginal worldviews that could, at the same time, contribute to reconciliation, healing and increased community capacity.

guides once again. The question then becomes whether those who are or have been part of oppressive systems that had such a negative impact upon Aboriginal people can play a legitimate role in addressing such issues. This question calls upon the best of our collective wisdom. Perhaps the answer lies in finally merging Western knowledge with that of Aboriginal colleagues and elders and calling upon the lessons of the past to guide us in this journey to slay the "dragons" that lie in wait in those uncharted lands.

Our Aboriginal colleagues have been articulate in expressing their hope for a child welfare system that works for them. Their intent is clear and their objective is sound. It is also clear that the path to this objective is strewn with overt

obstacles, hidden dangers, fog laden forests, impish impediments, and lurking lunatics. Some of these may be easier to spot than others. They include explanatory discussions of oppression, colonialism, Euro-centrism, domination and exploitation. The impacts of systemic poverty and racial discrimination should be well known and require little elaboration. A Federal government that has much practice in evading its full responsibility and Provincial governments that collude with this evasion only perpetuate the dilemma. Canada's citizens are best bemused and at worst hostile toward Aboriginal people who are often viewed as benefiting from the largesse of "our tax dollars."

Meanwhile Aboriginal communities continue to lose their most precious resource, their children, to child welfare systems that, more often than not, end up destroying their affiliation with their people, leaving far too many as lost souls whose ultimate destination may be the street or jail. Our 'well-meaning' interventions seem to, only too rarely, create happy, healthy, and productive adults. Some appear well but end up not belonging anywhere or to anyone, disconnected from their communities of origin and not belonging to their adopted community (Richard, 2004).

To what do we attribute such tragedies? Research conducted under the umbrella of the "Making our Hearts Sing" (MOHS) initiative in Alberta has begun to reveal the impact of residential schools and foster care for Aboriginal children. As we reflect upon the seemingly inexorable flow of Aboriginal children into non-Aboriginal care, it is imperative to reflect upon our professional beliefs and assumptions in the delivery of child welfare services. It seems evident that current service and programmatic paradigms exist in direct opposition to

traditional Aboriginal ways of thinking. This has arisen repeatedly in our research, and will be described in greater detail later in this paper. It seems timely to reflect upon the foundations of such programs as Aboriginal people seek return to traditional worldviews and values to replace what they view as unworkable program models that only worsen their current situation.

Prevailing Western Paradigms

Several Western thinkers have influenced our society dramatically over the past few centuries and are worth revisiting in light of their legacy. This seems especially important at a time when Aboriginal people are seeking a return to holistic values at the interpersonal, ecological, and spiritual level. Such values stand in direct contrast to prevailing models of child welfare practice. These models are based upon our relatively recent Western paradigms that have greatly contributed to the development of modern civilization. It is suggested that this progress has been procured at a high price. The following brief overview reminds us of our philosophical origins.

European thought was strongly influenced by the Cartesian dichotomy of mind and body, which led man to view himself as an isolated ego within a material body, which he was then to control. Descartes fundamentally affected the western world by dividing nature into two separate and independent realms: that of mind and that of matter. This allowed scientists to treat matter as dead and separate from themselves, and to see the material world as a multitude of objects assembled into a huge machine. Newton held this mechanistic view and constructed his theory of mechanics on this basis, making it the foundation of classical physics.

While the Cartesian division and Newton's mechanistic worldview may have been beneficial in the development of technology, they have not been as applicable to the world of human relationships and services. Existential philosopher, Gabriel Marcel (1949), goes so far as to propose that our undue faith in technology has led us to a form of 'pantechnicism' - an abuse of the methods of science - by extending it into areas to which they do not apply, such as those of interpersonal relations, philosophy and ethics.

Taylor (1922) established the School of Scientific Management in the early 1900s, which advocated the scientific method as the most efficient way to work. It consisted in shifting all responsibility for the organization of work from the worker to the manager, selecting the most competent person to do the work, training the person to do the work efficiently, and then monitoring performance to ensure that the work was done correctly. This formed the basis for the creation of assembly line production. Despite his contribution to economic prosperity in the Western world, Taylor ended up a hated man and eventually went mad as people reacted to an increasingly dehumanized work environment. His influence continues and extends to the complex and often fragmented system of social services we have today.

Weber (1947) was the first to study and describe the characteristics of bureaucracy. Most remembered for his study of the positive aspects of bureaucratic arrangements, Weber also studied this phenomenon out of concern for the negative implications he foresaw. He worried even then about the inability of such systems to respond to changing circumstances, the dangers of a mindless and unquestioning

bureaucracy and the potentially dehumanizing effects on staff, especially those who worked at the lowest levels of the organization. The child welfare agencies formed in the twentieth century inevitably reflected these prevailing paradigms as the most efficient ways to organize work, becoming part of what Morgan (1986) describes as an inevitable societal movement toward increased mechanization, specialization and bureaucratization. Since that time the Child Welfare system has increasingly adopted the bureaucratic and management practices of that era. While these practices have generated great benefits for humankind, we suggest that they have their down sides. The pursuit of scientific and professional solutions to the problems of people seems at times to have estranged child welfare from the communities and the people it serves. While important gains were achieved by the application of scientific and rational approaches to complex social conditions, have we lost the balance that is necessary between community and bureaucratic systems? In the absence of any other familiar models and because of the constraints imposed by funders and policy makers on Aboriginal communities have they been forced into a paradigm alien to their innermost beliefs and values? Has our embrace of the bureaucratic paradigm with its recurrent themes of domination and rationality inadvertently aborted the Aboriginal search for autonomy and self-determination?

We believe these to be important questions for all of child welfare. Hardly a day goes by without a major child welfare crisis somewhere in the Western world. Most often there are calls for procedural solutions or resources to minimize the repetition of 'errors' that call attention to 'deficiencies'. Child Welfare reviews leave a legacy of increased paperwork reporting and information requirements, to

the point where the time spent on casework with clients is now far less than the time needed to document their interventions. New procedures, safeguards, protocols, and training and information requirements are promoted. New tools are introduced: risk assessment, sophisticated information systems, rigid timelines, and greater specification of responsibilities and reporting requirements, and new legislation to name only a few.

These changes and revisions seem to be more concerned with achieving the institutional role of gatekeepers to scarce resources than guaranteeing quality children's services. This seems to validate Weber's fear that growing areas of life would be subjected to decision-making according to technical rules, diminishing creative thinking and self-direction on the part of its members. The key dimensions of routine and hierarchical decision-making might eventually replace discretion, spontaneity, and personal moral choice. Studies about client and staff experiences with child protection services suggest that at least some of these fears have become reality in our child protection services (Lafrance, 2001).

Modern child welfare services are seen by many as hierarchical, overly specialized, and procedurally bound. This can result in service models that look for pathology rather than strength and that seek to maintain the status quo rather than to seek structural change. Ralston-Saul (1995) provides some early alerts to the parade of ideology to which the human services have been subjected: assertions are made as truth; there is contempt for considered critical reflection and a fear of debate. There is a need to counter this tendency. We need forums in which service recipients, service providers, policy makers, and academics can challenge and support each other to create more responsive services. The "Making our Hearts Sing" initiative in Alberta (MOHS) is finding signs of hope in Aboriginal communities engaged in a healing process. Youth are being asked to contribute to their community and to help other youth, and clients and front line social workers are beginning to be heard. Most importantly, the Elders are increasingly recognized as an important source of wisdom and experience. Important changes are taking place in Aboriginal communities – changes that must be attended to and carefully nurtured, as they may have the key for all of child welfare. We must be mindful that in spite of their best intentions, there are forces at play that work against their interests. Some overt, some subtle, and others are so deeply engrained in our psyche that we are barely conscious of their presence.

Reflections – Past and Present

If we are to break the cycle of destructive practices towards Aboriginal people that has nearly decimated their culture and their way of life, it seems important to reflect on Indigenous peoples' experiences with oppression and colonization over the past 500 years. This calls for an examination of deeply held assumptions, values, and attitudes that can have a sometimes unconscious, but always powerful impact on our behaviors. An alternative perspective is needed that builds greater understanding of the Aboriginal world view. The importance of reflection on this matter becomes even more important as we begin a new discourse initiated by such endeavors as the Reconciliation initiative begun in Niagara Falls in 2005[1].

It then seems relevant to revisit prevailing paradigms in which world views are expressed. Henderson (2000, p.12) compares the development of scientific paradigms with those that take place in the social sciences

as "context." As a paradigm reflects current scientific thought about the natural world, "context" reflects current social, political, and legal thought about human social order. He cites Roberto Unger, a Brazilian legal scholar who asserts, "If context allows the people in it to discover everything about the world that they can discover, then it is a natural context. If the context does not allow such movement then it is an artificial context derived from selected assumptions" (p.14). Many Aboriginal people have concluded that their survival lies in rediscovering the context that sustained them for many thousands of years before it was replaced with an artificial context. Unger's central thesis is that human empowerment depends on our ability to reduce the distance between what he calls context preserving routines (laws) and context transforming conflict. Human empowerment relies on the ability to (re)invent institutions and practices that manifest context revising freedoms. An improved understanding of the artificial context that has governed much of Aboriginal life may help inspire the creation of an alternative and more natural context and reduce the residue of colonialism; domination and oppression. Ultimately, this may construct a more just and equitable society.

Afro-Caribbean psychiatrist Frantz Fanon (Cited in Henderson, 2000) has defined colonized people as:

> . . . every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death . . . of its local cultural originality…which finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation that is with the culture of the mother country. The colonized person is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards. He becomes white as he renounces his blackness, his jungle. The

tensions between cultures and languages, inferiority complex, the assimilative choice are all elements of the brutal, subtle brutality of colonization (p.28).

This seems to reflect the conundrum that faces Indigenous people who wish to succeed in a prevailingly white society. We may be more politically 'correct' today, but we suggest that the following contains assumptions and beliefs about Aboriginal people in Canada that continue to exert greater influence than we may realize. The following summary of proceedings of a Joint-Church Delegation of the Indian and Eskimo Residential School Commission (1930) reveals some assumptions and beliefs that underlie an important policy discussion about the education of Aboriginal people that may be worthwhile revisiting (RG 10, volume 6730, file 169-62, pt. 2). The following described the prevailing belief about the perspective of Aboriginal people on the superiority of European culture vis-à-vis the forces of nature.

> . . . so far as the Indian himself is concerned, he has already seen with his own eyes that many of the white man's ways are superior to his own. He has seen, for instance, that the white man's methods and education have given him control over many of the forces of nature and over many of these circumstances of life (p.1).

The delegation then describes two fundamental and contradictory assumptions about Aboriginal people that had far reaching implications for shaping policy on Aboriginal education;

> . . . further as to the question of providing the best system of education for the Indigenous people of this country is one which had to be faced in other parts of the world where superior races invaded and possessed the territories occupied by similar peoples. Careful consideration is demanded in

connection with two other important factors which have a direct bearing on the subject. The first is as to whether the Indians existing need is to be taken as the foundation upon which our education is to be built and by which it would, in effect, be limited. Two, are we to assume that the white man's education is the most perfect yet devised by the ingenuity of man and impose that education upon them without necessarily considering whether, in fact, it is the best, the form best suited to their capacity or their needs. Both methods have been employed in dealing with various primitive peoples in other parts of the world and as might be expected, with various results (p.1).

The policy decision focused on a choice between building on the strengths of Aboriginal people and "grafting onto the deeply rooted stock of what already exists" or assuming that there was nothing worth building on. It was acknowledged, "The Indians successfully occupied this continent for 12,000 or possibly, 20,000 years . . . they have displayed unsurpassed human qualities of loyalty to unseen powers and adaptability to the practical; have a living past capable of energizing their present and "any system of education which destroys all their faith in their own institutions and traditions will create in them, a sense of permanent inferiority and an unfortunate belief that everything which is peculiarly your own is not only worthless but an obstacle to progress" (RG 10, volume 6730, file 169-62, pt.2). Others contended that the only hope for progress among Indigenous people lay in "the complete application to their condition of the western consciousness, experience, knowledge, and skill." It was only thus that they could benefit from "the education needed to advance them to higher levels of civilization and to enable them to use to their own advantage, the natural resources which surround them." The policy positions were clear (p.2).

Interestingly and in contradiction to the decision ultimately taken, the church societies considered the traditional qualities of Aboriginal people as worth preserving. These are quoted verbatim:

1. "The quality of loyalty to family and friends which is capable of expansion into loyalty to a wider circle.

2. The deep love of children from which can be developed the strong desire to help the children of the race to be well-born.

3. The generosity and hospitality which are outstanding characteristics of the Indian races which may be developed as some of the finer elements of social living.

4. The traditional quality of courage and admiration of brave leadership and which can be used to spur the young Indian on in the face of discouragement and the hard grind of monotonous routine.

5. The engrafted dignity and serenity of the leaders of the race and which should be preserved as a help in restoring to the hectic world in which we live, the poise and calm of which we have been robbed by our numerous mechanical inventions" (RG 10, volume 6730, file 169-62, pt.2, p.3).

Regrettably, such insights did little to challenge prevailing assumptions and beliefs that held the Aboriginal people to be in need of civilizing and Christianizing. One cannot help but wonder how differently the lives of Canadian people might have evolved if such beliefs had prevailed in the education and care of Aboriginal children. Ironically a residential school study in Saskatchewan (Caldwell, 1967) describes the experience of Aboriginal people

in the residential schools of Canada that flowed from this policy decision. The residential school system failed to meet the total needs of the child because it failed to individualize, using sleeping, eating, recreation, academic training, spiritual training, and discipline to force compliance rather than developing the children. This was clearly a system designed to overlook the qualities that been so clearly acknowledged. Yet in spite of efforts to extinguish Aboriginal people and early predictions of their demise, they have been able to sustain much of their way despite ongoing assaults for the past 500 years.

While important policy and legislative changes have been made to support greater autonomy for Aboriginal child welfare programs in the recent past, we are suggesting that this is an essential, but not sufficient condition for self-determination in the delivery of such services. Historian Lise Noel (cited in Henderson, 2000, p.29) reminds us that systemic colonization is grounded in intolerance. This intolerance comes from unconscious assumptions that underlie "normal institutional rules and collective reactions." It is a consequence of following these rules and accepting these reactions in everyday life. In systemic colonization, Noel suggests that no single source of oppression or demeaning can be assigned causal or moral primacy. These are imbedded in the consciousness of all and so engrained in our day to day lives that if the oppressed cannot point to any single form of oppression, then the oppressor and his consciousness become invisible. In short, if fundamental change is to take place, we need a collective and intensive reflection on what is taking place in our souls.

Young (cited in Henderson, 2000, p.30) poses a conundrum for those who are assigned to the dominant groups of society.

The oppressor has no apparent existence. Not only does he not identify himself as such, but he is not even supposed to have his own reality. His presence is so immediate and dense and his universe coincides so fully with the Universe that he becomes invisible. Rarely seen, rarely named, he is unique nonetheless and having a full existence as the keeper of the word. He is the supreme programmer who confers various degrees of existence on those who are different from himself…as the embodiment of the universal, the dominator is also the only Subject, the Individual, who never being considered to belong to a particular group can study those impersonal categories of the population who pose a "problem", represent a "question", constitute a "case" or simply have a condition".

The complexities involved in reconciliation with Aboriginal people by members of the dominant group are no simple matter. We are finding that to support Aboriginal self determination in the development of policies and practices that are in keeping with Aboriginal traditions and beliefs calls for an uncommon degree of humility and a high degree of receptivity to different ways of thinking. This task is further complicated by the reality that most Aboriginal professionals have been educated and socialized in mainstream systems for practice in child welfare systems. While many are gaining greater understanding of their heritage, they cannot but be influenced by the educational and socialization system to which they have been exposed, resulting in what Little Bear (2000) calls "jagged colonialism." Aboriginal communities are being challenged to become even more aware of their internalized oppression and to create social work practice that is congruent with their traditional worldview and values. This calls upon the best of the community's collective wisdom. For those who wish to support community efforts

perhaps the answer lies in finally accepting the wisdom of Aboriginal colleagues and elders as our guides in this journey. Carniol (2005) describes how Aboriginal social work practitioners and tradition teachers have influenced him as a teacher and practitioner.

They have influenced me in a very profound way. One of my teachers in this area is an Anishnabe Elder. Her Aboriginal name is Waubauno Kwe. Her English name is Barbara Riley. I first met her at a workshop and as I heard her speak and saw the way she interacted with the workshop participants, I found myself being very open to the kind of teachings that she was providing. I discovered that Aboriginal cultures are very sophisticated and intricate. I was amazed at the extent to which I had internalized the privilege of mainstream culture that has devalued and created false images of Aboriginal culture. I am very grateful to her for her willingness to become one of my mentors. She is responsible for my traveling along a road where I learned much more about Aboriginal world views, and realized that when it comes to helping people, there is a whole area of wisdom that Aboriginal culture can offer us (p.2).

The complexity of understanding a different life perspective can be daunting when the dominant society so prevails that we are unaware of our contribution to the oppression of Aboriginal people. This is evident when new knowledge derived from work with Aboriginal people fails to resonate at a sufficiently deep level to create greater understanding. Our partnerships demand an authentic sharing of knowledge and an intensive collaboration in creating new paths. Mutual respect and recognition of the integrity of the 'natural' Aboriginal cultural context must be our guides as we journey together.

The "Making Our Hearts Sing" initiative in Alberta clearly tells us that community perceptions about new solutions to child welfare issues in Aboriginal communities must begin with human rather than technocratic responses. Our collaboration premised on the assumption that the cultural integrity of First Nations conflicts with prevalent approaches to the delivery of child welfare services. The holistic and flexible models favored by Aboriginal families and communities differ greatly from the specialized and often rigid practice models that prevail in most of child welfare. Much as the collective ignorance demonstrated by global unconsciousness to the current ecological and economic sustainability crisis, there seems to be a collective inertia in response to the historical and contemporary structures of violence toward families and children. We are learning from the stories gathered in our work that the outcomes of current child welfare interventions for many Aboriginal children have been abysmal and in some respects worse than those of the residential school system. Survivors from both the residential school system readily admit that those who were placed in foster care as the only Aboriginal child in a white community were worse off because they were deprived of the companionship of their peers for most of their childhood. It is suggested that the fundamental reasons contributed to this tragedy continue to be present. These include a lack of funding to support and sustain Aboriginal families in their communities, and the primary allocation of funds that supports the break up families and the placement of the children with non-Aboriginal caregivers. As stated by John S. Milloy in a presentation at a conference on Reconciliation in Child Welfare gathering held in Niagara Falls titled "How Do Bad Things Happen when Good People have Good Intentions?"

Doing good is apparently better than doing nothing well – and so hangs the tale of the residential school system, and the child welfare system too, which could only afford child protection (removal of children from their families) rather than prevention activity (Reconciliation Movement, 2006).

This has been a fundamental flaw since the promulgation of the Indian Act. In the beginning the Federal government provided insufficient funds to religious organizations to serve Aboriginal children removed from their homes while providing minimal resources to maintain children in their homes and support their families. This same policy direction laid the foundation for the "60's scoop," as provincial authorities removed children from their communities and federal authorities limited their contribution to reimbursing the provinces for out of home care by primarily white caregivers. The policy remains essentially unchanged today in spite of delegated Child Welfare authority to First Nations. Canada pays full costs to First Nation agencies for the removal of children and precious little for supporting and preserving families, perpetuating a legacy that continues to escalate. In this sense the only change that has taken place in over 130 years has been the players. We have gone from missionaries, Indian agents, Royal Canadian Mounted Police to provincial social workers and to First Nation Agencies. Until fundamental change occurs at the fiscal and program policy level with the Federal and Provincial Authorities we condemn many well intended people to a cynical system that refuses to contemplate the havoc it continues to create and the resulting social and economic costs.

When the expression 60's scoop was first coined based on information compiled by Johnson (1983), there were about 3000 Aboriginal children in care. In spite of the best efforts of many the numbers have escalated to 22,500 First Nations children in care in all of Canada (Bennett & Blackstock, 2002). They place this figure in context by indicating that in 1940 there were approximately 8,000 First Nations Children in residential schools when these were in full operation. What can be done to curtail such an alarming trend when the programmatic and legal solutions underway are failing to staunch the loss of children to family and community? Need we not look in an entirely different direction?

As Aboriginal people seek to renew and invigorate their own spirituality as a source of strength, perhaps social work should also look deeply into its own spiritual roots. Zapf (2003) suggests that as a profession seeking to improve its status as evidence based discipline, social work may have avoided spiritual issues because they were perceived as unscientific. This pattern is changing as social workers express a renewed interest in spirituality. Zapf (2003) cites Drouin (2002, p.34) who attributes this renewal to "a longing for profound and meaningful connections to each other, to ourselves, and to something greater than ourselves" that has arisen because the Western mindset of individualism and materialism has ruined the environment and destroyed community. He sees evidence of "growing spiritual longing" in social work practitioners, in clients, and in Western society as a whole (p.36).

Zapf (1999a) suggests that while some authors have attempted to include traditional knowledge or "Aboriginal theory" as part of the knowledge base for mainstream social work practices any assumption of traditional knowledge as just another theory base disguises a fundamental

difference in world view. Morrissette, McKenzie, & Morrissette (1993) express the essence of this difference as follows:

While Aboriginal people do not embrace a single philosophy, there are fundamental differences between the dominant Euro-Canadian and traditional Aboriginal societies, and these have their roots in differing perceptions of one's relationship with the universe and the Creator (p. 93).

Hart (1996) compares Western and Aboriginal approaches as follows:

> Western models of healing separate and detach individuals from their social, physical, and spiritual environments, isolating "patients" for treatment purposes and then re-introducing them into the world. Traditional healers are concerned with balancing emotional, physical, mental, spiritual, aspects of people, the environment, and the spirit world (p. 63).

Social work has begun to incorporate spirituality as part of its knowledge base and practice foundation. Zapf (2003) warns of the danger in limiting our understanding of spirituality to a component of the person, pointing to Aboriginal social work and traditional healing that are founded on a spiritual sense of interconnectedness. He asks if spirituality might not be a key to expanding our understanding of the person/environment relationship, the profound connections between ourselves and the world around us.

PART II - POTENTIALITIES

Making our Hearts Sing

The Making our Hearts Sing (MOHS) Initiative in Alberta took up this challenge by aiming to build collaboration among child welfare stakeholders and Aboriginal communities to examine issues relating to child welfare in their communities and create innovative, effective and practical approaches to child welfare that are more in keeping with traditional Aboriginal worldviews and may contribute to reconciliation, healing and increased community capacity. To this end, the research represented collaboration between the Alberta Ministry of Children's Services, the University of Calgary Faculty of Social Work, the Blood Reserve, the Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation and Region 10 (Métis Settlements) Child and Family Services Authority.

MOHS Methodology

Appreciative inquiry was selected as the guiding methodology for the study, as it provided a good fit with the research goals and Aboriginal culture. First, Appreciative inquiry moves away from a problem focus to a participatory, strengths perspective. Through this approach, people collectively celebrate their accomplishments, build on their successes and act upon their dreams and wishes for the future (Elliot, 1999; Hammond, 1996). This strengths approach is consistent with calls to move away from deficit approaches to understanding Aboriginal communities towards approaches that highlight the competence and resiliency of Aboriginal people and can help to design new and culturally-meaningful approaches to community needs (McShane & Hastings, 2004).

Second, the Appreciative Inquiry process is a participatory approach that provides a voice to Aboriginal perspectives, which have traditionally been silenced (Sinclair, 2003). Third, storytelling is the primary data collection approach of Appreciative Inquiry, a practice that is congruent with the Aboriginal oral tradition. Storytelling has also been conceptualized as

a consciousness raising type of activity that allows people to relate to each other, develop greater self-awareness, break the silence, and contextualize their experiences from their own worldview (Abosolon & Willett, 2004). In summary, the Appreciative Inquiry approach provides a holistic and participatory approach that values multiple ways of knowing and working collaboratively from a strengths perspective towards a shared vision. It was hoped that this approach would help generate community empowered approaches to child welfare that could serve as exemplars for other Aboriginal communities.

Data Collection

Storytelling or unstructured interviews in the form of gatherings or sharing circles were used to collect data from the project. Simply put, a sharing circle begins with an open-ended question, in this case the research questions and gathering objectives. Then, each participant in the circle has the opportunity to share his or her perspective on the question or issue in a round robin format. The gatherings focused on the implications of the legacy of residential schools for child welfare, developing community and youth leadership, and sharing and learning from the gatherings. The specific focus of the gatherings in each community varied according to community needs and interests. Over 250 community members, leaders, professionals and elders were involved as participants in a total of seven gatherings in the three communities. The gatherings and stories were audio recorded and transcribed, and in many cases, also filmed.

The community was approached by the project steering committee, and a meeting arranged with appropriate community leaders, including elders, for open discussion about the research and partnership potential. Thus, appropriate protocols for collaboration and community involvement were established with each community. The Kainai Legislative Initiative of the Blood Tribe became a major community partner in the project. The Initiative's mandate is to have jurisdiction and law-making authority with respect to Child, Youth, and Family Services in their community. The project provided an opportunity for collaboration and the advancement of their work in establishing relevant and culturally appropriate services to their community. Building on their earlier work, this research project focused on the question, "to improve the utilization of traditional knowledge in service delivery, we need to……." Three gatherings were conducted using an open spaces facilitation approach, which engages participants for the collection of ideas and promotes a creative thinking process. The first two gatherings focused on data gathering in implementing traditional knowledge in the child welfare services and the last session celebrated and received recommendations primarily from the elders. The gatherings were extremely successful and approximately 170 people participated.

MOHS found considerable synergy between the voices of these authors such as Zapf and Hart, and the messages derived from community participants' renewed vision for child welfare services. Existing programs are not working as well they could, as indicated by the rising number of Aboriginal children in care. Many are concerned that the child welfare experience may inadvertently parallel the colonial experience of residential schools and may have similar long-term negative ramifications for Aboriginal communities. The impact for those who have experienced either or both systems is evident in the alarming statistics of Aboriginal people's continued trauma as reflected by high rates

of suicide, poverty, substance abuse, family violence, family breakdown, school drop out, and escalating child welfare caseloads in Aboriginal communities.

While many Aboriginal child welfare agencies are seeking models of practice that are more consistent with their worldviews to counter these trends, there is a dearth of "new" models that incorporate "old" ways to respond to an increased understanding of the impact of colonization, residential school experiences and the 60's scoop on Aboriginal communities and families. A consensus is evolving many Indigenous communities that new approaches to child welfare intervention and prevention founded on a framework of analysis that provides an understanding of the history and current reality of Aboriginal people and culture are needed. Such a new framework is a necessary foundation to facilitate Aboriginal ownership and leadership in child welfare.

The challenge is to learn from joint efforts with Aboriginal communities that will not only create new insights, but new knowledge that can be readily applied to real world situations. MOHS took up this challenge by building collaboration between child welfare stakeholders and Aboriginal communities to create innovative, effective and practical approaches to child welfare that are more in keeping with traditional Aboriginal worldviews and that contribute to reconciliation, healing and increased community capacity. The questions guiding the study were focused on the historical effects of the residential school experience on the identity of Aboriginal children, families and communities and a comparison with the effects of placement in child welfare services on the identity of Aboriginal children, families and communities.

The following section summarizes some

of the work, insight and learning from this collaborative endeavor with the Blood Reserve in Southern Alberta. The creation of a new vision is not without its challenges. On the one hand, there is a strong and continuing desire among many Aboriginal people and their allies to build upon traditional Aboriginal strengths and values such as; courage, respect for each other and for nature, the oral tradition and the wisdom of the elders, a deep connection with each other and mother earth, a consistent application of spirituality to all of life. Cultural camps and some models of practice provide concrete examples of the power of these concepts to improve daily life.

On the other hand, the loss of culture and tradition resulting from colonisation continues to affect the lives of Aboriginal people, and 'Western' people are often unaware of the oppressive impact of their assumptions, beliefs and attitudes toward Aboriginal people. The ultimate objective of the MOHS initiative is to create an opportunity for conversation and understanding. Sahtouris (1992: p.1) a planet biologist, tells of an ancient prophesy that illustrates more fully the nature of the conversation;

Within the ancient Hopi Indian Prophecy is told the history of the Red and White brothers, sons of the Earth Mother and the Great Spirit who gave them different missions. The Red Brother was to stay at home and keep the land in sacred trust while the White Brother went abroad to record things and make inventions. One day the White Brother was to return and share his inventions in a spirit of respect for the wisdom his Red Brother had gained. It was told that his inventions would include cobwebs through which people could speak to each other from house to house across mountains, even with all doors and windows closed; there would be carriages crossing the

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sky on invisible roads, and eventually a gourd of ashes that when dropped would scorch the earth and even the fishes in the sea. If the White Brother's ego grew so large in making these inventions that he would not listen to the wisdom of the Red Brother, he would bring this world to an end in the Great purification of nature. Only a few would survive to bring forth the next world in which there would again be abundance and harmony.

Indigenous elders tell us that the time for this to happen is near and that the need for dialogue is urgent and compelling.

It seems clear to us that the adoption of an overly bureaucratic and legalistic paradigm has greatly rigidified practice by the introduction of overly specialized roles, top down and fiscally driven policies, increasing disconnection from community, overly prescriptive standards and other trappings of technologically based approaches. These have served to distance child welfare agencies from those they serve. Yet these models are often forced upon Aboriginal community service providers, further impairing the community aspirations for greater autonomy and self-determination. The communities involved in MOHS initiative are clear about the essential values and philosophy that must guide the development of programs and services. They stress the importance of shared parenting and community responsibility for children, the importance of language as a source of renewed culture, knowledge of history and tradition as an essential element of identity, the importance of kinship and connection to each other and a respectful approach to the planet. The problem is that the chasm between what Aboriginal communities envision and the realities of funding and policy restrictions are enormous. The gap in our understanding

is vaster than initially envisioned by some of the principals in MOHS. While we continue to be hopeful of finding new ways as to serve families and children as envisioned, we are less naïve than we may have been a year ago. Little Bear (2000) speaks to the collision of jagged worldviews and helps us to understand the hazards of understanding each other. The 'western' worldview is more linear than holistic, hierarchical and specialised rather than generalised, more materialistic and self-interested than sharing, less concerned about relationships and kindness than competitiveness, more aggressive than respectful, and more focussed on external sources of control and authority than on the development of internal controls. Therein lays the challenge in creating greater understanding.

Our work thus has brought us further along in our journey with communities, planners, practitioners, leaders and elders to find this understanding, but we have much more to learn. The communities' views of services that would help them can be far removed from current models of practice. The following illustrate some of the themes that arose in community meetings. It is important to recognize the extent to which the assumptions, values and beliefs upon which they are based differ from the prevailing approaches described in Part I of this chapter and their inherent potential for positive change. While they are distant from many of mainstream child welfare, we believe that they offer fundamentally human approaches that may surpass our current (over) reliance on technocratic solutions.

Messages from community

The most important message from the community gatherings was that the incorporation of cultural practices that support

important familial and community kinship systems is critical to a process of recovery. In our view, this has two prerequisites. The first is that Canada and the Provinces must own their responsibility to change funding and legislation in ways that mitigate the impact of colonial policies on Aboriginal communities, families, and children, and, allow for a higher degree of self-determination in charting their collective future. The second is that Aboriginal people must intensify their awareness of the depth of colonization and its impact on their communities, especially on the children and youth who remain at high risk. Unless these are confronted, the disconnection from Aboriginal beliefs and values and the resulting devaluing of their child rearing and human development practices can only be perpetuated. An approach to child welfare consistent with the Aboriginal culture would focus on family and collective human relationships. It would strengthen a collective approach to child care responsibilities that encompasses the cultural continuity of a people. Cultural continuity is the cornerstone for the amelioration of the most negative and destructive impact of colonization. Socialization and educational theories and practices are fundamental to the survival of parenting practices for any cultural and societal group. In fact, they are essential to the group's meaning of life and the purpose of their existence. These essential elements must be supported to interrupt the cycles of lateral violence in First Nations communities.

The major clusters of themes that emerged from these gatherings express the cultural and societal crisis of the community and its understanding of the path of recovery. These clusters are: (1) the recovery and affirmation of cultural and societal values (way of life) and (2) the structural violence of colonial policies and practices.

The first cluster of themes focused on identity, relationships, and the interconnectedness of language with a way of life supported by the teachings of the elders, the passing on of stories which are their knowledge system (education), and the importance of kinship systems as important components of responsibility for child care, socialization and education. The second cluster of themes reflected the realities of their lived experience with colonial violence, the structural violence of poverty and marginalization, unemployment and racism, with the attending issues of substance abuse and lateral violence among community and family members

Cluster One – Themes relating to the recovery and affirmation of culture and a way of life

1. Making a path for children so that they can live

 The cultural identity of the tribe is the most significant component in revitalizing and affirming traditional methods of child care. Tribal identity is based upon a common worldview of the nature of human beings, and their relationship to nature. These primary relationships shape the nature of relationships within family and community. The incorporation of the physical and metaphysical world, family, and ancestors is fundamental to kinship relations. The separation and disconnection of people from the essence of their existence has been the most profound impact of residential schools and child welfare systems, as the unity and wholeness of an all inclusive universe is at the heart of Aboriginal peoples' connection to their cultural and social identity.

The community told us that the teachings and stories must be once again told to the children, and that "our children must know who they are."

The children must be given their cultural names; this is what connects them with the universe, the land, their community, and their family. Most importantly, this is what provides them with a place from which to securely participate in the world as they draw on the kinship relations from which their names are derived. Reuniting and affirming these relational connections and the responsibilities imbued in these relationships is the essential function of cultural and social identity.

The stories must be told in the original language. Language reflects the philosophical system of the people and evokes a relational perspective which mirrors their sacred world (Bastien, 2004). It reflects the meanings ascribed to existence, the purpose of relationships, and the responsibilities inherent in these connections. It provides a way of interpreting the world in which they live (Bastien, 2004). Language guides the epistemology and pedagogical practices of the Tribe; it is instrumental in creating knowledge and creating reality (Bastien, 2004). It is the medium for incorporating knowledge systems and creating identity. New responsibilities, organizational structures, programs, and services can flow from this connection to traditional knowledge and the responsibilities of the collective. Inclusion and connection are integral to the way of life and identity of indigenous people and can serve to inform revitalized programs and services. More specifically, participants stressed the importance of revisiting education by:

- Incorporating indigenous methods of research.
- Recording and documenting traditional knowledge.
- Rethinking educational programs.
- Involving the community in changing the social environment.

- Making language education mandatory.
- Educating young parents.

2. Collective recovery through participating in indigenous culture

The disruption to Aboriginal family and community life is evident in the fragmentation of the way of life and worldview of the community. Affirming attachment to family and community life, parental bonding, kindness, and nurturing of children as essential components of service and program delivery is reflected in the principles of Aboriginal culture. Recent scientific findings about the nature of reality reveal that everything is related to everything else in the universe. In other words, material objects are no longer perceived as independent entities but as a concentration of energy of the quantum field. This is not new knowledge to indigenous people who have always understood the universe to be the indivisible whole that quantum physics now understands. This indivisible wholeness of universe is the source of Aboriginal spirituality. The cultural principles and assumptions of Aboriginality , a way of life based on spirituality as the source of all relationships, calls upon all people to assume responsibility for all relationships.

An Indigenous human development approach based on collective responsibilities must guide the development of programs and services for families and children. It must begin with those who are most vulnerable and who contain the greatest hope for a new era for Aboriginal people, the children. The participants were adamant that language is mandatory and that their stories form the foundation of knowledge systems, of inclusiveness and harmony, and of the knowledge by which to guide the interpretation of experience. Language provides the forum and medium for speakers to call into

existence a world of relationships and alliances. This calls for a social and spiritual order that places them in a universal social system in which to live their lives. This social system in its essence consists of relationships held together by an affinity to all of life and an intention for survival. Collectively, it is being responsible for the health and peace of all. Communal well being is a collective sacred responsibility and is the essence of the purpose for living. Children must be taught about their ancestors, their history, and their alliances through story, ceremony, and language. Cultural continuity means integrating tribal ways into everyday life, and it is in this experience that the identity of Indigenous people can best be understood.

The participants valued coming together in feast and gatherings to renew and revitalize communal values and the affinity of kinship systems. Such gatherings are the traditional methods for gathering and promoting collective knowledge and wisdom. They renew and strengthen collective responsibility and through consensus call for action to address the challenges of the day. Gatherings revitalize traditional ways for strengthening the affinity of collective and family ties, affirming and utilizing knowledge building, decreasing external dependencies, developing indigenous leadership and practices, and creating new sources of knowledge for recovery.

Spirituality is expressed as an ontological responsibility for strengthening family and kinship alliances that create a more sustainable and thriving community, with a focus on the wisdom of the elders and the potential for a more hopeful future for children and youth. It is based upon traditional teaching and learning, with each person taking responsibility for the various roles of family and community. It is a

method of forging new alliances, kinships and coming to know your relatives. Spirituality is having respectful care for family, elder, children, parents, and grandparents. Respect is striving to preserve the sacred nature of all relationships that life holds for every one and everything and between every one and everything. It is the "all my relatives" of the Tribe. This means to live in ceremony, to be respectful and to honor all relationships as the source of communal strength. Spirituality is living and being in a way with life which includes the sacred. The community stressed the importance of the following practices to support and affirm this more spiritual way of life:

- Spirituality expressed in sacred ways of prayer
- Smudging
- Teachings
- Positive attitudes
- Feasts and gatherings
- Involving men in a healing process as well
- Creating employment to increase self-reliance
- Taking responsibility for ourselves
- Education
- Knowing and living values
- Ceremonies
- Knowing relatives
- Creating harmony through traditional activities

3. Living in ceremony demonstrates traditional knowledge and teaching

The traditional teachings about collective responsibilities are the guiding principles for everyday living. They have a transformational impact on community life and social organization, and will improve the quality of life for all members. The hope is that families

and community will have stronger connections because of a more culturally appropriate approach and the use of their indigenous language. This approach is based on coming together as a nation in a return to traditional teachings led by the elders and a process governed by communal values. Culture is expected to address many of the hurdles and challenges facing Aboriginal people because it is premised on the authenticity and integrity of traditional teachings, as opposed to a bi-cultural model. Implementing and affirming a cultural approach and reconstructing social systems and community collective responsibilities will form the context for education, research, and the creation of more culturally appropriate policies and services.

A comprehensive strategy guided by traditional principles of collective responsibility will under gird our community development approach. Community awareness, education, and training for Tribal entities are essential for the implementation of policy and program changes. The participants stressed the urgency of developing programs where youth are taught by elders and the importance of social workers trained in Aboriginal culture if the vision of the community is to be realized. The revitalization and affirmation of cultural identities is seen as the long term solutions for child welfare and youth at risk. This calls for "Aatsimihkasin" which means 'living in a sacred manner". The following themes sum up community perceptions of issues that must be addressed to deal with impact of structural violence.

- Long term foster care solutions
- Loving each other
- Creating laws to protect adopted children
- Looking after men's wellness

- Ensuring adequate housing
- Facing the reality of alcohol and drug abuse
- Bringing together youth and elders
- Building community
- Supporting families

Cluster 2: Themes Related to the Structural Impact of Colonization and Collective Trauma

The belief that power and control are central to mastery over other men and nature has guided the evolution of progress throughout the Western world. Colonialism has made Indigenous nations dependent as they were stripped of their own resources, means of economic sustainability and ways of knowledge production, leaving them a legacy of abuse and violence that rendered them powerlessness and demoralized. This continues in policies of apartheid, marginalization, economic dependency, stigmatization, and stereotyping, the very fabric of policies that initiated the process of genocide. The violence that continues on reserves in Canada includes overt physical violence, structural violence and psycho-spiritual violence. This violence terrorizes and re-traumatizes communities with programs structured on the very tenets of genocide; hierarchy, paternalism, patriarchy, power, control, rationality and empiricism. These tenets continue to fragment and isolate individuals, creating community despair and hopelessness that put on-reserve First Nations in seventy-ninth place in the world on the quality of life index compared with most Canadians who enjoy first place (Blackstock & Bennett, 2002). Poverty, inadequate housing, and substance abuse are the leading factors for child welfare involvement (Blackstock & Trocme, 2005). These factors have their roots in the structural

violence of genocide and herein lay the fallacy for those who propose assimilation, adaptation, rehabilitation, reconciliation, accommodation, and advocacy as the only measures that need to be taken. The following factors were mentioned by community members as needing urgent attention and action:

- Poverty
- Adequate housing
- Protecting adopted children by keeping them connected to us
- Healing
- Alcohol Abuse
- Dealing with violence
- Respect for self
- Accountability for education funding
- Tackling the problem of gang violence
- Need for parental involvement planning needed programs
- Heath and well being of elders.
- Involving elders in programs and services.

Authors' Perceptions of the Participants Responses

- The participants that attended these gatherings have a clear understanding of the destruction of their way of life, and the current challenges of cultural continuity and collective survival.
- They also know that countering genocidal impacts and becoming a thriving community depends on the continuity of their cultural ways, kinship systems, and fulfillment of their tribal responsibilities.
- It is important to reinstitute social programs and structures that support kinship relational roles and responsibilities, as the continuity of kinship is critical to the well-being and survival of the community and

the foundation of identity as Aboriginal people.

- Our challenge is to continue the collaboration and take steps to implement community recommendations

Authors' Reflections on Participants' Responses

1. Anti- colonial epistemologies, methodologies and pedagogies are required to affirm, rediscover and reconstruct the knowledge systems and social organizations of First Nation people. The epistemologies reaffirm cultural assumptions, the required validity for their lived experience. The context, reality, and aspirations of First Nation People must become integrated in research and knowledge production as opposed the current imbalance in power relationships that perpetuate the construction of knowledge based upon colonial assumptions that serve only to maintain the oppression.

2. Social work education and practice must develop curricula that support structural change and reflect anti oppressive practice by transforming conceptual frameworks in ways that support Aboriginal aspirations and right to self-determination.

Next Steps for the MOHS Project

- Work with Elders and ceremonialists in the construction of knowledge systems, conceptual frameworks and pedagogy for social work practice based on cultural integrity;
- Develop new program models based on community guidance that will be in harmony with the Aboriginal way of life and inform a new legislative framework;

- Evaluate existing models that offer promise for broader application;

- Establish demonstration projects to test out and validate the community recommendations where needed;

- Develop curriculum for First Nation social work leadership and organizational change;

- Develop training programs for human services workers working with First Nation communities that pursue cultural continuity as their primary objective.

POSTSCRIPT

Our challenge is to find a greater balance between the well known tendencies of bureaucratic system which includes the notion that the "more perfectly the bureaucracy is 'dehumanized,' the more completely it succeeds in eliminating from official business love, hatred, and all purely personal, irrational and emotional elements which escape calculation. This is the specific nature of bureaucracy and it is appraised as its special virtue" (Elwell, retrieved July 27, 2006). According to Weber, because bureaucracy is a form of organization superior to all others, further bureaucratization and rationalization may be an inescapable fate. "Without this form of (social) technology the industrialized countries could not have reached the heights of extravagance and wealth that they currently enjoy. All indications are that they will continue to grow in size and scope" (Elwell, retrieved July 27, 2006).

Weber wrote of the evolution of an iron cage, a technically ordered, rigid, dehumanized society. Our challenge will be to avoid the pitfalls that Weber expressed when he speculated on the other future possibilities of industrial systems. Weber had a foreboding of an "iron cage" of bureaucracy and rationality, but he recognized that human beings are not mere subjects molded by socio-cultural forces. We are both creatures and creators of socio-cultural systems. And even in a socio-cultural system that increasingly institutionalizes and rewards goal oriented rational behavior in pursuit of wealth and material symbols of status there are other possibilities.

No one knows who will live in this cage in the future, or whether at the end of this tremendous development entirely new prophets will arise, or there will be a great rebirth of old ideas and ideals or, if neither, mechanized petrification embellished with a sort of convulsive self-importance. For of the last stage of this cultural development, it might well be truly said: 'Specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart; this nullity imagines that it has obtained a level of civilization never before achieved (Elwell, Retrieved July 27, 2006).

This article is an attempt to bring together the perspectives of the authors who come from very different places and hopefully reflects the overall intent of "Making our Hearts Sing." It is not an easy journey to learn how the world appears to another person or people. But we believe it to be a necessary one. It is our hope that the message of Aboriginal people about the importance of spirit and heart in all of our lives is important in countering the negative tendencies of the 'iron cage' that we are too often creating. Lest it appear that we can easily change our perspectives in this journey through uncharted land, an ancient Amazonian legend provides a further source of wisdom. According to the legend, the blue-black Rio Negro and the creamy, caramel-colored Rio Solimões, run side by side, without mixing at the mouth of the Amazon River. The waters of the two rivers differ in temperature, clarity,

density, and acidity, and continue side by side for miles before becoming the Amazon. Both rivers converge at one point but each retains its essential quality and characteristics. The resulting foam is new knowledge that would not exist if the rivers had not met. Our hope is that similarly the new knowledge generated by our coming together will allow Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people to retain their essential qualities, while creating new solutions that will better serve all children and families.

Endnotes

1. The Reconciliation Initiative seeks to advance understanding the impact of child welfare interventions on Aboriginal families and communities in Canada and the United States, as well as examining the values and beliefs that underlie Indigenous and mainstream approaches to child welfare, and to identify the principles for a renewed approach to child welfare respecting Indigenous children at national and local levels. In an effort to make a difference for Indigenous children, youth and families over 200 leaders in child welfare from Canada and abroad, gathered in Niagara Falls in 2005, Canada, to develop and design the framework for a Reconciliation Movement in North America. As part of this process the groups' collective visioning has shaped the wisdom and perspectives that resulted in the Reconciliation in Child Welfare: Touchstones of Hope for Indigenous Children, Youth and Families document http://www. reconciliationmovement.org/docs/Touchstones_of_ Hope.pdf.

Bios

Jean Lafrance has been involved in child welfare work for over 42 years, beginning as front line social work in northern Alberta in 1964 and serving in various leadership roles in northern, central and southern Alberta as well as in Edmonton and Calgary. He has also worked in staff development, policy and program development and strategic planning as an Assistant Deputy Minister, capping his 33 years in government as Alberta's Provincial Children's Advocate. He earned an MSW at Carleton University in 1970 and a PhD in Social Work from the University of Southern California in 1993. He joined the Faculty of Social Work with the University of Calgary in 1997 where is now an Associate Professor with a keen interest in child welfare work with Aboriginal communities.

Betty Bastien works with the Access division at the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Calgary. She is Piikani and resides on the Blood Reserve, has taught and done curriculum design at Red Crow Community College in the Native Studies Department at the University of Lethbridge, and has conducted research on child development theories, child welfare, and Indigenous research methodologies. Betty was co-chair of the First Nations Adult and Higher Education Consortium Social Work Curriculum Development Task Force.

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Are rural American Indian adolescents becoming a race of angels?

John Cournane

"It is well known that indigenous children in Canada are fairing so poorly as a result of complex historical and contemporary dynamics that play themselves out in indigenous communities and in our cities."[1]

Article 30 of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child recognizes the right of Indigenous children to enjoy their traditional culture, religion and language. This article contains the unwritten hope that societies around the world will help maintain distinct Indigenous identities. Since October 31, 2002, the government of Canada has attempted to live up to that obligation by setting aside $320 million over five years to improve early childhood development for indigenous children[2]. Before conducting quantitative and qualitative research on the specific programs funded by the federal government, my goal in this paper is to provide a brief overview of the importance of developing a Canadian Aboriginal identity amongst adolescent First Nation people. My fear is that without such programs Canadian Indigenous children will become "individuals without an anchor, without horizon, colourless, stateless, and rootless – a race of angels" (Fanon, 1963, p.170).

The Roots of the Situation

David Lester in his book Suicide in American Indians states that:

The ambiguity of identity in adolescent American Indians (comes) as a result of the conflict between the American Indian culture and the dominant American culture … this conflict may be greater for American Indian adolescents than for other ethnic groups, especially because the other ethnic groups have lives more intertwined with the dominant culture than reservations (Lester, 1997, p. 51).

The dominant culture is not an abstract entity. According to Fanon, it is a "whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify and praise the action

Abstract
This article discusses the importance of identity formation and the development in young Aboriginal persons as important in the early years of education. Education is an important anchor that would help ensure a reduction in adolescent suicides and improve ego development.

through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence (Fanon, 1963, p.188). The separation of Aboriginal youth from the dominant culture takes on a special significance after the two great wars because:

> Only in the course of the two great wars of this century did the populations of the more developed industrial states take on the character of nation states. Nation states one might say, are born in wars and for wars. Here we find the explanation why, among the various layers of we-identity, the state level of integration today carries special weight and a special emotional charge. The integration plane of the state, more than any other layer of we-identity, has in the consciousness of most members the function of a survival unit, a protection unit on which depends their physical and social security in the conflicts of human groups and in cases of physical catastrophe (Elias, 1991, p. 206).

Since the World Wars there has been permeation throughout society of a "we-identity". The current "we identity" has morphed into an "official recognition of the social reality of diversity (that came from) the policy of bilingualism within a multicultural framework announced by Prime Minister Trudeau in 1971…bilingualism within a multicultural framework was an attempt by the Canadian state to establish a flexible basis for unity and a comprehensive nationhood" (Ghosh, 2002, p.24). This comprehensive nationhood under the banner of multiculturalism was seen as welcoming, inclusive and embracing. Peter Caws (1994) compared it to concepts like international, pluralist and ecumenical, suggesting that it transcends sectional divisions. However, Trudeau's vision incorporated a bilingualist approach that resulted in interculturalism within Quebec leading to Bill 101 and the protection of a Quebecois identity.

What about protecting and promoting a distinct ethnic identity for First Nation people?

A Distinct Ethnic Identity

Denise Newman's article: Ego Development and Ethnic Identity in Rural American Indian Adolescents[3] related ego development to an organizing framework that is responsible for asking life's bigger questions: Who am I? How do I view my world? - Questions that can only be answered through coming to terms with the concept of identity. One of the first researchers to focus on identity, Erik Erikson (1963), purported that it is impossible to separate identity from ego development. The identity/ego development paradigm for Charles Taylor (1994) is a fundamental defining characteristic that makes us human beings. As human beings our co-dependence is central to our development, this is reflected in Brameld's (1970) research that identified identity as undergoing both an individual and collective development within simple or complex institutions. Likewise the work of the Russian psychologist Leo S. Vygotsky (1978) was based on a cultural-historical activity theory that perceived a strong interdependence between the social context and the individual. Vygotsky's theory was based on the belief that individual development is in direct relation to social experiences. The co-dependence aspect of identity formation, according to Erikson, begins to occur at the crucial time of adolescence because at this time individuals are neither consciously nor deliberately attempting to shape it. Preschool programs and early school age programs provide fertile ground to reach First Nation children because they are characteristically striving for more independence while figuring out where they belong in relation to the broader community. It is important that the community given the responsibility to educate these children is made up of First Nation elders

because non-recognition and/or misrecognition of an ethnic identity during these early educational years can inflict harm, and literally can be thought of as oppressing and incarcerating them in a false, deformed, and existentially reduced mode of being[4].

From Newman's (2005) research "a reasonable relationship (exists) between ego development and identity strivings during early adolescence" (Newman, 2005, p.11). The larger society, as Newman (2005) points out, impacts the formation of an ethnic identity for Aboriginal adolescents by introducing them to negative Native American labels and racial stereotyping, as evident in popular cultural sports teams (Braves, Redskins) and the omission of native Indian social and political history from educational texts or the portrayal of Native Americans as somehow a "developing people". A lack of understanding of the authentic roots of their ethnic identity can lead to an ethnic deprivation which may render "some stages of ego development insurmountable for the child, after which s/he will cease to develop…. or very slowly thereafter" (Loevinger, 1976, p.174). However, according to Newman, if an awareness of ethnic identity is nurtured at an early age it can result in more psychologically mature Native American adolescents possessing a higher degree of awareness of their ethnic identity. These higher levels of ego development are associated with greater emotional experiences, both positive and negative.

From Assimilation to a Proactive Approach

Assimilation for Aboriginal people can, as noted by Newman, come in the form of labels and racial stereotyping. This exclusion, imposition and expropriation are often considered "as wholly external – an extrinsic force, whose

influence can be thrown off like the serpent sheds its skin" (Hall, 1990, p.233). However, the ability to throw off these false portrayals of First Nation identities is not such an easy task because they become "actively disaggregated… recomposed –re-framed, put together in a new way… (becoming) a site of a profound splitting and doubling" (ibid). He uses Frantz Fanon in Black Skin, White Masks to emphasize his point:

> The movements, the attitudes, the glances of the other fixed me there, in the sense in which a chemical solution is fixed by a dye. I was indignant; I demanded an explanation. Nothing happened. I burst apart. Now the fragments have been put together again by another self (Fanon, 1986, p.109).

Who is the "another self"? Ghosh and Abdi's (2004) perspective of the another self is developed from an educational framework where a focus on certain traditions and theories in schooling, centred around the social construction of knowledge "imply the constructions of reality, their selection, and the organization (which) legitimize the knowledge and culture of the dominant group, with the resulting elevation and ensured continuity of this group's bodies of knowledge at the expense of the others" (Ghosh and Abdi, 2004, p.13). The "another self" that Aboriginal adolescents are exposed to in Canada, and in other parts of the world, come at their own expense. The social construction and conceptualization of Aboriginal adolescents divide them from their classmates and intrinsically provide a powerful negative theoretical identity. The way to change this is to promote programs such as Aboriginal Head Start, a program designed to have indigenous communities play an active role in establishing First Nation identity curriculum at an early age. The curriculum and social environment

designed to foster a distinct Aboriginal identity places social structural change ahead of psycho-social change.4 Placing Aboriginal children in a social structural environment that is Indigenous will eventually lead to a psycho-social change that will profoundly effect ego development.

Conclusion

Stuart Hall writes that cultural identities are the "points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a positioning" (Hall, 1990, p.226). First Nation youth must be positioned in a way that they intrinsically respect their identity. The famous sociologist Emile Durkheim wrote that we must not "direct our attention to the superficial position of our consciousness; for the sentiments, the ideas which come to the surface are not, by far, those which have the most influence on our conduct. What must be reached are the habits…these are the real forces which govern us" (Durkheim, 1956, p.1052). Canadian First Nation adolescents must be taught about an ethnic identity that influences conduct. Thus the habits that need to be implemented must, as the First Nations Action Plan state, be under the control of First Nation Peoples and be grounded in First Nations languages and cultural values. Helping to provide a First Nation identity with positive habits will go a long way in helping to reduce adolescent suicide and improving ego development. Without such an approach the generation will become a race of angels. Ten years ago the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples wrote:

> The majority of Aboriginal youth do not complete high school. They leave the school system without requisite skills for employment, and without the language and cultural knowledge of their people.

Rather than nurturing the individual, the schooling experience typically erodes identity and self- worth. Those who continue in Canada's formal systems told (The Commission) of regular encounters with racism, racism expressed not only in interpersonal exchanges but also through the denial of Aboriginal values, perspectives and cultures in the curriculum and the life of the institution (RCAP, 1996, Vol. 3, p.434).

The negative cycle of Aboriginal youth struggling within the educational system must end. First Nation Ego Development and Identity formation in the early years of education is vital.

End Notes

1. Statement by Mr. Keith Conn, Delegation of Canada to the Second Session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues on Agenda Item: Health. New York, May 19, 2003.

2. The article appeared in the May/June periodical Child Development.

3. This is based on the work of Charles Taylor and can be found in Ghosh and Abdi, 2004, p. 26-27.

4. Weber, Marx and Durkheim have all viewed psycho-social change as occurring after social structural change.

Bio

John is a PhD student in Education at McGill University. John obtained a MSc degree from the London School of Economics and an MBA from the University of Ballarat. John's interest in First Nations Research began at the University of Alberta where he majored in Native American history. His BA honours dissertation was on the Anglican Missionaries impact on the Sisika Indians and his level of Cree was at an intermediate level. John is looking forward to undertaking more in-depth research about multicultural projects and programs aimed at First Nations children.

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(A Literature Review) Re-examining issues behind the loss of family and cultural and the impact on Aboriginal youth suicide rates

Kristine Morris

Canadian Aboriginal children are among the most impoverished population in our nation. Not only do they routinely live in poverty, but many are at risk of physical, emotional and sexual abuse, neglect, poor health care, poor housing; they are also more likely than any other group of Canadian children to be taken from their homes and placed in the child welfare system (Blackstock, Trocmè & Knoke, 2004). They are the newest generation in a long line of Aboriginal Canadians who have been oppressed, assimilated, apprehended, discriminated against, and excluded from "mainstream" society. They also have the dubious distinction of being 5 to 6 times more likely to commit suicide than their non-Aboriginal Canadian counterparts within the same age range (Lynch, 2001).

Cultural Continuity: A Protective Factor against Suicide Risk

Cultural continuity has been acknowledged as a protective factor against suicide risk (Brown, 2003; Chandler & Lalonde, 2003; Lalonde,

Abstract
This paper examines child welfare issues in relation to the impact of cultural loss and/or lack of cultural identity and its correlation with suicide risk among young Aboriginal persons.

2003; Quantz, 1997; RCAP, 1995; Thira, 2000). In light of this connection between cultural identity – or lack thereof – and suicide risk, I believe it is important to examine the impact of loss of culture on Aboriginal young people. In doing so, we as helping professionals will hopefully gain some insight into how we may be contributing to the cultural loss experienced by these young people, as well as how we can contribute to insulating them from such despair.

As a BSW student I have also been fortunate enough to have been raised by a long time social worker who has championed equality and Aboriginal issues for decades. I feel very strongly that it is our responsibility, as social workers, to acknowledge that child welfare practices have historically ignored the best interest of the child, separating families for generations, which has greatly contributed to the loss of cultural identity experienced by these children. As we have been part of the problem, so must we be part of the solution; it is imperative that awareness is raised around this issue, so that best practice may be redefined in terms

of what children and their families truly need, as opposed to what agencies and funders have deemed as satisfactory service delivery. Along with this, I hope to gain insight into how we, as helping professionals, can encourage an environment where our youth are not so overwhelmed by the grief of their loss that they feel the need to take their own lives.

I will examine two aspects of the way in which so many Aboriginal children experience loss of culture; first, by virtue of being placed in non-Aboriginal foster and adoption homes, and secondly, for the children who do remain in Aboriginal communities, how they are experiencing a loss of cultural identity there. I will then look at how the grief experienced by this loss of culture manifests itself in the epidemic level of suicide rates among Aboriginal youth. Finally, I will examine how kinship care is a real possibility in contributing to healing and reconnection for youth and their communities, as well as what obstacles are preventing such initiatives from truly taking flight.

For the purposes of this paper, I will be using the term 'Aboriginal' to encompass all First Nations people in Canada. I will also interchange the terms 'child'/'children' and 'youth' when referring to young people, without any intended discrepancy in age ranges in the use of one or the other. With a topic such as cultural loss for Aboriginal people, I acknowledge that there are multiple layers that would need to be addressed in order to fully understand the complexity of the issue; this, however, is not possible within the scope of this paper, nor is it the intention of this author to attempt to give a complete representation of the lives of Canadian Aboriginal people; any attempt to do so would ignore the diversity of the First Peoples, their histories and present day lives. My focus will be, specifically, on the grief experienced by loss of culture, and how this grief manifests itself in the astronomically high suicide rates found among Aboriginal youth. My intention, in focusing on the epidemic suicide rates and the protective factors against suicide is to raise awareness among human service agencies, to bring to the attention of decision and policy makers that best practice policies must take into consideration the cultural needs of these children, so giving them the possibility to live the lives they deserve to live; to live lives they feel are worth living.

Aboriginal Children in non-Aboriginal Homes: the "Best Interest" Philosophy

Government and church directed residential schools were created with the sole purpose of assimilating Aboriginal children. Children were removed from their families, forbidden from speaking their language or participating in any of their cultural or religious practices. With the closures of residential schools, beginning in the 1960's, came the development of the child welfare system, which was created with the express purpose to protect "the best interests of the child" (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), 1996). The definition of the 'best interests' of the child, however, was established by white bureaucrats, based on Eurocentric standards and delivery models, with no input from or recognition of traditional Aboriginal culture or kinship care systems.

What resulted was a phenomenon of huge numbers of Aboriginal children being apprehended from their families, known as the "Sixties Scoop", which was all done in the name of the 'best interest of the child'. Poor socio-economic situations on reserves made it easy for social workers, guided by white, Eurocentric

standards, to justify taking children away from what appeared to be a deprived, neglected life. Apprehensions, according to the 'best interest of the child' philosophy of the time, seemed preferable to providing supports or services to the families in need (Shangreaux, 2004; Kulusic, 2005). Funding allocations were provided for institutions and foster care programs (in white homes), but not for preventative and supportive programs within Aboriginal communities. With no programs in place to recruit Aboriginal homes for children in care, nor to support the families in need, the children were apprehended and placed in non-Aboriginal homes, time and time again (Palmer & Cooke, 1996). By the 1980's, Aboriginal children in care were placed in non-Aboriginal homes 70 to 90 per cent of the time. By 1994, the number of Aboriginal children in care was six times that of non-Aboriginal children (RCAP, 1996). The current estimate is that there are between 22,500 and 28,000 Aboriginal children in the child welfare system, which is three times the highest numbers of children attending residential schools in the 1940's (Blackstock, 2003). The Sixties Scoop, evidently, did not end in the sixties as the term implies.

Every time there is an apprehension, there is a child who is separated from his or her family. What effect does this have on a child? According to researchers Canetti et al., (2000), the loss of a parent by separation is "more detrimental to the mental health of adolescents than the loss of a parent by death". These findings are echoed in an international study by Yamamoto et al. (1996), who state that the loss of a parent is rated as the most stressful event in the lives of children. It is noted that the second most stressful of events are related to "any experience that is denigrating, shaming, and embarrassing to children" (p.148). In hearing so many of the stories of children placed in non-Aboriginal care, there is a recurring theme of shame at being taken from their homes, shame at having parents who – they were told – could not take care of them, and most of all shame over being identified as an Aboriginal person.

With poor access to medical services on reserves, many families were forced to send their young children into foster care temporarily in order for the child to receive medical treatment. It was not unheard of for these children to simply never be returned to their families – not because of neglect or mistreatment, but because it was thought that the children would 'do better' in a white home than they would on the reserve with their families (Kulusic, 2005). The responsibility for ensuring these medical needs are met is further exasperated by the federal and provincial government's inability to take responsibility (Lavallee, 2005).

Research also confirms that early separation of a child from his or her family, like the ones just illustrated, especially when followed by emotional deprivation, puts this child at high risk for self-harm (Fournier & Crey, 1997). Imagine becoming ill and going to the hospital as a young child, and then simply never being returned to your family, to your home…never having the chance to see your parents, your grandparents or siblings again, just because somebody decided that you would do better in a home with strangers? It seems to me that this type of loss, of emotional deprivation, could potentially put many of us at risk of such desperate measures as suicide, as well.

Add to this the fact that children were – and continue to be – placed in cross cultural homes, and you layer on another obstacle to developing a cultural identity. Kulusic (2005),

an Aboriginal woman who was adopted by white parents, points out that non-Aboriginal adoptive parents are unable to provide for the cultural needs of Aboriginal children because of the way in which history is told regarding Aboriginal people, and that within the dominant discourse are "myths that justify transracial adoption as a form of rescue of these children." Kulusic was told by her adoptive mother that she was lucky that she did not grow up on a reserve, that "bad things happen there". Her mother was also fond of saying that her brother, also Aboriginal – was an 'Apple' – white on the inside but red on the outside – and that it was her grand accomplishment to have "made him an 'Apple'". Lisa Abel (n.d.), another Aboriginal woman adopted into a non-Aboriginal family, spoke of her feelings of depression as a child: "Now I know that I was an adoptee suffering from suppressed grief over the loss of my family, confusion over my lack of cultural identity…" Yet another young woman from Bella Coola, adopted as an infant by non-Aboriginal parents, states: "The Ministry of Social Services took me from my mother at birth on the 9th day of March 1975 and sentenced me to a life without an identity" (Lynch, 2001).

In Aboriginal societies, family has always been at the core of the community; children are welcomed into and cared for by the entire community as gifts from the spirits. Ignoring this essential foundation of Aboriginal culture is not only ignoring the best interest of the child, but is contributing to the tremendous amounts of loss and grief experienced by so many Aboriginal children. As noted in the report on Indian Child Welfare Standards in British Columbia in 1992, "the child's best interests are served when the child's family is strengthened" (McKenzie & Seidl, 1995).

Growing Up on the Reserve: Generations of Cultural Loss

Cultural identity is said to be a major influence on our confidence in our personal identities and capacities. This is especially true within traditional Aboriginal communities, where "it is the extended family that can give true shape to the First Nations or Aboriginal child's character and identity, both as an individual and as part of a community" (Lynch, 2001). The transmission of cultural identity between generations on reserves across Canada, however, has been severely disrupted, due to decades of colonialism, cultural oppression and assimilation. Generations of families have been separated and traditional ways of life have been discouraged, even forbidden, through residential schools and later through the child welfare system. Added to these racist assimilation policies are high poverty rates, low levels of education, poor employment opportunities, inadequate housing and sanitation, as well as high incidence of addictions, physical, sexual and emotional abuse. Given all these factors, it is hardly surprising that in conditions like these, youth are more likely to feel helpless and hopeless (RCAP, 1995). The losses of cultural identity, the lack of hope for the future; these feelings of loss are believed to be associated with the growing numbers of suicides and suicide attempts among Aboriginal populations. In Figure 1, Chandler et al. (2003), illustrate the disparity between suicide rates for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth; the differences are staggering. The Canadian Aboriginal community presently has the worst suicide problem of any population in the world (Quantz, 1997). This is not a cultural problem, nor is it a social problem; it is an epidemic, and it's time to make a change.

Apparently the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples agreed; they held a hearing in the 1990's, to which Aboriginal youth across Canada were invited to speak. The youth spoke more often about culture and identity than about anything else; "this sense of loss coloured virtually every statement that youth made to the Commission" (Thira, 2000). It is my belief that people intuitively know what they need; Aboriginal youth know that they are suffering from a loss of culture and a loss of family, and it's time for us to listen. As a young girl from Iqaluit, NWT said in her address to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, "Children have dreams. Children trust grown-ups. Please don't let us down".

Links Between Cultural Loss and Suicide Rates

Psychologists Chandler & Lalonde (1998), in researching suicide rates among Aboriginal youth in British Columbia, discovered a startling fact; while more than half the tribal councils in British Columbia experienced no suicides during the six years of their study, others suffered rates of more than 800 times the national average. Figure 2 illustrates these differences, and the range is shocking (Chandler et al., 2003). This means that 90 per cent of known suicides occurred in less than 10 per cent of the Aboriginal communities in British Columbia (cited in Brown, 2003). This led the researchers to question what differences existed between the communities with low suicide rates as compared to those with astronomically high suicide rates. Chandler and Lalonde hypothesized that the difference between the communities with high rates of suicide and those with low rates of suicide was the amount of cultural continuity that the community was able to establish. They defined certain factors

of cultural continuity in their study, including; efforts to regain title to traditional lands, re-establishment of self-government, control over education, health care, police and fire services, as well as providing facilities in the community where traditional cultural events and practices could take place, including involvement by Elders, women and youth (Lalonde, 2003). Their findings concluded that "in each and every case, the youth suicide rate is lower in communities that share markers of cultural continuity" (Chandler, Lalonde, Sokol, & Hallett, 2003). Even more remarkable was the discovery that in communities where all the above mentioned factors of cultural continuity were present, there was a complete absence of youth suicide. What is it, then, about cultural continuity that is such a strong protective factor against suicide among youth? Perhaps it is the sense of belonging, which we all need. Perhaps the autonomy gained by the communities, as a result of controlling their own governments and systems, translates into a general sense of optimism, making it easier in turn for individuals in the community to reach out to their youth and support them. Although we may not have a definitive conclusion as to why cultural continuity is a protective factor against suicide, the findings still bring hope, illustrating that although every Aboriginal community has suffered oppression and a devastating loss of culture, they have not all responded in identical ways; some communities have been successful in preserving and promoting their traditional culture and have found ways to regain control over important aspects of their communal lives (Chandler et al., 2003). Coupled with this is efforts by First Nations to control aspects of research and knowledge transformation through the implementation and use of OCAP principles (National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2004).

It is through the discovery of these remarkable findings – that increased cultural continuity strongly correlates with decreased suicide rates – that we can say with reasonable certainty that a loss of culture is a huge contributing factor to the high suicide rates experienced in some Aboriginal communities. This is a positive discovery, in that once we are able to identify a cause, we can more readily work at a solution. This is not to say that cultural identity is the sole cause of youth suicide in Aboriginal communities, or that by increasing cultural continuity we will eradicate death by suicide completely. As I said in the opening of this paper, issues surrounding the history of colonization, oppression and marginalization experienced by Aboriginal people are multilayered and complex; there is no quick fix, no easy answer. What this research does offer, however, is evidence that Aboriginal communities that are successful in preserving their culture as well as recovering some control over the institutions that govern their collective future are also "dramatically more successful in insulating their own children against the risks of suicide" (Chandler et al., 2003).

Efforts to Regain What Has Been Lost

As with any change, any movement forward, we must begin with where we are right now. The present day reality is that there are more Aboriginal children being raised in non-Aboriginal homes than there were Aboriginal children taken from their homes at the height of the residential school era, and so the issue of cultural loss and grief experienced by these children in care needs to be addressed, first and foremost.

I have already discussed the way in which Aboriginal children are experiencing grief over the loss of their families as well as the loss of their cultural identities, putting them at risk of depression, self-harm and suicide. Many Aboriginal communities, along with some children's services organizations are recognizing the need for family and cultural connections for these children, and we are beginning to see some positive initiatives around re-connecting children in care with their communities.

According to Palmer and Cooke (1996), Aboriginal children in non-Aboriginal care need opportunities to be in contact with other Aboriginal people. This paves the way for these children to develop a positive sense of identity, by placing them in an environment where they are able to spend time with role models who are proud of their culture and ancestry, and are willing to share this pride and knowledge with the children. These experiences can be valuable in the healing journey for these young people who grieve the loss of separation from their communities.

One exciting example of this, which occurred in March of 2006, was a joint initiative between Saddle Lake reserve, Blue Quills, Children's Services, and the University of Calgary's Faculty of Social Work. A number of Aboriginal children in care in Edmonton were taken to Saddle Lake reserve, along with their social worker and foster parents, where they were welcomed with a feast hosted by the Saddle Lake community. The children each received a traditional blanket made by a grandmother, were introduced to their relations, and left with a specially prepared genogram of their families (J. Lafrance, Associate Professor, University of Calgary, Faculty of Social Work, personal communication, March 15, 2006). This was a positive, important reunion for these children, for the community of Saddle Lake, and for the foster parents caring for the children. This event

is a good example of bridging the cultural gap between the care provider, the family and the community, as well as providing the children with the roots that every one of us needs and deserves. Hopefully this event will allow for these children and their families to reconnect, and for their caregivers to gain a better sense of where the children come from.

Another initiative that provides Aboriginal youth an opportunity to reconnect with their culture is the Aboriginal Youth Council (AYC), which works as part of the National Association of Friendship Centres across Canada. All Aboriginal youth from 14-24 years old are welcome to join the AYC, where they work to "preserve and promote culture and heritage" (National Association of Friendship Centres, 2006). It is a good opportunity for young people, especially those living in urban settings, to discover their culture and to surround themselves with other Aboriginal youth who have experienced the same or similar loses.

You can look on virtually any website of any foster care or adoption organization, and you will find courses and workshops for foster parents. Among the topics covered are the issues of loss and grief, as well as cultural awareness. I am hopeful, knowing that these supports are in place for non-Aboriginal foster and adoptive parents to better understand and provide for the unique needs of the children in their care. Ideally, children would always be with their families, or at least in their communities, but until that day comes – and I am hopeful that it will come – efforts such as these have the potential of reducing the staggering losses experienced by Aboriginal children in non-Aboriginal care.

My main area of concern, when discussing Aboriginal children in care, is the need to work toward changes in child welfare practices, so that children can be cared for by their families, their extended kin, or at the least within their communities. By aiming to use the least disruptive measures possible, child welfare has the potential to be practiced in a way that is not only respectful towards the child, the family and the community, but also in a way that will strengthen the family bonds that too many Aboriginal communities have had stolen over the generations. One way in which the least disruptive measures can be exerted is through kinship care. Kinship care is not a new concept; in many cultures over time, extended kin have stepped in and helped care for children when the parents have been unable to do so. Kinship care has an advantage over foster care placement in that it reduces trauma by placing "the child with familiar family members, and maintaining continuity in the child's connection to his or her culture and family history" (Morley, 2006, p.6). In light of the protective nature of cultural continuity, as discussed earlier, against suicide, this type of care arrangement seems preferable, not only in providing cultural continuity for the child, but also towards healing and reconnection within a given community.   There are initiatives that are currently working towards this paradigm shift, where Aboriginal children will, ideally, remain in their communities and maintain contact with their birth families, but there are obstacles in the way.

A huge obstacle to the successful mplementation of kinship care programs is the funding that is – or rather that is not – available. According to the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada's Wen:De Report (2005) "there are more resources available to children who are removed from their homes than for children to stay safely in their homes" (p. 21). If a child is placed in a foster home with total

strangers – not only to the child personally but often to the child's culture as well – the home is eligible receive health and dental coverage for the child in their care. If the same child is placed with extended kin – people they know, trust, love and understand, then the family is not eligible for the same benefits. Federal funding formulas provide child welfare agencies with funds according to the number of children they have in government care, but do not provide the same financial supports for children placed with extended kin (Child and Youth Officer for British Columbia, 2006). In addition, there is more funding provided for institutions, and foster care than there is allocated for community resources, infrastructure improvements, inadequate and overcrowded housing (Loxley, De Riviere, Prakash, Blackstock, Wien, & Thomas Prokop, 2005). As long as these standards and legislations are in place, there will be very little incentive for and initiative on the part of child welfare workers to support and maintain kinship care programs.

Conclusion

Not every parent is the best caregiver; they may have addictions, may be neglectful, and may even be abusive, but they are, in their child's eyes, the parent none the less. The grief experienced at the loss of a parent is not diminished by the quality of parenting, a point that we, as helping professionals, would do well to remember.

There is no disputing the reality that there are numerous socio-economic disadvantages for people living on reserves, including addictions, various forms of abuse, overcrowding, poor sanitation, and poverty. It is not my intention to attempt a 'solution' to all that ails Aboriginal communities. It is, however, my intention to highlight that although there are many

issues that need to be addressed in Aboriginal communities across Canada, the systematic removal of a community's future generations is of no benefit to anyone. The children are suffering terrible losses; they are like trees without roots, tossed around haphazardly without direction or purpose. The strength of any community lies in its potential for the future; without it there is no hope, there is no reason for moving forward. Children need to be connected with their families and their communities, whether they are currently in care or at risk of being placed in care in the future. Federal and Provincial governments must provide more incentives to Aboriginal communities as well as to children's services agencies so that families are given real opportunities to stay together, and that they are rewarded for doing so rather than being penalized. These communities need to be provided with the resources they require to heal and gather strength, for themselves and for future generations. It's the least we can do.

Bio

Kristine Morris is a BSW student at the University of Calgary; she is the mother of two young children, and is a second generation social worker, following in her father's footsteps. Kristine aspires to work with disadvantaged children and youth; in particular with Aboriginal children. She supports and would like to be involved in efforts towards Aboriginal cultural revitalization and kinship care initiatives for Aboriginal children in care.

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