

Trauma, Child Development, Healing and Resilience

A Review of Literature with Focus on Indigenous Peoples and Communities

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Key Messages

- Historical trauma refers specifically to the inter-generational impact of colonization on Indigenous peoples. Every First Nation, Métis and Inuit community will have unique experiences of colonization due to significant diversity of culture, geographic location and other specific historical encounters or events. The most recent definition of historical trauma includes: colonial injury to Indigenous peoples by European settlers who ‘perpetrated’ conquest, subjugation, and dispossession; collective experience of these injuries by entire Indigenous communities whose identities, ideals, and interactions were radically altered as a consequence; cumulative effects from these injuries as the consequences of subjugation, oppression, and marginalization have ‘snowballed’ throughout ever-shifting historical sequences of adverse policies and practices by dominant settler societies; and cross-generational impacts of these injuries as legacies of risk and vulnerability were passed from ancestors to descendants in unremitting fashion until ‘healing’ interrupts these deleterious processes.
- First Nations in Alberta share an interconnected worldview that focuses on building, maintaining and strengthening relationships with all living things. The Healthy Spiral of Relationships model illustrates that worldview. The spiral symbolizes the interconnectedness of the people and all the beings in their world - animate, inanimate and spiritual. If this spiral was three dimensional, it would be moving to demonstrate that relationships are constantly changing and require ongoing efforts to build, maintain, renew, and strengthen them.
- Several colonial policies contributed to the eradication of Indigenous cultures and impaired survivors’ ability to create healthy family relationships. Those policies include the creation of residential and boarding schools, the apprehension of Indigenous children (known as the Sixties Scoop), and over-representation of Indigenous children in the child welfare system. The loss of connection and communication between children and their parents and grandparents severely damaged essential family relationships, blocking the transmission of cultural, ethical, and normative knowledge between generations.
- The Gradual Civilization Act, the Enfranchisement Act and The Indian Act are grounded in the colonial assumption that Indian language, culture, pedagogy, intellect, and spirituality were inferior. These three acts were created to force assimilation ostensibly for the benefit of the Indian people. Through these acts and later amendments, and residential schools, Indigenous were forced to renounce their culture, language and spirituality. Ongoing systemic racism in the current Canadian society has further affected the capacity to develop a positive individual or collective Indigenous identity.
- Colonization in Canada is the ongoing domination and displacement of Indigenous peoples without their consent, in an attempt to eradicate Indigenous cultural, familial, political, educational and spiritual systems and replace them with Christian European structures of power. Over time, some Indigenous people eventually accepted that by virtue of their being Indigenous, they lack the ability

to solve their own problems. The development of a welfare dependency has been the result, whereby Indigenous people do not feel capable or hopeful that they can affect change in their reality.

- The policies of apprehending children damaged the very foundation of Indigenous social organization: the web of relationships. As each generation of children was removed, the relationships within the web became weaker. The ongoing mass apprehension of children by child welfare agencies continues to weaken the essential relationships and the very nature of the web itself. Many Indigenous individuals, families and communities have suffered devastating cultural, spiritual and familial loss. The shame of identity and culture that came with colonization confused the natural feelings of grief, and made it impossible to acknowledge and grieve these losses, resulting in disenfranchised grief. The results of such grief are the intensification of normal emotional reactions such as anger, guilt, sadness, and helplessness, which is passed on to future generations.
- Over 176 years of intergenerational residential school attendance, many survivors lost their connections to the strength of their traditional culture and eventually saw themselves only through the eyes of the colonizer. Over time, survivors have internalized the colonizer's narrative that foreign religion, competition, capitalism. Some have grown to fear their traditional culture, which they now believe is primitive and/or evil. The result for many Indigenous people has been not only marginalization, but the development of identity confusion - people who feel affiliation neither to the mainstream colonial culture, nor to the traditional culture they learned to fear or despise.
- For the Indigenous family and community, the introduction of pervasive and intergenerational violence by residential schools, the overwhelming grief and loss, and the subsequent traumatic response have had devastating effects on Indigenous families and communities. When the rules of relationships are not followed, healthy boundaries are transgressed, and spiritual, psychological, emotional, physical, sexual and lateral violence occurs within families and in communities. Families who carry the burden of historic trauma often experience overwhelming feelings of hopelessness, helplessness and powerlessness.
- The resilience of the Indigenous individual, family, and community is evident throughout Alberta. Considering the wide-spread and long-standing assimilation effort that Canada has undertaken, the fact that Indigenous law, culture, language, and spiritual expression still exists and can be reclaimed is a testament to the deep, intergenerational resilience of First Nation, Métis and Inuit people. There are three conditions for the building and maintaining of family and community resilience and for healing from the effects of historic trauma: reclaiming an interconnected relationships-based worldview and legal tradition; reconciliation of damaged relationships; and recovering the power to respectfully self-determine.

- Three focus areas have been identified for supporting decolonization, reconciliation and self-determination:
 - Reclaiming the mediating role of the Indigenous family: The process of building family resilience is central to their health and survival. At the very core of this process is the renewal of respectful relationships within the family and between the family and the community, natural and spiritual environments.”³³ Essentially, building resilience is a (sometimes very difficult) process of individual and family re-orientation, reclamation of the rules between family members, and the adoption of roles and responsibilities to the family unit, broadly defined.
 - Interconnected family services: Interconnected family services must be grounded in the principles of reciprocity and fluidity (everything and everyone can and must change), as well as be informed by the values that are inherent in the nation’s legal traditions (such as kindness, caring, sharing, honesty, humility, respect and freedom).
 - Healing theory and programs: Healing programs and services are experiential educational processes that teach history, culture, and connectedness, and mobilize sacred knowledge in the “recapturing of the life force.”
- Healing programs are often framed as the beginning of a lifelong healing journey that involves personal and collective decolonization. Often, programs will combine traditional teachings ceremony and activities with history lessons on colonization and the impact on Indigenous people throughout Canada and North America. Learning colonial history provides context for historic-trauma informed behaviour, with the goal of encouraging individuals take responsibility for their actions, make amends (whenever possible), and develop the capacity to make good decisions for themselves.

Executive Summary

Historical trauma refers specifically to the inter-generational impact of colonization on Indigenous peoples. In the 1990s, the mental health issues suffered by Indigenous people in Canada were first conceptualized as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Later researchers briefly began developing the concept of ‘residential school survivor syndrome,’ but then settled on the term historical trauma to create a definition that included the larger historical contributing processes. The most recent definition includes four aspects:

1. “Colonial injury to Indigenous peoples by European settlers who ‘perpetrated’ conquest, subjugation, and dispossession;
2. Collective experience of these injuries by entire Indigenous communities whose identities, ideals, and interactions were radically altered as a consequence;
3. Cumulative effects from these injuries as the consequences of subjugation, oppression, and marginalization have ‘snowballed’ throughout ever-shifting historical sequences of adverse policies and practices by dominant settler societies; and
4. Cross-generational impacts of these injuries as legacies of risk and vulnerability were passed from ancestors to descendants in unremitting fashion until ‘healing’ interrupts these deleterious processes.”¹

The current definition is useful in underscoring the past and present colonial conditions that cause and perpetuate intergenerational trauma. However, every First Nation, Métis and Inuit community will have unique experiences of colonization due to significant diversity of culture, geographic location and other specific historical encounters or events. To understand the nuanced effects of colonization and how it informs our understanding of historic trauma and healing, we must dive deeply into specific culture and experiences.

A Note about Terminology

This discussion is written in English, the language of the colonizer in Canada. Thus, the terms used to refer to the people who were here before European settlers will be in the language of the colonizer. It was chosen to use the term “Indian” when referring to colonial laws for consistency, as that was the term used in all of the legislation to which is referred. It is also beneficial, as it demonstrates for the reader how the Cree, Blackfoot, Dene and Nakoda (Stoney) people of Alberta are still referred to today in Federal Law. Quotes from authors that use the terms Native and First Nation have also been included. In the rest of the paper, the terms Aboriginal, Indigenous, and First Peoples interchangeably to promote flow and readability in the paper. All of these terms have colonial connotations and thus can be problematic, but they are the words available in the English language. When referencing specifically a Cree worldview, words (and meanings) that were specific and contextually appropriate. In addition, Cree terms are used to describe/refer to important concepts within this worldview.

¹ Kirmayer, Gone, and Moses, “Rethinking Historical Trauma,” 301.

Pre-Contact Indigenous Society

Before contact, it is estimated that there were between 60 to 80 million Indigenous people in North America.² Currently, there are 1.4 million self-identified Indigenous people living in Canada³.

On the territory now known as Alberta, the population was organized into sovereign nations, with significant language and cultural diversity, including Blackfoot, Cree, Nakota/Dakota and Dene. Later, Métis people came to live in Alberta, which saw the development of Métis colonies, now known as Métis settlements. There is also a small population of Inuit people now living in Alberta. These nations, with their languages, cultures, and spiritual expressions, remain an important part of the cultural richness and diversity of Alberta.

All First Nations in Alberta share an interconnected worldview that focus on building, maintaining and strengthening relationships with all living things. This perspective is grounded in the principles of reciprocity and holism, and manifests in the desire to maintain harmonious, respectful relationships with all living things (although it is also true that there has been historical strife between nations as well). From this worldview arise four domains that have historically fostered good relationships between nations, within communities and families and resulted in the development of flourishing individuals, families and communities, as well as sustainable ecosystems. The following four domains were the cornerstones to childhood development in Indigenous Nations that thrived prior to colonization.

First, communities and nations were deeply interconnected, through “a dense network of relationships within which sharing and obligations of mutual aid ensured that an effective safety net was in place.”⁴ The interconnected family was the cornerstone of these societies, providing the foundation of all political, educational, social and economic systems. The concept of family, therefore was broad and inclusive, defined through a complex combination of biological ties, clan membership bonds, adoptions and economic partnerships (e.g. hunting partnerships between communities). Children were at the centre of this network,⁵ with entire communities mobilized to ensure their protection, education and social development into adults who contribute significantly to the strength of the network.

Second, every Nation had (and has) a legal tradition – a constellation of laws, values and ethics – that guided the behaviour of all members. The interconnected nature of the pre-contact family and community required that laws be created to promote respectful relationships and the resolution of conflict towards peaceful, harmonious societies.

Third, all First Nations had (and have) mechanisms for the development of healthy, positive individual and collective identity in their children that are specific to each Nation. The process of positive identity formation included fostering an understanding of important roles, responsibilities and vocations within the Nation that would strengthen the bonds of the dense, interconnected network.

² Tully, “The Struggles of Indigenous Peoples for and of Freedom.”

³ StatsCan (2011). <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-656-x/89-656-x2015001-eng.htm>

⁴ Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, vol. III.

⁵ Ibid.

Finally, the capacity to be self-determining is a cornerstone of successful individuals, families and nations. Within this interconnected worldview, all living beings are afforded the opportunity to govern themselves – to chart their own course – in ways that are respectful of others’ need to do the same. Traditional child-rearing techniques emphasized autonomy and critical thinking, with opportunities to learn natural consequences for actions.

The interconnected worldview, relationships, laws, roles and responsibilities were (and are) embedded in each Nation’s language, and these values are taught through stories, observation of protocol, ceremonies and songs. This experiential pedagogy also includes garnering knowledge through connectedness with land and ecology. Traditionally, life skills and vocations were learned through relationship-based apprenticeships with family members – both blood relations and kinship bonds created through customary adoptions.

The Healthy Spiral of Relationships model⁶ (Figure 1) illustrates an interconnected worldview and the four domains. The spiral symbolizes the interconnectedness of the people and all the beings in their world - animate, inanimate and spiritual. If this spiral was three dimensional, it would be moving to demonstrate that relationships are constantly changing and require ongoing efforts to build, maintain, renew, and strengthen them.

The spaces between the levels in the spiral are significant, representing the space that allows the individual family or community to respectfully self-determine. The spiral is supported (kept upright) by the strength of the laws, ethics and values that form the Nation’s legal tradition (portrayed in yellow). The rules and values are essentially the scaffolding that ensures healthy boundaries within all relationships throughout the spiral. The model demonstrates the necessary elements for the formation of a healthy identity that includes a sense of belonging and responsibility to the wellbeing of the entire spiral (to all living beings).

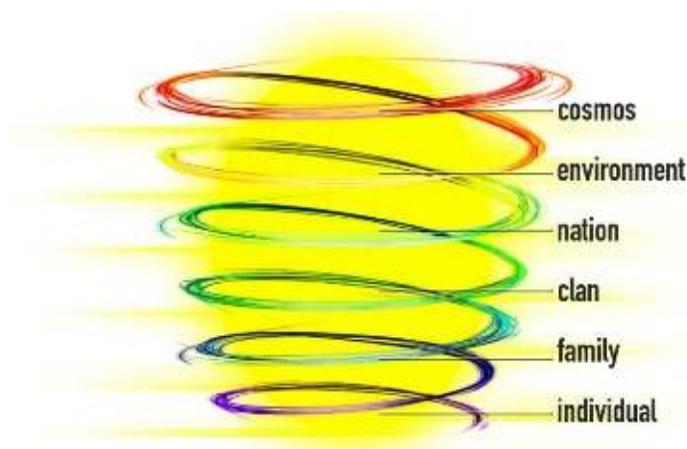


Figure 1: Healthy Spiral of Relationships⁶

⁶ LaBoucane-Benson, “Reconciliation, Repatriation and Reconnection: A Framework for Building Resilience in Canadian Indigenous Families.”

Interconnectedness and Neuroscience

Both the Indigenous understanding of healthy child development and the neuroscience findings of healthy brain development focus on the importance of multiple positive relationships in child development.

Western neuroscience has found that brain development begins shortly after conception and continues through gestation, birth, early childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood. The brain is built over time in a predictable sequence, with basic circuits and skills forming a foundation for the more complex circuits and skills that follow. A sturdy foundation is built through positive experiences and responsive relationships.

The experiences we have as children, both good and bad, shape developing brain circuits through a use-it-or-lose-it process. The active ingredient in this process is the back and forth social interactions between a child and responsive adult. More precisely, in a supportive environment, the interactions between children and caregivers are opportunities for children to practise basic cognitive, social, and emotional skills and to strengthen the neural circuits underlying those skills. These interactions thereby establish a sturdy foundation for good outcomes in learning, health, and future relationships. The Indigenous spiral of relationships represents a powerful example of how multiple, specific and supportive relationships contribute to the development of healthy brains and productive, healthy adults.

Executive function and self-regulation skills are the mental processes that enable us to pay attention, plan ahead, prioritize tasks, problem-solve, and control our emotions. As children grow and begin school, executive function skills help them work with new information, inhibit their desires, regulate their emotions, set goals, and solve problems. These abilities are some of the best predictors of academic and employment success. Executive function and self-regulation skills are also critically important to our ability to parent the next generation. Parents need to be able to pay attention and juggle multiple tasks, set priorities, adapt to constantly changing circumstances, and regulate their own emotions, particularly when their child has difficulty regulating theirs.

Stress also shapes brain architecture and here, too, the presence or absence of supportive adult relationships largely determines whether these effects will be helpful or harmful. Experiencing stress is a normal part of life and can even be beneficial in development, but not all types of stress response are the same. All children experience stresses like meeting new people or being separated from their caregivers for short periods of time. This is a *positive stress response* because this sort of mild activation of the stress response system provides children with small, short-lived challenges that can help them learn the basic skills they need to cope with the more serious challenges they will likely meet in future.

Even intensely stressful childhood experiences such as losing a loved one or surviving a natural disaster can often be managed with responsive adult support. The presence of a caring, supportive adult buffers the child's response to stress by helping soothe his emotions and calm his fears, and teaching him more adaptive coping strategies for dealing with bigger challenges. This is called a *tolerable stress response*.

The web of relationships, informed by an interconnected worldview, has all the components required to build resilience in children; by ensuring they have access to supportive adult relationships and rich serve-and-return interactions, as well as by allowing children to experience tolerable stress (appropriate autonomy), and ensuring they are supported during overly-stressful events. These are the steps that will help any child build strong brain architecture that supports cognitive, social and emotional capacities, and good mental and physical health for a lifetime.

Colonial Policy

Affecting the Interconnected Family, Community and Society

Boarding and Residential Schools

Beginning in 1820, Indigenous children were removed from their families and communities and placed in state-funded Industrial Boarding Schools. By 1930 there were 80 Residential Schools operating across Canada, and this system continued for rest of the twentieth century, with the last school closing in 1996.⁷

Residential school policies were based on the Euro-Christian beliefs that Indigenous peoples were: primitive; godless and heathen; child-like and unable to care for themselves; and savage. As such, government assumed that Indigenous children would fail to succeed if they remained under the influence of their families. The ultimate goal of the residential school system was to fully assimilate Indigenous people, eradicating all Indigenous culture, language and spirituality.

Students were forbidden to speak their First language and the practice of Indigenous spirituality and culture was deemed morally and ethically wrong and was therefore also prohibited.⁸ If children dared transgress these rules, they received punishments, which ranged from shaming to physical violence. As a result, if any of the children did go home, they struggled to communicate with their family and were unaware, suspicious, or afraid of customs/rituals that had historically strengthened and reaffirmed relationships between family and community members.

For 176 years, children were placed either in day-schools or residential schools for the entire school year. In addition to the attempts to eradicate Indigenous cultures, the schools were mismanaged, underfunded, and overcrowded. They were first operated with the belief that, through the labour of the children and the church staff (who would work for very little payment), the schools would require very little funding. The lack of funding affected the quality and quantity of food available for students. Undernourished children with depressed immunities that were living in overcrowded dormitories lead to the spread of disease among the children, which resulted in a high death rate among students.⁹

⁷ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada's Residential Schools*.

⁸ Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, vol. I, 316.

⁹ *Ibid.*, vols. I, 329–330.

Child Welfare Policies

Generations of residential school graduates were survivors of trauma, abuse and neglect, burdened with significant psychological issues that impaired their ability to create healthy relationships with spouses and children. Survivors entered adulthood without an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of parents, or how to care for and nurture children of their own.

Although there were almost no Indigenous children on the child welfare caseload in the early 1950s, by the mid-1960s one third of all Indigenous children were in care.¹⁰ The apprehension of Indigenous children became so widespread and continuous, it is commonly referred to as the Sixties Scoop. However, apprehensions continued for decades: in 1980-81 Indigenous children were still grossly over-represented in the child welfare caseload and were almost always placed in non-Indigenous homes.¹¹ Many children suffered abuse in their foster or adoptive homes.

Indigenous over-representation in the child welfare system and the lack of placement of children in foster care that is culturally-congruent remains a critical issue in child welfare to this day. An evidence-based straight line can be drawn that connects multiple generations of residential school survivors to generations that have been raised in government care.

Affecting Development of Legal Traditions

The Euro-Canadian dismissal of Indigenous legal traditions has been devastating. The view that Indigenous peoples were uncivilized and lawless was the foundation of residential school policy: that to save the Indians, they must have European-based education. The goal of the residential school was to assimilate Indigenous children into Western lifestyle through Christian-based education. As such, the focus was on Christianization towards cultural genocide¹² rather than academic achievement.

Parents, aunts, uncles, and grandparents were made to feel inferior; due to their Indigenous identity and/or the poverty they lived in, officials deemed them unable to raise their children. They were made to relinquish their responsibility to interpret the world for their children¹³ and forced to withstand the shame of not being able to protect the gifts they were bestowed by the Creator.¹⁴ The loss of connection and communication between children and their parents and grandparents severely damaged essential family relationships, blocking the transmission of cultural, ethical, and normative knowledge between generations. As such, children's emotional, social and spiritual development was arrested.¹⁵

Survivors grew up to become parents themselves and transmitted their lack of knowledge of the rules, values and norms to their children. This loss of parenting skills¹⁶ resulted the mass removal of children by provincial child welfare systems. The contemporary outcome of colonial policy is the continued

¹⁰ Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, vols. III, 22.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, vols. III, 23.

¹² Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada's Residential Schools*.

¹³ Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, vols. III, 16.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, vols. III, 21.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. III, 16.

¹⁶ Makokis, "Teachings from Cree Elders."

marginalization and subjugation¹⁷ of the Indigenous family, further diminishing the capacity of Indigenous families to create environments when children develop morality and ethics of the First Nation legal tradition.

Shame, violence and abuse were widely employed as educational pedagogy in residential schools; as a result, many Indigenous children did not learn the knowledge/ teachings of either Settler or Indigenous society. Their moral, social and spiritual development was significantly impaired. The ability for Indigenous children to fully learn (and feel connected to) Western laws, rules or norms has been further diminished by colonial racism, heteropatriarchy and the belief in the inferior status of the Indigenous intellect, spirituality, culture and worldview.

Affecting Development of Positive Identity

The *Gradual Civilization Act*, the *Enfranchisement Act* and *The Indian Act* are grounded in the colonial assumption that Indian language, culture, pedagogy, intellect, and spirituality were inferior. These three acts were created to force assimilation ostensibly for the benefit of the Indian people. The cornerstone of the legislation was the concept of enfranchisement: for Indigenous men, to become a Canadian citizen – to be seen as fully human – he was forced renounce his culture, language and spirituality. Indigenous women would be forced to enfranchise through marriage to a non-Indigenous person (this provision was held until 1985), or if her Indigenous husband chose to enfranchise.

Residential schools, operating until 1996, instilled a deep shame for many children in their Indigenous identity, and yet did nothing to build a positive assimilated identity. The disconnect created between children and their families was described as early as 1913, where Indian Agents on reserves noted a cultural gap that was creating people stranded between communities, without an identity.¹⁸

In 1876 the first *Indian Act* was passed to move forward an explicit agenda of assimilation of Indigenous people into Canadian society and attempt at cultural genocide, or the eradication of Indian culture, language and spirituality.¹⁹ In 1884 the *Indian Act* was amended to protect Indians from their own cultures.²⁰ This amendment prohibited ceremonies, which were (and are) critical educational tools for the development of identity, as well as legal tradition and interconnectedness. The amendment was not removed until 1951. Ongoing systemic racism in the current Canadian society has further affected the capacity to develop a positive individual or collective Indigenous identity.

Affecting Ability to Self-Determine

Colonization in Canada is the ongoing domination and displacement of Indigenous peoples without their consent,²¹ in an attempt to eradicate Indigenous cultural, familial, political, educational and spiritual systems and replace them with Christian European structures of power. The ultimate goal was assimilation and enfranchisement, as “Canada denied the right to participate fully in Canadian political,

¹⁷ Navia, “Uncovering Colonial Legacies.”

¹⁸ Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, vol. I, 357.

¹⁹ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada’s Residential Schools*, 1.

²⁰ Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, vols. I, 267.

²¹ Tully, “The Struggles of Indigenous Peoples for and of Freedom.”

economic, and social life to those Indigenous people who refused to abandon their Indigenous identity.”²² At residential schools, the state deemed Indigenous people culturally and morally unfit to parent, attempting to control every facet of the children’s lives, including post-graduation vocations and arranged marriages. Children were not educated to become self-sufficient, nor did the schools develop their capacity for self-management. Over time, some Indigenous people eventually accepted that by virtue of their being Indigenous, they lack the ability to solve their own problems. The development of a welfare dependency has been the result, whereby Indigenous people do not feel capable or hopeful that they can affect change in their reality.

Further, many children suffered or witnessed significant physical and sexual abuse at residential schools. In most cases, no adult at the school took action to protect them from this abuse, causing children to feel hopeless, helpless, and powerless. Later child welfare began removing children from Indigenous families due to behaviour that was created at the schools or created by the poverty that Indigenous people felt powerless to change. As a result, a deep distrust of service providers has grown along with a disconnect from the European-based systems that exist to protect children and help families. Many Indigenous people also feel a hopelessness that the experiences of trauma-based behaviours, poverty and isolation will never be overcome.

The *Indian Act* and other pieces of legislation severely diminished Indigenous women’s political power and participation, and controlled Band elections and all decision-making on reserves. The assimilation agenda and the belief that Indigenous people were unable to govern their own affairs is the foundation of the *Indian Act*, which remains problematic due to its racist, paternalistic foundation.

The criminal justice system, which has been historically used as a punishment for resistance to colonialism, continues to over-incarcerate Indigenous people for behaviour based in colonial disenfranchisement and poverty.

Historic Trauma

From Interconnectedness to Profound Isolation

The policies of apprehending children to place them in residential schools damaged the very foundation of Indigenous social organization: the web of relationships. As each generation of children was removed, the relationships within the web became weaker. The ongoing mass apprehension of children by child welfare agencies continues to weaken the essential relationships and the very nature of the web itself.

Residential schools prohibited the pedagogy that develops an interconnected worldview. For many survivors, this resulted in the loss of relationships-based Indigenous language and the fear of participating in ceremonies that held instructions regarding the nature of their relationship with all living things. Loss of language also resulted in communication barriers between Elders and children within the family and community structure. The European-based educational system further focussed on competitiveness, individualism and materialism, further damaging the web of relationships.

²² Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada’s Residential Schools*, 2.

Residential school survivors did not grow up with parental role models; they were raised in an environment that lacked love, kindness and nurturing by school staff who believed them to be inferior. Teaching techniques in residential schools included physical punishment that is now considered abusive. Later on, when Indigenous children apprehended by child welfare and placed in foster and adopted homes, they experienced similar circumstances - abusive foster parents who did not understand nor appreciate children's Indigenous culture, spirituality and language.

In both situations, children typically lived without the intimate contact with a trusting adult required to mature socially and emotionally. They were essentially deprived of traditional parenting role models and when they emerged from these schools they had no experience of a family life to draw on. Many survivors passed on the inability to form trusting relationships to their children, which has been subsequently passed on to the next generations, continually weakening the web of relationships, and most critically, the capacity of the Indigenous family.

Many Indigenous individuals, families and communities have suffered devastating cultural, spiritual and familial loss. This loss was, and is, compounded by the fact that the colonizing society has not acknowledged that the loss sustained by Indigenous people was legitimate, instead perpetuating the myth that cultural genocide was an act of charity for the betterment of the Indigenous people.

Thus, the natural reaction of grief to the loss of self-determination, lifestyle, ceremony, ritual, language, family structure and culture was denied to Indigenous people by those who controlled all systems. The shame of identity and culture confused the natural feelings of grief, and made it impossible to acknowledge and grieve these losses, resulting in disenfranchised grief. The results of such grief are the intensification of normal emotional reactions such as anger, guilt, sadness, and helplessness, which is passed on to future generations.

From Strict Legal Tradition to Lawlessness

Family violence is abhorred in all First Nation legal traditions. One of the most devastating outcomes of residential school policy has been the introduction of widespread abuse. Indigenous people have been subjected to numerous types of trauma, causing trauma-informed behaviours that have torn the fabric of family and community connectedness. Children who were victimized physically and sexually *sometimes* perpetrated violence as adults. Children who were neglected and unloved, *sometimes* became detached, neglectful parents. When trauma is not resolved by an individual who was abused as a child, it can be passed on to the next generation,²³ having devastating effects on the family over successive generations.

Although abuse in residential schools was known to Indian agents, other government officials and church leaders, no person with authority took action to charge and prosecute the offenders, putting their own interests ahead of the safety of the children.²⁴ This has caused a pervasive distrust of the Canadian justice system, which has been used both as an instrument of punishment for resistance to assimilation, as well as a buffer to protect perpetrators within the systems of colonization.

²³ Aboriginal Healing Foundation Program Handbook, 2nd Edition 1991, cited in Chansonneuve, *Reclaiming Connections*, 51.

²⁴ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada's Residential Schools*.

The residential school system separated children from loving family, a sense of safety, and belonging. The widespread abuse, the lack of adult protection, the coerced feelings of inferior identity, as well as unresolved feelings of grief, compounded in survivors as hopelessness and despair. These mental health issues associated with residential schools have been passed on inter-generationally, and have resulted in high rates of suicide in some Indigenous families and communities.

From Self-Respect and Belonging to a Colonized Identity

Colonization has caused significant damage to Indigenous people's view of themselves and their sense of belonging. The goal of the *Indian Act* was to force Indigenous people to acculturate, or to adopt European culture and enfranchise, which caused a significant amount of stress. That Indigenous children were then raised in hostile, regimented, abusive environments compounded the stress of acculturation, fostering residential school survivors' feelings of resentment towards their parents and alienation from their families.

Over 176 years of intergenerational residential school attendance, many survivors lost their connections to the strength of their traditional culture and eventually saw themselves only through the eyes of the colonizer. Over time, survivors have internalized the colonizer's narrative that foreign religion, competition, capitalism, and individualism are superior and more civilized. Some have grown to fear their traditional culture, which they now believe is primitive and/or evil.

Acculturation was further complicated by pervasive ongoing racism in Euro-Canadian society that has rejected Indigenous people unless they discard critical aspects of their indigeneity (legal traditions, values, ceremonies, language). The original, negative colonial stereotypes of Indigenous people have survived and still exist within Canadian society, resulting in both subtle and more overt systemic racism that continues to attack the psyche of Indigenous people throughout Canada. The result for many Indigenous people has been not only marginalization, but the development of identity confusion²⁵ - people who feel affiliation neither to the mainstream colonial culture, nor to the traditional culture they learned to fear or despise.

Foster placement and adoption in families from non-Indigenous cultures compounds the issue of identity confusion. These children have not learned their culture, laws or values; they have no connection or sense of belonging to their Indigenous family/community, and yet they experience all of the racism towards 'Indians' in Canadian society. They carry the shame of the inferior identity, yet have experienced none of the protective mechanisms of their interconnected culture that would have created a positive sense of belonging and buffered feelings of worthlessness and despair.

From Self Determination to Powerlessness and Despair

Indigenous people, who have been raised in environments marked by helplessness and powerlessness, often have overwhelming feelings of frustration and anger that can become uncontrollable rage, with violent behaviour.²⁶ This violence may be perpetrated within the family unit, in part as a result of

²⁵ Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, III, 17.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, vols. III, 66.

pervasive feelings of violation and loss of control, and in part as a product of learned abusive behaviour (victimization as a child).

Residential school policies and child welfare policies are directly tied to historic trauma-informed behaviours, including poor health outcomes, under-education, under-employment, substance abuse and self-harm. Further, the *Indian Act*, as a mechanism of assimilation and devastating social control over all aspects of First Nation life, has created pervasive poverty, dependency, and despair. The *Act* has thus diminished the individual and family's capacity to make good decisions, create plans for the future, and feel in control of their lives.

Returning to the image of a spiral as a symbol of the connectedness of the Indigenous individual, family and community, the essential relationships in the spiral create individual and collective identity. Within the spiral, legal traditions provide the infrastructure of the spiral and the capacity for self-determination. Colonization has damaged the infrastructure of the spiral, and as a result, the spiral collapses on itself; the relational boundaries are transgressed and the spiral becomes a tangled knot.²⁷



Thus, for the Indigenous family and community, the introduction of pervasive and intergenerational violence by residential schools, the overwhelming grief and loss, and the subsequent traumatic response have had devastating effects on Indigenous families and communities. When the rules of relationships are not followed, healthy boundaries are transgressed, and spiritual, psychological, emotional, physical, sexual and lateral violence occurs within families and in communities. Families who carry the burden of historic trauma often experience overwhelming feelings of hopelessness, helplessness and powerlessness.

Historic Trauma and Neuroscience

If both Western and Indigenous science agree that multiple healthy relationships are cornerstone to the development of healthy children and brains, there is also agreement that inconsistent, unreliable, or absent social interactions can derail brain development and push children off healthy developmental trajectories.

Geneticists also now know that experiences can also alter the expression of our genes during sensitive periods of development, which means that genes alone do not determine outcomes. Changes in gene expression can affect both brain development and behaviour thereby increasing or decreasing the likelihood of developing many types of chronic diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, anxiety, depression, and addiction. These outcomes, and others, are common for Indigenous people who carry the burden of historic trauma; the genetic findings parallel the effect of two centuries of colonial law and policies on the current day trauma-based behaviours and challenges many, but not all, Indigenous people face.

²⁷ LaBoucane-Benson, "Reconciliation, Repatriation and Reconnection: A Framework for Building Resilience in Canadian Indigenous Families."

Further, many Indigenous families have, over many generations, been subjected to overwhelming acculturation stress; in addition, children have grown up in environments where they have been left alone to manage normal developmental stress, as well as overwhelming external stresses such as racism, neglect and poverty. Neuroscience has mapped the *toxic stress response*, which occurs when children experience frequent, intense, and long-lasting threats in the absence of adequate adult support. Experiences like abuse, neglect, or living with a caregiver who is not able to provide appropriate serve-and-return interactions, as is the case when a caregiver has an addiction or untreated mental health problem, produce toxic stress in children. This type of experience releases large amounts of stress hormones into the body which can damage developing brain circuits and peripheral systems over time. In short: toxic stress is detrimental to healthy brain development, which affects the adult's capacity to navigate and pursue healthy, productive lifestyles. For Indigenous children living with the burden of historic trauma, toxic stress has deeply affected brain and skill development.

Healing: Decolonization, Reconciliation and Self-Determination

The resilience of the Indigenous individual, family, and community is evident throughout Alberta. Considering the wide-spread and long-standing assimilation effort that Canada has undertaken, not to mention the billions of dollars spent in that enterprise, the fact that Indigenous law, culture, language, and spiritual expression still exists and can be reclaimed is a testament to the deep, intergenerational resilience of First Nation, Métis and Inuit people.

Indigenous family resilience “is synonymous with the state of connectedness of the members of the family: it is the ability to maintain connectedness to family, clan and society, as well as the natural environment and the spiritual cosmos. The more connected the family is (internally between members and externally with community and the natural/spiritual environments) the more resilience it will realize.”²⁸ The quality of connection between people will dictate the quality of life, and good relationships are informed by the principles of respect, caring, sharing, kindness, humility, honesty and self-determination.²⁹ The more these principles are evident in relationships between individuals and other environments, the more resilience the family and community will manifest.

Healing is a process whereby individuals and families are re-oriented to an interconnected worldview, placing importance on building good relationships with their family and their community. Often this requires the reparation of the spiral of relationships that have been fragmented or confused with trauma-based behaviour.³⁰ Healing those relationships is therefore the process of building resilience, which is to say that healing and building family resilience are essentially the same process.

From this perspective, reclaiming an interconnected worldview and repairing and reconciling relationships are both inherent in the process of healing and building family/community resilience.³¹ For many people, healing is also learning laws, morals, and ethics that inform healthy relationships. Indeed,

²⁸ Ibid., 205.

²⁹ LaBoucane-Benson, “Reconciliation, Repatriation and Reconnection: A Framework for Building Resilience in Canadian Indigenous Families.”

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

reclaiming Indigenous legal tradition through language, ceremony, cultural practice, and stories creates respectful relationships and builds a positive Indigenous identity, with a sense of belonging/responsibility to those relationships.

As such, Indigenous culture, language, ethics, laws, and worldview provides a framework to address historic trauma. In other words, Indigenous ways of knowing must be used to name the issue (i.e., provide meaning to historic trauma), to create interventions, and to decide if those interventions are effective.

Earlier, historic trauma was visually presented as a collapsed spiral of relationships: a tangled, chaotic knot. By reclaiming an interconnected worldview that is founded on building and renewing respectful, healthy relationships, the spiral can be disentangled and re-oriented to reclaim respect for relationship boundaries (Figure 2).

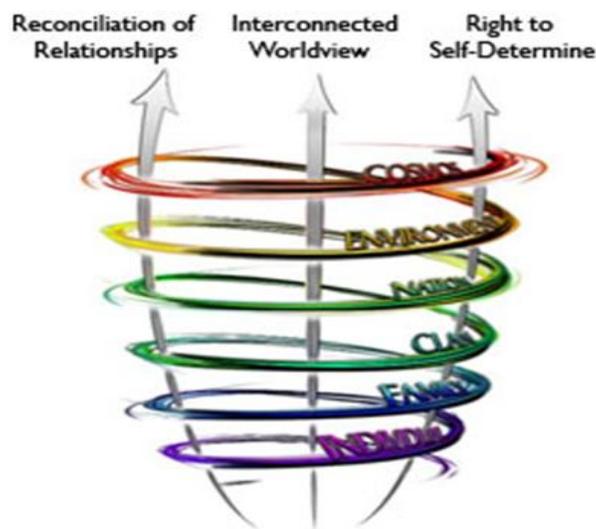


Figure 2: Indigenous Model of Building Individual and Family Resilience²⁹

As such, there are three conditions (represented by the poles in Figure 2) for the building and maintaining of family and community resilience and for healing from the effects of historic trauma:

- reclaiming an interconnected relationships-based worldview and legal tradition;
- reconciliation of damaged relationships; and
- recovering the power to respectfully self-determine.³²

For resilience, healing or change to occur, all three dimensions of the healing process need to be engaged at many different levels: individual, family, clan, and nation (community).

³² Ibid.

Reclaiming the Mediating Role of the Indigenous Family

“While many Indigenous families may still practice some aspects of interconnectedness, (which accounts for the fact that they have survived), the essential web of relationships has been at times fragmented or confused with trauma-based behaviour. For these families, the process of building family resilience is central to their health and survival. At the very core of this process is the renewal of respectful relationships within the family and between the family and the community, natural and spiritual environments.”³³ Essentially, building resilience is a (sometimes very difficult) process of individual and family re-orientation, reclamation of the rules between family members, and the adoption of roles and responsibilities to the family unit, broadly defined.

Interconnected Family Services

Interconnected family services must be grounded in the principles of reciprocity and fluidity (everything and everyone can and must change), as well as be informed by the values that are inherent in the nation’s legal traditions (such as kindness, caring, sharing, honesty, humility, respect and freedom).

There is widespread evidence of significant, ongoing Indigenous individual, family and nation resistance to colonization since the time of contact. Understanding the critical role of resistance by individuals, families and communities to every government attempt at assimilation will help service providers to understand difficult, rebellious and resistant clients. Resistant behaviour, from this perspective, is a means of survival and a product of deep distrust for government services. It is also a strength that can be the foundation for family growth and healing.

In addition, service providers must ensure that they are not continuing the mission of Christianisation and enfranchisement, and ensure that they are not reflecting the colonial assumptions and toxic narratives of colonization. Reconciliation in the areas of spiritual expression and Indigenous pedagogy (language, ceremony, land-based learning and stories) is paramount in the healing process. Services that are grounded in restorative, reconciliatory processes, promote equality between religion and traditional spirituality, and include Indigenous leadership will create safe spaces for family voice in decision-making, identity reclamation and healing.

Many Indigenous community-based organizations are actively decolonizing; they are reclaiming their interconnected worldview by working with Elders and mobilizing traditional knowledge to create programs and services that have the capacity to promote healing and self-determination of their clients. Many programs offered by these organizations and First Nations or Métis communities are focussed on strengthening and preserving the Indigenous family, the primary agent of change.

Healing Theory & Programs

Healing from historic trauma is a learning process that includes activities that foster reclaiming the relationships-based worldview. At its core, healing is a movement from isolation, despair, and

³³ Ibid., 209.

hopelessness to belonging and deep responsibility to all living beings within the web of relationships.³⁴ Healing programs and services are experiential educational processes that teach history, culture, and connectedness, and mobilize sacred knowledge in the “recapturing of the life force.”³⁵

Healing programs are often framed as the beginning of a lifelong healing journey that involves personal and collective decolonization. Often, programs will combine traditional teachings ceremony and activities with history lessons on colonization and the impact on Indigenous people throughout Canada and North America. Learning colonial history provides context for historic-trauma informed behaviour, with the goal of encouraging individuals take responsibility for their actions, make amends (whenever possible), and develop the capacity to make good decisions for themselves.³⁶

These programs will often use Western techniques in complementary ways. These may include therapeutic exercises, meditation (neurodecolonization)³⁷ or the reconceptualising of Western theory (such as Maslow’s theory³⁸ or attachment theory³⁹) to be more congruent with an interconnected, relational worldview.

³⁴ LaBoucane-Benson, “Reconciliation, Repatriation and Reconnection: A Framework for Building Resilience in Canadian Indigenous Families.”

³⁵ Leona Makokis, quoted in Blue Quills First Nations College and Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research, *The Gathering: A Compendium of Stories and Presentations Exploring Positive, Strengths-Based Outcomes Related to Enhancing First Nations and Métis Child Wellbeing of Kids-in-Care in Alberta*, 8.

³⁶ Isaak et al., “Surviving, Healing and Moving Forward.”

³⁷ Yellowbird (2013), cited in Sasakamoose et al., “First Nation and Métis Youth Perspectives of Health An Indigenous Qualitative Inquiry,” 638.

³⁸ Quinn, “Coming Full Circle - The Lifelong Journey of Becoming,” 49.

³⁹ Simard and Blight, “Developing a Culturally Restorative Approach to Aboriginal Child and Youth Development,” 39.

Introduction

Historical trauma refers specifically to the inter-generational impact of colonization on Indigenous peoples. In the 1990s, the mental health issues suffered by Indigenous people in Canada were first conceptualized as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Later researchers briefly began developing the concept of ‘residential school survivor syndrome,’ but then settled on the term historical trauma to create a definition that included the larger historical contributing processes. The most recent definition includes four aspects:

1. “Colonial injury to Indigenous peoples by European settlers who ‘perpetrated’ conquest, subjugation, and dispossession;
2. Collective experience of these injuries by entire Indigenous communities whose identities, ideals, and interactions were radically altered as a consequence;
3. Cumulative effects from these injuries as the consequences of subjugation, oppression, and marginalization have ‘snowballed’ throughout ever-shifting historical sequences of adverse policies and practices by dominant settler societies; and
4. Cross-generational impacts of these injuries as legacies of risk and vulnerability were passed from ancestors to descendants in unremitting fashion until ‘healing’ interrupts these deleterious processes.”⁴⁰

The current definition is useful in underscoring the past and present colonial conditions that cause and perpetuate intergenerational trauma. However, every First Nation, Métis and Inuit community will have unique experiences of colonization due to significant diversity of culture, geographic location and other specific historical encounters or events. To understand the nuanced effects of colonization and how it informs our understanding of historic trauma and healing, we must dive deeply into specific culture and experiences.

This report was written to inform the Models of Caregiver Support, out of the Foundations of Caregiver Support Steering Committee. This report is offered in three sections:

- The research design and method employed for the literature review follows.
- The literature review, which is presented as a case study, with focus on the Cree experience of colonization and trauma. Exploring Cree law, culture and pedagogy is the foundation for understanding what was damaged by colonization and what must be reclaimed in the healing process. Similar in-depth studies into Métis and Dene culture and experience would be beneficial.
- Finally, the annotated bibliography is offered at the end of the document. It provides a summary of the analysis (rather than the detailed categorization and coding).

A Note about Terminology

This discussion is written in English, the language of the colonizer in Canada. Thus, the terms used to refer to the people who were here before European settlers will be in the language of the colonizer. It

⁴⁰ Kirmayer, Gone, and Moses, “Rethinking Historical Trauma,” 301.

was chosen to use the term “Indian” when referring to colonial laws for consistency, as that was the term used in all of the legislation to which is referred. It is also beneficial, as it demonstrates for the reader how the Cree, Blackfoot, Dene and Nakoda (Stoney) people of Alberta are still referred to today in Federal Law. Quotes from authors that use the terms Native and First Nation have also been included. In the rest of the paper, the terms Aboriginal, Indigenous, and First Peoples interchangeably to promote flow and readability in the paper. All of these terms have colonial connotations and thus can be problematic, but they are the words available in the English language. When referencing specifically a Cree worldview, words (and meanings) that were specific and contextually appropriate. In addition, Cree terms are used to describe/refer to important concepts within this worldview.

Research Design and Method

In 2015, Child and Family Services (Government of Alberta) approved a framework document that outlines principles, guidelines and practices that enable caregivers to support the safety and well-being of infants, children, and youth from early intervention through temporary care to a stable and secure home. However, while there is extensive literature on Western understandings of child development, there has not yet been a comprehensive review of literature to draw together the impacts of trauma, and grief and loss on the development of Indigenous children. Perhaps more important, there has been little focus on traditional Indigenous understandings of child development, and there is a need to focus on research that studies the importance of Indigenous culture, ceremony, and practice in the healing and resilience of Indigenous children and their communities.

Annotated Bibliography

The researchers undertook a comprehensive search for literature that addressed childhood development from an Indigenous world view, focusing on trauma, grief and loss, and resilience. The first round of searches used the comprehensive searches of Academic Search Complete and Google Scholar. Several databases were also searched, including: Dissertations and Theses Global; Global Health Library; Bibliography of Native North Americans; and CINAHL. The researchers also hand-searched journals that focus on Indigenous peoples, including: *Indigenous Policy Studies*; *Pimatisiwin*; *First Peoples Child and Family Review*; *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples*; *International Journal of Indigenous Health*; *Canadian Journal of Native Studies*; *Decolonization: Indigeneity; Education & Society*; *Journal of Indigenous Health*; and, *International Journal of Indigenous Policy*. Additionally, the researchers examined several community-based organizations in Canada that conduct research focusing on Indigenous communities, including: Urban Indigenous Knowledge Network; National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health; Indigenous Healing Foundation; and National Indigenous Health Organization. As the researchers read the articles, they also searched bibliographies and added more sources. The search terms used to conduct the searches are listed in the chart below. Searches were limited to Alberta or Canada, and spanned the years 2000-2016, although some earlier documents were also included because of their significant contributions, such as sections of the report by the Royal Commission on Indigenous Peoples released in 1996 and the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Keywords employed for the search included:

Child/children	Indigenous	Trauma/grief/loss
Youth	Indigenous	Ceremony/traditional/cultural/ritual
Kids	Native	Healing
Family/families	Cree/Métis/Dene	Resilience/resilient/resiliency

After completing all searches, the researchers found 44 sources to categorize for the annotated bibliography.

Categories of Analysis

Analysis of the literature was along two axes: first, the literature was coded in relation to the four categories of the *Indigenous Model of Building Individual and Family Resilience*, developed by Patti LaBoucane-Benson.⁴¹ Four categories arise from this framework when considering literature that focuses on child development from a Cree perspective (as well as Métis and Dene to a lesser extent).

1. The development of an Interconnected Worldview;
2. Adoption of a legal tradition;
3. The creation of a positive individual, bicultural and collective identity; and
4. The capacity to become a self-determining individual and part of a self-determining family.

Second, literature was coded according to whether ideas addressed:

1. Cree society prior to colonization, including philosophical grounding, organization of families and societies, understandings of human development, and pedagogical approaches;
2. The impact of colonization on Cree society, including policy, programs, attitudes and ensuing cultural genocide and inter-generational, historic trauma; and
3. Healing and resilience.

In addition, the researchers added a fifth code: Outliers. This code was created to include pertinent information that could potentially expand or enhance the model and thus our understanding of worldview, the effect of historic trauma on child development, and healing.

Thus, the annotated bibliography includes the following information for each of the 44 sources:

1. Citation (authors, title and publication information);
2. Description of group studied or reported on;
3. Summary of each article/report/book, rather than the published abstract (if one was offered). The summaries created are more specific to the questions posed in the literature review and thus more helpful.
4. An overview of the contributions of each article/report/book in each of the five categories.

Literature Review

The literature review represents a synthesis of the categorized and coded data; each chapter represents one of the four categories, with pre-colonization, historic trauma and healing code-based sub-categories.

The chapters are written narratively, each weaving together literature from over 50 sources. Note that quotations using first-person voice have been italicized to highlight the voice of the person that is being quoted, whether an author, an Elder, or an informant for a research project.

⁴¹ LaBoucane-Benson, "Reconciliation, Repatriation and Reconnection: A Framework for Building Resilience in Canadian Indigenous Families."

Interconnected Worldview

The purpose of this section is to discuss (provide evidence for) the pre-contact worldview, to demonstrate what was damaged by colonization, how that has affected Indigenous people, and how the historic trauma-informed behaviours can be healed. It is not to suggest that pre-colonization Cree society was a utopia, but rather that there was a valid, highly effective Cree worldview that gave rise to a philosophy, science, and pedagogy, which resulted in successful Cree societies. In fact, “positing a historic utopia cannot adequately capture the importance of Cree legal traditions to human flourishing and social order within Cree communities, and the immensity of the terrible losses wrought by colonialism. In part, it is because of what it, too, erases: the ability to imagine the contemporary, reasonable Cree person; the value of Cree social rules, meaning-making, and world making narratives; socially embodied generational conversations and debates; and the capacity to confidently respond to universal human and social issues.”⁴²

Further, the discussion focuses specifically on Cree society, acknowledging that First Nations are diverse with unique cultures, languages, ceremonies and ways of organizing families and communities. It is unwise to assume that research/evidence from one nation would apply to another. However, it is also true that “there is an interconnectedness...among the sacred ceremonies, teachings and beliefs of First Nations. Each treaty First Nations possesses its own unique language and cultural traditions. Yet in spite of that, the Elders are able in their discussions with one another to identify a unique First Nations world view and philosophy”.⁴³

Cree Interconnected Worldview

Mamatowisowin (Life Force) Mamatawisiwin (Spirit Power)

The Cree world view is shaped by the relationships between Cree people and all living beings.⁴⁴ Leona Makokis stated: “I learned that in our Cree world view, the term ‘life force’ is used to describe the Indigenous people’s connection to our Creator, to our relationships with the plants, animals, the cosmos, all of humankind, to the face to face interaction of people within a family and extended family, and the world of intimacy and friendship.”⁴⁵ This life force exists within and amongst all life forms; it is the ‘glue’ or connective energy that binds all living things within the Cree interconnected worldview. As such, humans are not separate from the natural world, because all living things are deeply interconnected.⁴⁶

⁴² Friedland, “Navigating through Narratives of Despair,” 279.

⁴³ Cardinal and Hildebrandt, *Treaty Elders of Saskatchewan: Our Dream Is That Our Peoples Will One Day Be Clearly Recognized as Nations*, 9.

⁴⁴ Makokis, “Teachings from Cree Elders,” 89.

⁴⁵ Blue Quills First Nations College and Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research, *The Gathering: A Compendium of Stories and Presentations Exploring Positive, Strengths-Based Outcomes Related to Enhancing First Nations and Métis Child Wellbeing of Kids-in-Care in Alberta*, 4.

⁴⁶ Nabigon and Mawhiney, “Aboriginal Theory.”

Sacred Gifts from the Creator

Cree beliefs about creation teach that the Creator (*wiyohkawimaw*) gave the people sacred gifts as a result of a sacred relationship between the people and the Creator.⁴⁷ The first gifts were physical in nature and include the people, land, animals and plants. “The Elders say that the Creator gave the First Nations peoples the lands in North America. The Elders maintain that the land belongs to their peoples as their peoples belong to the land. The land, waters and all life-giving forces in North America were, and are, an integral part of a sacred relationship with the creator.”⁴⁸ The second gifts were metaphysical in nature: the rules, law, principles, and values that guide our many relationships.⁴⁹

Framework: Web of Family And Kinship

Before European settlement, the Indigenous people of North America were the sole inhabitants of the continent. The first Europeans to land in Canada would have “encountered free, vibrant, sovereign organisation and territorial jurisdictions that were older (3,000-30,000 years), more populous (60-80 million) and more variegated than Europe.”⁵⁰ Within these societies, ‘family’ could have been defined as a complex combination of biological ties, clan membership bonds, adoptions and economic partnerships (e.g. hunting partnerships between communities), and included a large extended network of aunts, uncles, grandparents and cousins. “In many First Nations communities, members of the same clan are considered family, linked through kinship ties that may not be clearly traceable, but stretch back to a common ancestor in mythical time.”⁵¹ This conceptualization created a sophisticated, broad and inclusive family system: “The effect of these diverse, overlapping bonds was to create a dense network of relationships within which sharing and obligations of mutual aid ensured that an effective safety net was in place.”⁵²

This complex kinship network can be visualized as a spider-web of concentric circles of relationships⁵³, with the children placed in the centre of the web. Their safety, security and love is guaranteed by the strength of the numerous relationships (with inherent obligations and responsibilities) that constitutes the web. Children were viewed as sacred gifts⁵⁴ from the Creator; they are “spiritually pure, totally sin free, and completely innocent.”⁵⁵ Children enter this world with special gifts to share with their family and a higher purpose, both of which “manifest themselves as they become teachers, mothers, hunters,

⁴⁷ Cardinal and Hildebrandt, *Treaty Elders of Saskatchewan: Our Dream Is That Our Peoples Will One Day Be Clearly Recognized as Nations*.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁴⁹ Cardinal and Hildebrandt, *Treaty Elders of Saskatchewan: Our Dream Is That Our Peoples Will One Day Be Clearly Recognized as Nations*.

⁵⁰ Tully, “The Struggles of Indigenous Peoples for and of Freedom,” 38.

⁵¹ Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, vol. III, 9.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 11.

⁵³ Littlebear (2000), cited in Carriere and Richardson, “From Longing to Belonging: Attachment Theory, Connectedness, and Indigenous Children in Canada,” 55.

⁵⁴ Tomasso and Finney, “A Discussion Paper on Indigenous Custom Adoption Part 2”; Simard and Blight, “Developing a Culturally Restorative Approach to Aboriginal Child and Youth Development”; Dorion, “Opikinawasowin: The Life Long Process of Growing Cree and Métis Children.”

⁵⁵ Dorion, “Opikinawasowin: The Life Long Process of Growing Cree and Métis Children,” 117.

councillors, artisans and visionaries. They renew the strength of the family, clan and village and make the elders young again with their joyful presence.”⁵⁶ “The community is thereby compelled to do its best in producing well-adjusted and productive adults to further strengthen the collective through the generations. This is not only good for the child but necessary for the overall survival of the community of which she is an integral part.”⁵⁷

Therefore, the web of relationships is essentially “a child-centered and caring community of people... who all have responsibility for the good and welfare of the community’s children. As such, a child may be cared for by her natural mother, an aunty, and a cousin at different points in the child’s life...this has traditionally been seen as desirable in order to produce a child who embodies the totality of tribal experience, its values, knowledge and ways of behaving.”⁵⁸

In addition, customary adoption practices were used to create additional, purposeful relationships between children and non-biological family members. “It is still common practice in many communities for parents to give a child to another family in the community. In some cases, a fertile couple would agree to have one of their children adopted at birth by a childless couple; in so doing the two families would contract a special bond with each other for life. As well, many traditionalists, having retained their knowledge of Indigenous language, bush skills and medicine practices, consider it a privilege to have been reared by grandparents within these customary adoption arrangements.”⁵⁹ Customary adoption demonstrates an interconnected perspective that children “that are meant to be shared to promote community strength, bonding, and caring.”⁶⁰

Further, the web of relationships includes purposeful kinship connections with plants, animals, the land and the spirit world,⁶¹ creating reciprocal, critical relationships that ensured ecological survival and sustainability. The web of relationships (extended family) was the foundation of all social organization within Indigenous society.

Framework: Medicine Wheel/Circle

The circle is a powerful symbol of the connection between First Nations people and the Creator in many Canadian Indigenous communities: it is “at once a statement of allegiance, of loyalty, fidelity and unity by both the nation and its people.”⁶² In the medicine wheel framework, “the circle symbol is elaborated to convey the interdependence of persons, families, communities and nations with the natural and spiritual order of the universe.”⁶³ “Teachings regarding the medicine wheel vary across FNMI communities, however, a commonality across teachings is that the wheel is made up of four quadrants,

⁵⁶ Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, vol. III, 21.

⁵⁷ Richard, “A Commentary Against Aboriginal to Non-Aboriginal Adoption,” 102.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁵⁹ Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, vol. III, 11.

⁶⁰ Bertsch and Bidgood (2010), cited in Tomasso and Finney, “A Discussion Paper on Indigenous Custom Adoption Part 2,” 25.

⁶¹ Carriere and Richardson, “From Longing to Belonging: Attachment Theory, Connectedness, and Indigenous Children in Canada.”

⁶² Cardinal and Hildebrandt, *Treaty Elders of Saskatchewan: Our Dream Is That Our Peoples Will One Day Be Clearly Recognized as Nations*, 14.

⁶³ Castellano, “Aboriginal Family Trends,” 14.

each representing an area of health.”⁶⁴ On one hand, the medicine wheel is used to demonstrate relational holism, as well as balance between the mental, emotional, physical and spiritual dimensions of the individual, family and natural world.⁶⁵ On the other hand, The Cree Medicine Wheel is used to describe the internal (spiritual) and external (physical) self, and the fact that good overall health requires attention to both.⁶⁶

The medicine wheel framework has also been used to understand healthy human development, within the context of a sustainable world.⁶⁷ “The Cree Medicine Wheel provides theories about different stages of human development, appropriate developmental tasks of each stage, and knowledge about assets that facilitate positive development at each stage.”⁶⁸ The medicine wheel model uses relationships as the foundation of all understanding, as well as “the role of spirituality, developmental plasticity, diversity, the interconnectedness of “nested environments”, and the concept of co-creation between self and Creator”.⁶⁹

Cree Pedagogy: Ways of Knowing in an Interconnected Worldview

In a Cree Interconnected worldview, the relationship of the learner to what is being learned is intimate and personal⁷⁰ as knowledge can only be gained experientially, through the interaction of the body, mind, and spirit of the learner and nature. “It is an experience in context, a subjective experience that, for the knower, becomes knowledge itself. The experience is knowledge.”⁷¹ Children are taught to learn from their own experiences and draw their own conclusions.⁷² All knowledge is gleaned in relationship with other living beings (both material and spiritual), a process whereby Indigenous people “place themselves in the stream of consciousness,”⁷³ or within the life force (*mamatowisowin*) that connects all living things, in order to gain knowledge of the world around them. For example, “it is a Cree belief that by observing the habits and characteristics of the animals, lessons are learned.”⁷⁴

Role of Language

The Cree interconnected worldview is the foundation of the Cree language. Children who are raised to speak the Cree language also learn Cree laws, rules and values, which are embedded within the language.⁷⁵ For example, *Nitsiyihkâson* is more than the statement ‘my name is’, “it relates to the

⁶⁴ Graham and Stamler (2010), cited in Sasakamoose et al., “First Nation and Métis Youth Perspectives of Health: An Indigenous Qualitative Inquiry,” 638.

⁶⁵ Castellano, “Aboriginal Family Trends”; Nabigon and Mawhiney, “Aboriginal Theory.”

⁶⁶ Simard and Blight, “Developing a Culturally Restorative Approach to Aboriginal Child and Youth Development.”

⁶⁷ Wenger-Nabigon, “The Cree Medicine Wheel as an Organizing Paradigm of Theories of Human Development.”

⁶⁸ Ibid., 158.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Goulet, *Ways of Knowing*.

⁷¹ Ermine, “Aboriginal Epistemology,” 104.

⁷² Dorion, “Métis Family Life.”

⁷³ Ermine, “Aboriginal Epistemology,” 104.

⁷⁴ Makokis, “Teachings from Cree Elders,” 89.

⁷⁵ Simard and Blight, “Developing a Culturally Restorative Approach to Aboriginal Child and Youth Development.”

kinship connections of the child to the network of social relationships in the community, and indeed the genetic and spiritual connections the child shares with their ancestors.”⁷⁶

The Cree language is also verb-based, “whereas in western worldview knowledge is deemed a noun. Therefore, in Indigenous worldview and their language, knowledge is considered a living, moving, growing entity.”⁷⁷ The interconnectedness of all beings is demonstrated, and therefore taught, within the structure of the language itself; “The significance lies in the fact that in Swampy Cree language the object and subject are both inside the same verb word...In the world there are not actions without actors.”⁷⁸

Role of Ceremony

The purpose of ceremonies is to be mindful of, build, maintain, and strengthen sacred relationships between human beings and all other living beings. “According to the Elders, the many ceremonies that First Nations were given came as a gift from the [Creator] to enable First Nations people to maintain a continuing relationship with the [Creator] and His Creation. Part of those gifts required that First Nations people maintain a connectedness to Mother Earth and all of her life-sustaining forces.”⁷⁹ Ceremonies are at once experiential, deeply philosophical, an exploration of our inner-selves and an opportunity to build relationships and sense of belonging with other people, plants, animals and the spirit world. “In that spiritual realm, we are all related, so the stories about the Other are also about us.”⁸⁰ It is a priority to teach children that the spiritual realm “is a very real and accessible source of wisdom, which can be accessed through prayer, meditation, dreamtime, and traditional ceremonies.”⁸¹ It is the duty of the extended family to “help children form their own special relationship with a loving and kind Creator.”⁸² This is, in part accomplished with the giving of spirit names in ceremony, which connects the child to the spirit world in meaningful, long-lasting ways.⁸³

Cree ceremonies are precise; they offered at particular times of the year, focussed on the strengthening of relationships with specific living/spiritual beings, as well as teachings about sacred values. For example, in the winter Give Away Ceremony, sacred Cree teachings on the value of sharing and giving thanks, were connected to prayers for a successful hunt;⁸⁴ in current society, the ceremony focusses on “providing the necessities to live a prosperous life, with enough food to carry families through each winter.”⁸⁵

⁷⁶ Pazderka et al., “Nitsiyihkâson,” 54.

⁷⁷ McKinley et al (2009), cited in Simard and Blight, “Developing a Culturally Restorative Approach to Aboriginal Child and Youth Development,” 34.

⁷⁸ Brundige, “*Tanisi Isinisohtamahk Kitaskino: Cree Philosophy. Akwa Kayaskiacimowin*,” 45.

⁷⁹ Cardinal and Hildebrandt, *Treaty Elders of Saskatchewan: Our Dream Is That Our Peoples Will One Day Be Clearly Recognized as Nations*, 20.

⁸⁰ Castellano, “Aboriginal Family Trends,” 1.

⁸¹ Dorion, “Opikinawasowin: The Life Long Process of Growing Cree and Métis Children,” 53.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 52.

⁸³ Pazderka et al., “Nitsiyihkâson.”

⁸⁴ Makokis, “Teachings from Cree Elders.”

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 107.

Role of Stories

Story telling is an important pedagogical tool in teaching an interconnected worldview. Knowledge is passed down from one generation to the next orally, through rigorous story telling techniques; “The continuance of that traditional knowledge...must pass from one holder to the next. Your life’s work is to find the one to pass it on for its survival.”⁸⁶ Stories taught children about the world around them, how they were to engage with the world and the consequences of not learning from the world around them, learning “how relationship building, cooperation and sharing are necessary to maintaining harmony.”⁸⁷ Cree stories of creation teach children natural laws and their *wahkohtowin* with other beings. “There is a Cree belief all stories and songs hold a spirit manifested into existence through our expression of sacred breath.”⁸⁸ Embedded in the creation stories is the central idea that “we were spirits before we were human, and that our time on this earth is one of having a human experience.”⁸⁹

In the Cree worldview, story-tellers are important; through their stories we learn how to be fully human.⁹⁰ “We learn how to respect our human relatives, our animal relatives, our animal cousins and our plant kin. We learn about our responsibilities to our sacred Mother Earth and our place in the order of life.”⁹¹ Cree stories also promote an egalitarian interconnectedness; that all living beings are important, worthy and must be respected. “Cree peoples did not conceptualize a universe whereby they were the supreme being above all other creatures. Logically, we could not have come into the world first, since we are dependent on plants and animals. The fact that Cree peoples have so many stories involving only animals...yet animals with cultural accomplishments, shows once again recognition of our place in the order of the universe...The world is not understood as having been created for humans. De-centering humans is common among Cree peoples’ stories.”⁹²

Neuroscience of Interconnectedness

The foundation of healthy brain development in children is the presence of healthy relationships that provide the social interaction necessary to create strong neural circuits. Brain development is an extended process that begins before birth and lasts into early adulthood. During the prenatal period, the brain generates almost all of the brain cells, or neurons, it will need, and these neurons then begin reaching out to make connections with neighbouring cells. These connections are called synapses, and they allow neurons to communicate with each other and form interconnected circuits that can process incoming information and direct brain function and behaviour. Neural circuits form in a predictable sequence: simple circuits that support basic functions, like arousal, appetitive functions, gross motor control, and parts of the sensory systems, form first and are generally fully functional by birth. These

⁸⁶ Ibid., 102.

⁸⁷ Brundige, “*Tanisi Isinisohtamahk Kitaskino: Cree Philosophy. Akwa Kayaskiacimowin*,” 175.

⁸⁸ Dorion, “*Opikinawasowin: The Life Long Process of Growing Cree and Métis Children*,” 96.

⁸⁹ Simard and Blight, “*Developing a Culturally Restorative Approach to Aboriginal Child and Youth Development*,” 38.

⁹⁰ Cree Elder Mason, cited in Brundige, “*Tanisi Isinisohtamahk Kitaskino: Cree Philosophy. Akwa Kayaskiacimowin*,” 36.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid., 110–111.

circuits provide the foundation for more complex circuits like language, attention, memory, emotional control, problem-solving, and critical thinking, to build on. For example, research⁹³ has shown that the human cortex matures in a back to front pattern, with visual cortex maturing first and the prefrontal cortex (the seat of executive functions) not maturing until the mid to late twenties.

During childhood and adolescence, neural circuits become interconnected and grow ever more complex to support our evolving skill development. Just as a house requires a strong foundation to support the walls and roof, the brain also requires a strong foundation of neural circuits in the early years to support later development. Agitation of these circuits can not only produce deficits in the corresponding skill, but can also adversely affect the development of circuits that form later on⁹⁴.

In the first few years of life, the brain is creating up to 1 million new synapses every second⁹⁵. However, as brain circuits mature, they generally lose some of their connections in order to become faster and more efficient at processing information. This is a normal developmental process called pruning and it is essential for optimal brain function. Pruning happens in an experience-dependent, or “use it or lose it” fashion: the neural connections that are used most often are strengthened and retained and those that are not used are weakened and pruned away. This is why the experiences children have during development are so important: the more each connection is used, the stronger it will become. If connections are not used, they can be pruned away.

The experience-dependent sculpting of neural circuits was first postulated in 1949 by Hebb in his seminal work, *The Organization of Behavior: A Neuropsychological Theory*. Hubel and Weisel’s work on the visual system in the 1960s greatly expanded the understanding of this process by showing that there are periods of time in which some neural systems are exquisitely sensitive to experiences, and in which certain experiences need to occur in order for development to proceed normally⁹⁶. This principle of sensitive developmental periods where plasticity – or the brain’s ability to change in response to experience – is occurring applies to neural circuits involved in many aspects of cognitive, social, and emotional behaviours⁹⁷.

Neural circuits that support cognitive, emotional, and social skills critical to learning and health outcomes are built through back-and-forth social interactions between children and stable, responsive adults. Thus, it is no surprise that human infants are born essentially “hard wired” for social interactions with the adults around them; the Indigenous complex web of relationships, would therefore provide a rich platform for healthy neural development.

Studies have confirmed that newborn infants recognize the unique pattern of contrast and shadow formed by the human face and preferentially direct their gaze toward it⁹⁸. For a species born helpless, not able to feed themselves, keep warm, or flee from danger without support, it is evolutionarily

⁹³ Gogtay et al. (2004)

⁹⁴ For example: Hoza, 2007; Fitzpatrick, 2015

⁹⁵ Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2009.

⁹⁶ Reviewed in Espinosa and Stryker, 2012.

⁹⁷ For example: Blakemore, 2010; Sullivan and Holman, 2010; Johnson and Newport, 1991

⁹⁸ Fantz, 1963

adaptive to be able to engage adult members of the group as it helps ensure survival. However, during the developmental period, these social interactions also play a key role in shaping neural circuits.

The back-and-forth social interactions between a child and a stable, responsive adult can be thought of like the serve-and-return interaction that goes on between two people playing a game like tennis. Babies and young children reach out for interaction with adults through eye contact, babbling, facial expressions, crying, gestures, and eventually words; adults must return the interaction by responding in a developmentally appropriate way that keeps the interaction going for a period of time. This back-and-forth social interaction allows babies and children to practice key skills such as forming and maintaining relationships, language and literacy, attention, working memory, emotional control, coping, and problem-solving. Repeated use of these prosocial skills strengthens corresponding connections in each respective brain circuit and provides a strong foundation for more complex circuits to build on. In the same way, social interactions that result in the practice of aggression, fear-based behaviours, or emotional dysregulation will strengthen those neural circuits accordingly. Thus, the quality of the social interactions a child engages in is critically important to brain development.

Colonization: Fragmentation of Relationships

Colonial Policy

The *Constitution Act* of 1867,⁹⁹ building upon legislation, inquiries, and commissions from the previous decades, adopted policies of assimilation and conversion to Christianity of Indigenous people. The purpose of the act was to rid Indigenous people of their identity, culture, traditions, and language, thus transforming them into British subjects - described as the effort to “kill the Indian in the child.”¹⁰⁰

Boarding Schools

To achieve the goal of killing the Indian in the child, the federal government opened residential institutions based on the “industrial boarding school” model. The industrial model delivered a half-day curriculum followed by a half day focus on practical activities, trades, and chores.¹⁰¹ It was department policy to discourage graduates from returning to the reserves, instead focussing on positions with the trades and in the cities, thus assimilating Indigenous people with the general community.¹⁰² In a 1916 review of a residential school's records, the Agent concluded that the school had neglected its initial purpose and that it had become mainly a “workhouse.”¹⁰³ Over time, the Federal government recognized that school policy was failing and by 1922 the industrial model was abandoned in favour of a boarding school model that became known as a residential school.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁹ Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, vol. I, 309.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. III, 349.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, vol. I, 315.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 317.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 333.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 318.

Residential Schools

The residential schools were funded by the Federal Government who contracted different church organizations in Canada to operate the schools. Government policy reflected the assumption that Indigenous children would fail to succeed if they remained under the influence of their families. This assumption gave rise to the justification for: removal of children from their communities; complete disruption of the Indigenous families; attempted re-socializing of children in residential schools; and schemes for integrating graduates into a non-Indigenous world.¹⁰⁵ The government's stated goal and wish was to obtain "entire possession" of Indigenous children once they reached the age of seven or eight.¹⁰⁶ Accordingly, residential school policies structured Indigenous children's movement from the Indigenous to the non-Indigenous world in three phases: separation, socialization, and assimilation through enfranchisement – which entailed a male graduate leaving behind his Indian status and becoming a full Canadian citizen¹⁰⁷ without protected Indian status. Residential schools were the most powerful instrument in the government's enterprise to civilize Indians with the long-term goal of eradicating Indigenous identity, Indigenous tribes, and the "Indian Problem."

Although the churches were contracted to provide administrative, operational, and educational services at the schools, no provisions were made in the contracts to oversee/monitor/assess the quality of care and education Indigenous children received. Although Indian Agents raised concerns, schools operated without any regulations regarding how discipline and punishment was administered at the schools (with the exception of a regulation passed in 1949 that encouraged the use of strapping); as such an environment was created where staff acted without consequence.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, regardless of the numerous reports filed over decades, no action was ever taken by either churches or government to correct the substantive proof of neglect, cruelty and abuse (emotional, physical and sexual) perpetrated on the children attending residential schools.

Much evidence exists describing the mismanaged, underfunded, and overcrowded conditions of residential schools. "The government believed that between the forced labour of students and the poorly paid labour of missionaries, it could operate a residential school system on a nearly cost-free basis...The system both intensified the level of competition among churches for students and encouraged principals to accept students who should have been barred from admission because they were too young or too sick."¹⁰⁹ The lack of funding also affected the quality and quantity of food available for students. "The federal government knowingly chose not to provide schools with enough money to ensure that kitchens and dining rooms were properly equipped, that cooks were properly trained, and, most significantly, that food was purchased in sufficient quantity and quality for growing children. It was a decision that left thousands of Indigenous children vulnerable to disease"¹¹⁰ (such as tuberculosis) which resulted in a high death rate among students.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 313.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 314.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 317.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., I, 352.

¹⁰⁹ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada's Residential Schools*, 59.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 89–90.

¹¹¹ Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, vol. I, 329-330.

It was common school policy that upon admission to the school, traditional clothing was discarded and replaced with school uniforms, traditional hair braids were cut off (and often boy's heads were completely shaved), the use of traditional language was forbidden and the practice of Indigenous spirituality and culture was deemed morally and ethically wrong and was therefore also prohibited.¹¹² If children dared transgress these rules, they received punishments, which ranged from shaming to physical violence.

As a result, if any of the children did go home, they were unable to communicate with their family and were unaware, suspicious or afraid of customs/rituals that had historically strengthened and reaffirmed relationships between family and community members. The disconnect created between children and their families was described in 1913, where Indian Agents on reserves noted a cultural gap that was creating people stranded between communities, without an identity.¹¹³ Further, the European lecture-style teaching model employed by the residential schools had little in common with the oral, experiential pedagogy of Indigenous people. Thus, many Indigenous children, having been accustomed to the latter, struggled to learn¹¹⁴ the European school curriculum - thus essentially garnering the knowledge/ teachings of neither Settler nor Indigenous society.

By 1956 Federal Government policy regarding residential schools changed, acknowledging the importance that parents played in the children's development, and a provision for the creation of parent school committees was established. By 1971, 180 parent-school committees were formed across Canada; however, they had little authority and no influence in the classroom. As time went on the government worked towards a policy of integration which would see the schools either transform in function or close all together, while at the same time expanding the role of child welfare agencies to address the children who needed social care.¹¹⁵ "By the time the last residential school closed in the 1990s, more than 140,000 Indigenous children had been subjected to this education that systematically denigrated their Indigenous languages, culture, and spirituality as well as disrupting family ties and community involvement in child rearing."¹¹⁶

Child Welfare Policies

After many years in Residential Schools, many graduates were survivors of trauma, abuse and neglect, burdened with significant psychological issues that impaired their ability to create healthy relationships with spouses and children. As a result, many entered adulthood without an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of parents, or how to care for and nurture children of their own. In many occasions, survivors who were dealing with trauma-based behaviours passed on abuse to their children. Their parenting style reflecting the lack of love, nurturing, anger and violent discipline they learned at the hands of school staff. In some communities, physical and sexual abuse within family units became

¹¹² Ibid., 316.

¹¹³ Ibid., 357.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 320.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., vol. III, 23.

¹¹⁶ Kirmayer, Gone, and Moses, "Rethinking Historical Trauma," 306.

pervasive behaviour.¹¹⁷ In other instances, Indigenous homes were reported to be overcrowded, living in poverty with children suffering from neglect by their residential school survivor parents.¹¹⁸

In these cases, Child Welfare authorities were quick to apprehend children, and again residential schools were seen by child welfare as an alternative. According to departmental memos, by 1966 75% of children in residential schools were placed there due to child welfare issues.¹¹⁹ It was also in this time that churches ceased to be in control of the schools as the government took direct control in 1969.¹²⁰ Although there were almost no Indigenous children on the child welfare caseload in the early 1950s, by the mid-1960s one third of all Indigenous children were in care.¹²¹ The apprehension of Indigenous children became so widespread and continuous, it is commonly referred to as the Sixties Scoop; however, in 1980-81 Indigenous children were still grossly over-represented in the child welfare caseload and were almost always placed in non-Indigenous homes.¹²²

The child welfare system began to change in the 1990s as First Nations took control and development of their own child and family services. This led to the development of placement protocols which deemed non-Indigenous family placement as the last resort.¹²³ Still the challenge of Indigenous over-representation remains. One study reported that in 2011, almost half (48.1%) of all children aged 14 and under in foster care were Indigenous children;¹²⁴ in 2015 the government of Alberta reported that 69% of the children in care were Indigenous.¹²⁵ Further, in 2008, the government of Alberta reported that 13% of children in care were at serious risk of harm at the time of apprehension - 87% were not.¹²⁶ An evidence-based *straight line can be drawn that connects multiple generations of residential school survivors to generations that have been raised in government care*, as witnessed by one RCAP respondent: "Most of our clients - probably 90 per cent of them- are in fact, victims themselves of the child welfare system. Most of our clients are young, sole support mothers who very often were removed as children themselves... interesting note is that while the mother may have been in foster care the grandmother- I think we all know where she was. She was in residential school. So, we are into a third generation."¹²⁷

Historic Trauma: Isolation

The removal of children from the family unit through residential school policy has caused numerous effects on the interconnectedness of the Indigenous individual, family and society. The concept of

¹¹⁷ Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, vol. III, 13.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. I, 324.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 324.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 336.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, vol. III, 22.

¹²² Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, vol. III, 23.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹²⁴ <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/as-sa/99-011-x/99-011-x2011001-eng.cfm> (National Household Survey)

¹²⁵ Aboriginal Children in Care Working Group, "Aboriginal Children in Care: Report to Canada's Premiers."

¹²⁶ MacLaurin et al., "Alberta Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect 2008 (AIS-2008): Major Findings."

¹²⁷ Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, vol. III, 31.

historic trauma helps put the long-term impacts of residential school into a larger context. Historic trauma refers to emotional and psychological wounding that is cumulative over the life span of individuals as well as across generations.¹²⁸ Historic trauma is the broadest definition of trauma and encompasses all of the aforementioned categorizations of trauma and traumatic responses. Survivors of historic trauma include not only the residential school survivors who endured physical, emotional and sexual abuse and/or neglect, but also the generations of children who survived abuse and neglect in the child welfare systems, and many Indigenous people who carry the trauma of loss, assimilation, and the disenfranchised grief of their people. “Historical trauma has emerged not only as a framework to explain contemporary social suffering among Indigenous peoples, but also as an idiom of distress that connects the individual to the social, the cultural, and the historical simultaneously and in a manner that both explains contemporary pathology and situates it strategically along a continuum of agency that allows for healing despite the on-going presence of colonial risk factors.”¹²⁹

Clash of Worldviews

The removal of children from their families and communities has resulted in the degradation of Indigenous children’s interconnected worldview. “By contrast with First Nations, Eurocentric philosophies are more linear than holistic, hierarchical and specialized rather than generalized, more materialistic and self-interested than sharing, less concerned about relationships and kindness than competitiveness, more aggressive than respectful, and more focused on external sources of control and authority than on the development of internal controls.”¹³⁰ Colonization has thus created fragmented or jagged worldviews¹³¹ among Indigenous people.

Loss of Language

Residential school policies were hostile towards Indigenous languages, and “students had strong memories of being punished for ‘speaking Indian.’”¹³² This resulted in many students losing their capacity to speak their First language, and with it their understanding of the centrality of relationships within the interconnected worldview. Loss of the ability to speak Cree has contributed to the disruption of passing on specific laws, rules, roles and responsibilities that are inherent in the doctrine of *wahkohtowin* and embedded in Cree language structure. Cree people without their language are left unaware of the deep connection between language and culture¹³³ and do not understand the full impact of the loss of language.¹³⁴ Thus, many Cree people are now “coping with the chaos resulting from colonization and loss of language due to residential schooling... Loss of language is equivalent to the loss

¹²⁸ Yellowhorse Brave Heart 1998

¹²⁹ Waldram, “Healing History?,” 373.

¹³⁰ LaFrance, Bodor, and Bastien, “Synchronicity or Serendipity,” 310–311.

¹³¹ Little Bear, “Little Bear, L. (2000). Jagged Worldviews Colliding. In Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision. (Ed). Marie Battiste. UBC Press.”

¹³² Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada’s Residential Schools*, 81.

¹³³ Brundige, “*Tanisi Isinisohtamahk Kitaskino: Cree Philosophy. Akwa Kayaskiacimowin.*”

¹³⁴ Park, “Remembering the Children.”

of spirit; without our sense of spirit we become vulnerable to illnesses such as the addiction and violence epidemic currently engulfing indigenous communities.”¹³⁵

Further, the language policies had a detrimental effect on the connectedness of the Indigenous family. “The attempt to assimilate students by denying them access to, and respect for, their Indigenous language and culture often meant that the students became estranged from their families and communities... Some survivors refused to teach their own children their Indigenous languages and cultures because of the negative stigma that had come to be associated with them during their school years.”¹³⁶ Other survivors reported that loss of language created barriers to meaningful communication between residential school students and their families, damaging the ability of students to learn their culture and even causing the inability to tell their parents about the abuse that was happening at the schools.¹³⁷

Suppression of Traditional, Knowledge and Ceremony

In 1884 the Indian Act was amended to protect Indians from their own cultures,¹³⁸ prohibiting ceremonies such as the Potlach, the Tamanawas dance, and later the Sundance. “The missionaries who ran the [residential] schools played prominent roles in the church-led campaigns to ban Indigenous spiritual practices...and to end traditional Indigenous marriage practices. Although, in most of their official pronouncements, government and church officials took the position that Indigenous people could be civilized, it is clear that many believed that Indigenous culture was inherently inferior.”¹³⁹

A jail term of two to six months would be given to anyone engaging in or assisting in these ceremonies. In 1918, Indian agents were given the power to prosecute Indigenous people who violated any of the anti-dancing, anti-potlatching provisions,¹⁴⁰ which effectively suppressed entire ceremonies, even though only certain aspects of ceremonies were criminalized.¹⁴¹ The inability to practice culture and ceremonies had a devastating effect on family and community “Cree and Metis people had to practice many of their spiritual and ceremonial traditions cautiously, in secrecy, or go underground.”¹⁴² This provision of the Indian Act was not amended until 1951 to allow Indigenous people to practice their culture.

Inability to Form Healthy Relationships

Residential school survivors did not grow up with parental role models; they were raised in an environment that lacked love, kindness and nurturing by people who considered them to be inferior

¹³⁵ Leona Makokis, quoted in Blue Quills First Nations College and Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research, *The Gathering: A Compendium of Stories and Presentations Exploring Positive, Strengths-Based Outcomes Related to Enhancing First Nations and Métis Child Wellbeing of Kids-in-Care in Alberta*, 7.

¹³⁶ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada’s Residential Schools*, 154.

¹³⁷ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada’s Residential Schools*.

¹³⁸ Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, vol. I, 267.

¹³⁹ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada’s Residential Schools*, 5.

¹⁴⁰ Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, vol. I, 268.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 269.

¹⁴² Dorion, “Opikinawasowin: The Life Long Process of Growing Cree and Métis Children,” 30.

based upon their Indigenous identity, customs and beliefs.¹⁴³ Teaching techniques in residential schools included physical punishment that is now considered abusive. “Many former residential school students feel unable to express positive emotions and, as a result, have had difficulty establishing functional adult relationships with companions or family members.”¹⁴⁴

Later on, when Indigenous children apprehended by Child Welfare and placed in foster and adopted homes, they experienced similar circumstances - abusive foster parents who did not understand nor appreciate their Indigenous culture, spirituality and language. In both situations, children typically lived without the intimate contact with a trusting adult required to mature socially and emotionally. They were essentially deprived of traditional parenting role models and when they emerged from these schools they had no experience of a family life to draw on. Both residential schools and child welfare apprehension from families have “caused traumatic bonding and/or the inability to express love.”¹⁴⁵

Grief and Loss

Since the time of contact Indigenous peoples have been subjected to a persistent demand for change: to reject their traditional languages, cultures and spiritual expressions of their ancestors and to accept without prejudice those of the European colonizers. This “unrelenting pressure to change induce[d] acculturation stress”¹⁴⁶ and has created for many individuals, families and communities a devastating sense of cultural, spiritual and familial loss. This loss was, and is, compounded by the fact that the colonizing society has not acknowledged that the loss sustained by Indigenous people was legitimate. In the past, the Canadian government created assimilative policy and took action with the belief that they were saving the Indians from a primitive, savage reality. From that perspective, ethnocide and cultural genocide became an act of charity for the betterment of the Indigenous people.

Thus, the natural reaction of grief to the loss of self-determination, lifestyle, ceremony, ritual, language, family structure and culture was denied to Indigenous people by those who controlled all systems. Indigenous people were made to feel ashamed of their identity and of traditional Indigenous ways and therefore it was impossible to think about or verbalize the feelings of grief and loss that would have been natural and normal. The resolution of grief was further stymied by prohibiting traditional ritual and ceremony that would have helped individuals progress through the grief process. This is referred to as ‘disenfranchised grief,’¹⁴⁷ which has been transmitted intergenerationally in “a continuous passing on of unresolved and deep-seated emotions such as grief and chronic sadness, to successive descendants.”¹⁴⁸ Disenfranchised grief for Indigenous people was therefore “grief that persons experience when a loss cannot be openly acknowledged or publicly mourned.”¹⁴⁹ The results of such grief are the intensification of normal emotional reactions such as anger, guilt, sadness, and helplessness. This is known as historical

¹⁴³ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada’s Residential Schools*.

¹⁴⁴ Kirmayer et al., “Suicide Among Aboriginal People in Canada,” 70.

¹⁴⁵ Chansonneuve (2005, cited in Muir and Bohr, “Contemporary Practice of Traditional Aboriginal Child Rearing,” 68.

¹⁴⁶ Couture, *Aboriginal Behavioural Trauma: Towards a Taxonomy*, 12.

¹⁴⁷ Yellow Horse Brave Heart and DeBruyn, “The American Indian Holocaust.”

¹⁴⁸ Wesley-Esquimaux and Smolewski, “Historic Trauma and Aboriginal Healing,” 2.

¹⁴⁹ Yellow Horse Brave Heart and DeBruyn, “The American Indian Holocaust,” 66.

unresolved grief; the legacy of denying cultural grieving practices for decades is the transference of that grief from generation to generation resulting in multigenerational unresolved grief.¹⁵⁰

Weakened Web of Relationships

The policies of apprehending children to place them in residential schools damaged the very foundation of Indigenous social organization: the web of relationships. Children were removed from: their parents; the vast, complex network of family relationships;¹⁵¹ the multi-method educational system that would teach the child their language, culture and spirituality; and a land-based lifestyle. “The traditional experiential family learning model and traditional mentorship system was destroyed by residential schools therefore disrupting the transmission of traditional teachings between the generations.”¹⁵²

As each generation of children were removed from this web of relationships, the relationships within the web became weaker. “The prolonged interaction with Euro-Canadian values of accumulation-- the individualist, materialist progression-- posed a serious threat to a Swampy Cree life of connection. Swampy Cree values centered on an understanding that “ecologies do not surround Indigenous peoples; we are an integral part of them and we inherently belong to them.”¹⁵³ European values on the other hand, promoted disconnection.”¹⁵⁴

Child Welfare practices have continued to perpetuate the colonial focus on the child as separate and disconnected from the extended family network. “The ‘best interests of the child’ principle has evolved over time, through policy, social work practice and the courts, to become the primary consideration in planning for a child. While the principle seems self-evident and culturally neutral it is defined subjectively through a value, knowledge and practice context that is decidedly Anglo European.”¹⁵⁵ The ongoing mass apprehension of children from the web of relationships by child welfare agencies continues to weaken the essential relationships and the very nature of the web itself. “The impact on Indigenous children, families, and communities perpetuated the loss of culture, connection, identity, and relationships; the development of a new generation of Indigenous people without parenting skills; the further disempowerment of Indigenous people; and the continuation of problems such as alcoholism, poverty, and violence.”¹⁵⁶

For some Indigenous families and communities, the web of relationships continues to deteriorate. Today “many factors contribute to weakening the fabric of a society and loosening the bonds of relationships and self-regulated behaviour: social change that is rapid or beyond the control of a society; family breakdown, which interferes with the nurturing and socialization of children; poverty and economic marginalization, which restrict opportunities for youth and contribute to a loss of hope; loss of respect

¹⁵⁰ Yellow Horse Brave Heart and DeBruyn, “The American Indian Holocaust.”

¹⁵¹ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada’s Residential Schools*.

¹⁵² Dorion, “Opikinawasowin: The Life Long Process of Growing Cree and Métis Children,” 22.

¹⁵³ Battiste and Henderson (2000), cited in Brundige, “*Tanisi Isinisohtamahk Kitaskino: Cree Philosophy. Akwa Kayaskiacimowin*,” 183.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Richard, “A Commentary Against Aboriginal to Non-Aboriginal Adoption,” 102.

¹⁵⁶ Native Child and Family Services of Toronto, Stevenato and Associates, & Budgell (1999), cited in LaFrance, Bodor, and Bastien, “Synchronicity or Serendipity,” 296.

for the wisdom of Indigenous people's culture; and learned patterns of self-defeating or self-destructive behaviour passed on from one generation to another."¹⁵⁷

Toxic Stress, Neuroscience and Historic Trauma

Oppressive colonial policies have damaged family and community relationships, diminished parenting skills and placed generations of children in hostile environments, devoid of nurturing adults that could be trusted. From a neuroscience perspective, these types of inconsistent, unresponsive, or absent social interactions can disrupt the development of neural circuits and lead to poor learning, social, and health outcomes.

Studies of maternal deprivation in primates have shown that the absence of these types of interactions can impair cognitive, social, and emotional development in offspring, with greater impairment associated with younger age at separation¹⁵⁸. These studies also suggest that it is the adult-infant interaction which is important: rearing infant monkeys with inanimate surrogates or other age-matched conspecifics does not produce competency in adulthood. Furthermore, the magnitude of impairment increases as the age at time of separation decreases. While many skill-building social interactions occur between a child and his or her primary caregiver(s), any stable, responsive adult can fulfill this function. Indeed, individuals who provide temporary child care, preschool programs, or who work within the education system see children on a regular basis and can play a significant role in modeling and supporting a child's repetitive use of prosocial skills¹⁵⁹.

The impairments caused by deficient adult-child social interactions result at least in part from an absence of practice-based learning, where a competent adult models and supports a child's repetitive use of a particular skill. However, newer research suggests that epigenetic modifications also play a role. Also called gene-environment interactions, epigenetic modifications influence gene expression through physical modifications to the area surrounding DNA, making genes either accessible or inaccessible to the cellular machinery required to initiate gene transcription.

In rodents, low quality maternal care methylates the glucocorticoid receptor gene in offspring, thereby downregulating gene expression and numbers of receptors in the brain; this has the functional effect of increasing stress reactivity¹⁶⁰. This finding is highly relevant to both child and adult outcomes given that stress drives many immediate behaviours and decisions and increases the risk for many physical and mental health problems across the lifespan. However, in primates, maternal separation has been shown to produce epigenetic modifications of thousands of genes, with more genes affected the younger the age at separation¹⁶¹. While the functional effects of this pattern of gene expression are not yet fully understood, it is likely that many of these changes partially underlie the behavioural impairments seen as the primates mature. Reintroducing social interactions with an attentive adult female can reverse some of the changes in gene expression if done early. However, recent research in humans has shown

¹⁵⁷ Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, vol. III, 57.

¹⁵⁸ Reviewed in van der Horst and van der Veer, 2008.

¹⁵⁹ For example: Love et al., 2005.

¹⁶⁰ Reviewed in Weaver et al., 2004.

¹⁶¹ Cameron JL, unpublished results.

that changes to gene expression caused by rearing in poor quality environments are also potentially heritable¹⁶², suggesting that subsequent generations may also become vulnerable to poor outcomes in the absence of any developmental adversity.

Stress also shapes the architecture of the developing brain. When a threat is perceived, the stress response system activates a well-coordinated signaling pathway via the hypothalamus, pituitary and adrenal glands to release stress hormones (e.g., adrenaline, cortisol) into the body. These hormones prepare us for fight or flight responses by increasing heart rate, blood pressure, and breathing, shunting available energy to the muscles, and affecting metabolism and various aspects of immune function. Cortisol also crosses the blood-brain barrier to signal cessation of the stress response via the glucocorticoid receptor. This system is highly adaptive when responding to short-term threats but can produce deleterious effects when it is active for long periods of time.

Researchers have characterized three main types of stress response in children in terms of the effect each has on development¹⁶³. A positive stress response occurs when a child experiences small, developmentally appropriate challenges that release stress hormones into the body that come back to baseline quickly. These types of experiences are healthy for brain development because they give children the opportunity to practice coping skills and strengthen corresponding neural circuits. Events such as getting an immunization, the first day of school, or falling off a bike and scraping a knee, can all be thought of as positive stress. Tolerable stress results in a more serious activation of the stress response system, but what differentiates it from other types of stress is the presence of a stable, supportive adult who can help the child buffer their response to the stress. The adult acts like an external stress regulatory system for the child, helping them calm their emotions, soothe their fears, and use their coping skills to deal with the threat so that stress hormones can come back to baseline reasonably quickly. A toxic stress response occurs when a child is exposed to serious, long-term threats, such as child maltreatment, witnessing domestic or community violence, or growing up with a caregiver with a substance abuse problem or untreated mental illness, without access to a responsive adult who can help them buffer their stress response.

Toxic stress releases large amounts of stress hormones into the body and brain that can damage peripheral systems via a mechanism called allostatic load¹⁶⁴. Allostasis literally means “stability through change”; it describes the capacity of some systems to mount a response to environmental stimuli, thereby maintaining a stable equilibrium while the stimulus is present, and return to normal functionality once the stimulus is removed. An example of one such system is the stress response system: it kicks into action in response to a perceived threat but returns to normal when the threat is removed.

The cost to the system in producing large changes in function is referred to as allostatic load. For example, constant activation of the stress response system produces wear and tear on the cells of the cardiovascular system that accumulates over time, producing vulnerability to cardiovascular disease

¹⁶² Yehuda et al., 2016.

¹⁶³ National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2005.

¹⁶⁴ McEwen, 2012.

later in life¹⁶⁵. In addition, constant cortisol signalling through the glucocorticoid receptor can prompt brain cells to downregulate their signalling capacity or alter their configuration within the circuit, changing the circuit's functionality. When this occurs in the developmental period, many of the brain changes associated with cortisol over-activation can be permanent¹⁶⁶. These types of changes can lead to poor learning, social, and health outcomes, sometimes even decades in the future.

In the past, resilience has been talked about in many different ways by different groups – as an inborn trait, as a process, or as an outcome – making it a difficult and confusing concept for people to understand or work towards. Newer research indicates that resilience is a positive outcome in the face of negative events¹⁶⁷. In other words, resilience is an outcome rather than an inborn trait of certain people. However, even though children are not born resilient, it is possible to build the foundations of resilience in all children by providing them with opportunities to practice prosocial skills while supported by stable, responsive adults; by mitigating the sources of toxic stress in their lives; and by providing their caregivers with the tools and skills they need to support healthy development. Everyone has a role to play in building the foundations of resilience in children, from parents and grandparents to frontline professionals to policy makers.

Healing: Reconciliation and Decolonization

Reclaiming Interconnectedness (Decolonization)

Indigenous family resilience “is synonymous with the state of connectedness of the members of the family (broadly defined): it is the ability to maintain connectedness to family, clan and society, as well as the natural environment and the spiritual cosmos. The more connected the family is (internally between members and externally with community and the natural/spiritual environments) the more resilience it will realize.”¹⁶⁸ From this perspective, reclaiming an interconnected worldview and repairing/strengthening the bonds in the web of relationships are both inherent in the process of healing and building family/community resilience.¹⁶⁹ For many people, this process is described as a *healing journey*, and requires “a process that occurs over time and requires not only personal strengths but also family and other social supports, including those in the community.”¹⁷⁰

Within the interconnected Cree worldview, the capacity for resilience and healing is inherent in the philosophy. “We are changing, but the very fact of our changing is something Swampy Cree people understood as fundamental to life, to an interconnected world of relationship. Therefore, changes and building relationships within those changes rather than detracting from who we are reaffirm our Cree-ness. Unfortunately, today, there are many people who look for some ‘essential’ ingredient that would make us who we are. A belief in a static identity, however, was never our belief. A belief in a

¹⁶⁵ Dong et al., 2004.

¹⁶⁶ McEwen, 2012.

¹⁶⁷ Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, 2015.

¹⁶⁸ LaBoucane-Benson, “Reconciliation, Repatriation and Reconnection: A Framework for Building Resilience in Canadian Indigenous Families,” 205.

¹⁶⁹ LaBoucane-Benson, “Reconciliation, Repatriation and Reconnection: A Framework for Building Resilience in Canadian Indigenous Families.”

¹⁷⁰

static world was never our belief.”¹⁷¹ The capacity to adapt to a changing world will be the cornerstone of healing; although coerced adaptation has caused a weakening of the web of relationships, reclaiming an interconnected worldview and its fluidity will ensure that Indigenous people will thrive in a modern world.¹⁷² Indigenous healing is about “cultural education, restoration, promotion, and protection as it is about therapeutic process,”¹⁷³ as long as the culture is a “shared cognitive mechanism for the negotiation of life in one’s social world,”¹⁷⁴ and not a static ideal of traditional culture that is irrelevant to Indigenous people today.

Healing, then, is a learning journey. To reclaim an interconnected Cree worldview, we must engage with the Cree pedagogical tools including language, ceremony/cultural practice and stories. This is a move towards a Cree lifestyle; “‘*Nehiyaw* Way of Life’ is a standard and quality of life that has been impaired by colonization, residential schools, and substances. The “*Nehiyaw* Way of Life” has never died away, but is experiencing a re-growth in Indigenous communities.”¹⁷⁵ Despite exposure to a range of hardships, resilience as a ‘healing journey’ is “a process that occurs over time and requires not only personal strengths but also family and other social supports, including those in the community.”¹⁷⁶

Reclaim Language

Learning Cree is an essential component in reclaiming an interconnected worldview. “Language is the covenant that the Creator has made between the people and the world around them. Language serves a greater purpose than to carry thoughts between people; it also carries worldview and identity throughout time and space.”¹⁷⁷ Within the Cree language are the rules and responsibilities to all living things;¹⁷⁸ it is a mechanism to learn *wahkohtowin* (the Cree doctrine of relationships), which can repair and strengthen their web of relationships.

Stories and Knowledge to Heal Disconnectedness

Stories, in Cree society, hold ancestral and cultural knowledge. “Through stories...we come to learn that life is a process; an engagement with the universe. We learn how relationship building, cooperation and sharing are necessary to maintaining harmony.”¹⁷⁹ Cree stories are interconnected in nature, modelling the interconnectedness of life; “the stories we tell and the stories we live are organized through an interconnection that does not fit a linear structure.”¹⁸⁰ Cree narratives provide an oral history that relies on the building of a relationship between the teacher and the learner. “Although *acimowin*, even

¹⁷¹ Brundige, “*Tanisi Isinisohtamahk Kitaskino: Cree Philosophy. Akwa Kayaskiacimowin*,” 74.

¹⁷² Boldt (1993), cited in LaFrance, Bodor, and Bastien, “Synchronicity or Serendipity,” 303.

¹⁷³ Waldram, “Healing History?,” 376.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Blue Quills First Nations College and Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research, *The Gathering: A Compendium of Stories and Presentations Exploring Positive, Strengths-Based Outcomes Related to Enhancing First Nations and Métis Child Wellbeing of Kids-in-Care in Alberta*, 23.

¹⁷⁶ Isaak et al., “Surviving, Healing and Moving Forward,” December 1, 2015, 792.

¹⁷⁷ Blue Quills First Nations College and Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research, *The Gathering: A Compendium of Stories and Presentations Exploring Positive, Strengths-Based Outcomes Related to Enhancing First Nations and Métis Child Wellbeing of Kids-in-Care in Alberta*, 23.

¹⁷⁸ Makokis, “Teachings from Cree Elders.”

¹⁷⁹ Brundige, “*Tanisi Isinisohtamahk Kitaskino: Cree Philosophy. Akwa Kayaskiacimowin*,” 175.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 131.

waywiyacimisowin were often told by specialists, the historians and teachers, our families and others in our communities were also regarded as teachers. And, though these stories were more often of a personal nature, nonetheless they were/are equally filled with metaphysical, epistemological and ethical lessons.”¹⁸¹ Healing therefore includes reclaiming the stories that both role model and offer insights on how to repair the web of relationships.

Spiritual and Cultural Connection Promotes Interconnectedness

For many Indigenous people, “spiritual fear, confusion, and conflict are the direct consequences of the violence with which traditional beliefs were stripped away from Indigenous peoples.”¹⁸² After the legislative ban on ceremonies was lifted in 1951, a movement began in the 1960s¹⁸³ to reclaim ceremonial practices. The connecting or reconnecting with ceremonies, teaching, and rituals has been essential, even life-saving, to residential school survivors’ (and their children’s) healing.¹⁸⁴ Reclaiming ceremony is also about reclaiming an interconnected worldview: “land, language, culture, and identity are inseparable from spirituality; all are necessary elements of a whole way of being, of living on the land as Indigenous peoples.”¹⁸⁵

Ceremony is mechanism by which Indigenous people connect to a higher power, or collective consciousness in the pursuit of a good life and healing; “participation in indigenous cultural practices—especially ceremonial practices—is widely understood in First Nations contexts to initiate relations with influential other-than-humans who will circulate generative power to tribal members for longevity, prosperity, healing, and wellness.”¹⁸⁶ Ceremonial practices have also been successfully incorporated into therapeutic interventions and healing programs, for Indigenous people who suffer from historic trauma.¹⁸⁷

Reconnect to the Land

A belief shared by Cree (and all Indigenous) people, is that the land and all of the living beings on it are sacred gifts from the Creator.¹⁸⁸ Reconnecting to the land – rebuilding and honouring those sacred relationships – is a cornerstone of healing; for some people, which means “activities such as ‘on-the-land’ or ‘bush’ healing camps where participants can experience the healing power of the natural world.”¹⁸⁹ “Land-based knowledge is practiced knowledge, knowledge that is used on the land. This becomes tied to the personal identity, spiritual development of people, and their overall relationships

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 37.

¹⁸² Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada’s Residential Schools*, 225.

¹⁸³ Maxwell, “Historicizing Historical Trauma Theory,” 413.

¹⁸⁴ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada’s Residential Schools*; Isaak et al., “Surviving, Healing and Moving Forward,” December 1, 2015.

¹⁸⁵ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada’s Residential Schools*, 224–225.

¹⁸⁶ Gone, “Redressing First Nations Historical Trauma,” 696.

¹⁸⁷ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada’s Residential Schools*; Gone, “Redressing First Nations Historical Trauma”; Archibald, “Decolonization and Healing: Indigenous Experiences in the United States, New Zealand, Australia and Greenland”; LaBoucane-Benson, “Reconciliation, Repatriation and Reconnection: A Framework for Building Resilience in Canadian Indigenous Families.”

¹⁸⁸ Cardinal and Hildebrandt, *Treaty Elders of Saskatchewan: Our Dream Is That Our Peoples Will One Day Be Clearly Recognized as Nations*.

¹⁸⁹ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada’s Residential Schools*, 163.

with others.”¹⁹⁰ Developing a spiritual understanding of the land, is therefore a solution to the contemporary problems of “isolation, and alienation between all peoples.”¹⁹¹

Reclaiming the Mediating Role of the Indigenous Family

“While many Indigenous families may still practice some aspects of interconnectedness, (which accounts for the fact that they have survived), the essential web of relationships has been at times fragmented or confused with trauma-based behaviour. For these families, the process of building family resilience is central to their health and survival. At the very core of this process is the renewal of respectful relationships within the family and between the family and the community, natural and spiritual environments.”¹⁹²

The family is an essential part of healing and transformation of the Indigenous society: “sometimes individuals undergo healing and strengthen families, while sometimes families nurture healthier individuals, but families consistently occupied the central position between individual and community.”¹⁹³ Reclaiming interconnectedness is, therefore, reclaiming the importance of the Indigenous family within the web of relationships: “to be strong as nations, we must nurture and support our families and communities. It is within our families that we as individuals come to know our place in the world and to know ourselves as part of a larger collective.”¹⁹⁴

In current family services practice, this means working with and allocating resources towards the healing of families.¹⁹⁵ “Caring for our children is a blessing and a means of resisting colonialism. Keeping natural families together creates stronger and healthier communities in the face of systems that seek to separate us. I am breaking the cycle of abuse and trauma. Doing that means caring for my kids and my brother’s kids.”¹⁹⁶ As such, community-based efforts in supporting families serve to strengthen the web of relationships by grounding these services in “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.”¹⁹⁷ These programs and services must then be evaluated from an Indigenous worldview as well; stated outcomes and ways of measuring success must

¹⁹⁰ Meyer (2003), cited in McGuire-Kishebakabaykwe, “Exploring Resilience and Indigenous Ways of Knowing,” 123.

¹⁹¹ Brundige, “*Tanisi Isinisohtamahk Kitaskino*: Cree Philosophy. *Akwa Kayaskiacimowin*,” 207.

¹⁹² LaBoucane-Benson, “Reconciliation, Repatriation and Reconnection: A Framework for Building Resilience in Canadian Indigenous Families,” 209.

¹⁹³ Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, vol. III, 9.

¹⁹⁴ Margo Greenwood, quoted in National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, “Family Is the Focus,” 5.

¹⁹⁵ Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, Canada’s Residential Schools*.

¹⁹⁶ Youth collaborator, quoted in Navia, “Uncovering Colonial Legacies,” 76.

¹⁹⁷ LaFrance and Bastien, “Here Be Dragons! Reconciling Indigenous and Western Knowledge to Improve Aboriginal Child Welfare,” 117.

be grounded in an interconnected worldview and reflect that which is important to the Indigenous people/families they serve.¹⁹⁸

Reclaiming Balance and Harmony

For many Indigenous people, finding holistic balance and harmony in relationship with all living things is central to the healing process. Many Indigenous people look to the teachings of the medicine wheel as a guide for this healing process; a model of healing that assumes “growth and healing is always a spiritual process based on connecting to oneself and finding balance.”¹⁹⁹

Healing interconnectedness, through the framework of the medicine wheel or relational worldview model, “encourages the restoration and establishment of balance among all four realms of our existence: mind, body, emotion, and spirit, rather than focusing on...individual pathology and external interventions.”²⁰⁰ This perspective of building resilience and healing is in sharp contrast to “linear epidemiological model based on risk and protection factors.”²⁰¹ “Not only is Indigenous healing intended to balance the four quadrants of humanity through the interconnecting contexts of nature, community, and the individual,²⁰² but healing is designed to reaffirm cultural values and to integrate the individual within the context of the community.”²⁰³ Historic trauma healing in this model, therefore requires the building, maintaining, and strengthening of community relationships in the healing process, with the goal of achieving community harmony.²⁰⁴

Healing Theory & Programs

Healing from historic trauma is a learning process; it is the participation in activities that assist in the reclamation of relationships-based worldview. Healing is a movement from isolation, despair, and hopelessness to belonging and deep responsibility to all living beings within the web of relationships.²⁰⁵ Healing programs and services are experiential educational processes that teach history, culture and connectedness, mobilizing sacred knowledge in the “recapturing of the life force”²⁰⁶. Healing programs

¹⁹⁸ Blue Quills First Nations College and Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research, *The Gathering: A Compendium of Stories and Presentations Exploring Positive, Strengths-Based Outcomes Related to Enhancing First Nations and Métis Child Wellbeing of Kids-in-Care in Alberta*.

¹⁹⁹ Simard and Blight, “Developing a Culturally Restorative Approach to Aboriginal Child and Youth Development,” 33.

²⁰⁰ Quinn, “Coming Full Circle - The Lifelong Journey of Becoming,” 2016, 32–33.

²⁰¹ Burack et al (2007), cited in Tousignant and Sioui, “Resilience and Aboriginal Communities in Crisis: Theory and Interventions,” 46.

²⁰² Dion Stout (2013), cited in Quinn, “Coming Full Circle - The Lifelong Journey of Becoming,” 2016.

²⁰³ Ibid., 33.

²⁰⁴ Quinn, “Coming Full Circle - The Lifelong Journey of Becoming,” 2016.

²⁰⁵ LaBoucane-Benson, “Reconciliation, Repatriation and Reconnection: A Framework for Building Resilience in Canadian Indigenous Families.”

²⁰⁶ Leona Makokis, quoted in Blue Quills First Nations College and Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research, *The Gathering: A Compendium of Stories and Presentations Exploring Positive, Strengths-Based Outcomes Related to Enhancing First Nations and Métis Child Wellbeing of Kids-in-Care in Alberta*, 8.

are often framed as the beginning of a lifelong healing journey, whereby the acquisition and integration of teachings “can take a lifetime to learn.”²⁰⁷

Healing can therefore include personal and collective decolonization; reclaiming interconnectedness is a conscious resistance to “the dominance of colonial models and asserts a decolonizing view of what it means to heal and how one heals.”²⁰⁸ However, there have been bridges between traditional healing and Western or Eastern models of healing that resonate with some Indigenous people. Recently, the concept of Neuro-decolonization is being put forward, as a bridge connecting Indigenous ceremony, ritual and practice, with the practice of mindfulness in healing and addressing colonial depression.²⁰⁹ “It is described as a blend of meditation and traditional contemplative practices; mindfulness seeks to correct cognitive biases and current Western created mindlessness.”²¹⁰ “Neurodecolonization is an emerging field that examines how the brain functions in a colonial situation and how the use of specific mind-brain activities and projects can change important neural networks to enable one to overcome the myriad effects of colonialism.”²¹¹

In other instances, Western theories have been revised or reconceptualised to fit within an interconnected paradigm. “In opposition to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs theory, Indigenous scholars argue that self-actualization includes spirituality, community, ceremonies, identity, self-esteem, sense of safety, security and belonging, and roles and relationships within the community.”²¹² Therefore, self-actualization is seen as the beginning and initial stage of development, actualizing through the traditional spirit naming ceremony and manifesting spirit through one’s lifetime.”²¹³

In addition, attachment theory (which focuses on the individual child’s attachment to parents) has been challenged and reconceptualised to focus instead on the child’s need for cultural competency. Specifically, cultural attachment theory seeks to mobilize an interconnected worldview by focussing on the child’s “knowledge of family, extended family, community, and Nation and their relationship to each other and the world...Cultural attachment theory provides an Indigenous child with the ability to have a secure base in which he or she can explore the world. More specifically, cultural attachment theory provides the individual with cultural support, via the structures to successful transition to adulthood.”²¹⁴

As a consequence of the focus on the child exclusively, without concern for the extended family relationships that are paramount to the development of healthy Indigenous children, the use of attachment theory in the grounding of children’s services has had negative consequences on the

²⁰⁷ Bearskin et al., “Mâmawoh Kamâtowin, ‘Coming Together to Help Each Other in Wellness,’” 28.

²⁰⁸ Park, “Remembering the Children,” 439.

²⁰⁹ Yellowbird (2013), cited in Sasakamoose et al., “First Nation and Métis Youth Perspectives of Health: An Indigenous Qualitative Inquiry,” 638.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 636.

²¹¹ Yellowbird (2013), cited in Ibid., 646.

²¹² Cross (2010) and Koptie (2008), cited in Quinn, “Coming Full Circle - The Lifelong Journey of Becoming,” 2016, 49.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Simard and Blight, “Developing a Culturally Restorative Approach to Aboriginal Child and Youth Development,” 39.

Indigenous child.²¹⁵ In contrast, an interconnected worldview holds that “it is crucial for the well-being of indigenous children, families, and communities to preserve the culture and identity of indigenous children and that practices that encourage extended family care and community connection are more relevant in working with indigenous children and families.”²¹⁶ From this perspective, the connectedness of the child – “as a feeling of belonging, of being an important and integral part of the world”²¹⁷ – is foundational, and it “implies a broader grounding in a person’s total environment than does attachment to one or two central figures.”²¹⁸

²¹⁵ Carriere and Richardson, “From Longing to Belonging: Attachment Theory, Connectedness, and Indigenous Children in Canada.”

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 52.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 57.

Development of a Legal Tradition

Legal Tradition in the Cree Worldview

The rules that promote good relationships are the Cree legal traditions, which are “part of the narrative processes through which Cree human experiences were made comprehensible and communicable to others, and through which Cree know-how, reasoning, and judgment developed for generations.”²¹⁹ At the core of Cree law is the sacred relationship between the people and the Creator.²²⁰ This special relationship “provided the framework for the political, social, educational and cultural institutions and laws of their peoples that allowed them to survive as nations for the beginning of time to the present.”²²¹

From the relationship between people and the Creator arises an understanding of human relationships with a moral obligation to all living and spiritual beings given to the people to survive.²²² The Cree Legal tradition is grounded in a deep sense of responsibility “not to an unknown deity, but to the reciprocal relationship, and the recipient of that relationship, regardless of who or what is the recipient.”²²³ Sometimes referred to as Natural Law, this ethic originates from spiritual connectedness and an understanding of reciprocal relationships.²²⁴ As such, the building, maintaining, and renewing of relationships are core processes intimately connected to seeking knowledge/learning in ethical ways.²²⁵

Wahkohtowin: The Doctrine of Relationships

Within Cree law, all aspects of creation are subject to the same laws that were given to the people by the Creator: they are *Iyintoweyesawewina* which literally means in English: “natural/common - laws/collection of ideas.”²²⁶ The foundation of the Cree legal tradition is the doctrine of laws that govern relationships between all things: *wahkohtowin*. “The relationship between the Creator and First Nations peoples is understood to be like that which exists between the various members of a family and is thus governed by laws of *wahkotowin*, laws detailing the duties and responsibilities which take effect for each member of the family unit.”²²⁷ *Wahkohtowin* is the “overarching law of respect and belonging. One belonged, first and foremost, to the sacred order of things laid down first [by] Creator.”²²⁸ “These are rules and laws that prescribe and proscribe conduct covering a wide range of relationships. They are

²¹⁹ Friedland, “Navigating through Narratives of Despair,” 278–9.

²²⁰ Cardinal and Hildebrandt, *Treaty Elders of Saskatchewan: Our Dream Is That Our Peoples Will One Day Be Clearly Recognized as Nations*.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

²²² Brundige, “*Tanisi Isinisohtamahk Kitaskino: Cree Philosophy. Akwa Kayaskiacimowin*,” 100.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 112.

²²⁴ Patricia Makokis, quoted in National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, “Family Is the Focus,” 12.

²²⁵ Brundige, “*Tanisi Isinisohtamahk Kitaskino: Cree Philosophy. Akwa Kayaskiacimowin*.”

²²⁶ Makokis, “Teachings from Cree Elders,” 94.

²²⁷ Cardinal and Hildebrandt, *Treaty Elders of Saskatchewan: Our Dream Is That Our Peoples Will One Day Be Clearly Recognized as Nations*, 18.

²²⁸ Roan and Waugh, cited in Dorion, “Opikinawasowin: The Life Long Process of Growing Cree and Métis Children,” 54.

comprehensive in that they contain detailed codes of behaviour, setting out what is prohibited, what is encouraged, the values that are to be respected and followed in each set of relations.”²²⁹

Miyo-Wicetowin

Within the doctrine of *wahkohtowin*, “powerful laws were established to protect and nurture the foundations of strong, vibrant nations. Foremost amongst these laws are those related to human bonds and relationships.”²³⁰ The laws of *miyo-wîcehtowin* guide people to build, maintain and strengthen *good* relationships to ensure unity throughout the nation²³¹ and is based on the principle of getting along well with others. *Miyo-wîcehtowin*, the doctrine of good relations, is a “term [that] outlines the nature of the relationships that Cree people are required to establish. It asks, directs, admonishes or requires Cree peoples as individuals and as a nation to conduct themselves in a manner such that they create positive or good relations in all relationships, be it individually or collectively with other peoples.”²³²

From these laws arise specific roles and responsibilities for all individuals, creating a strict social order,²³³ while providing healthy boundaries and ensuring people will feel safe, secure, and able to live the good life (*pimatisiwin*). “These teachings [of the laws of *miyo-wîcehtowin*] constitute the essential elements underlying the First Nations notions of peace, harmony and good relations, which must be maintained as required by the Creator.”²³⁴

Pastahowin

Cree legal tradition is based on the sacredness of all living and spiritual beings and requires that humans respect (rather than dominate, manipulate or use irresponsibly²³⁵) the life force within. “The act of breaking these rules – *pastahowin* – results in severe consequences for the individual and his/her family for many generations, known as *ohcinewin*. Cree Elders likened *pastahowin* to the Christian understanding of sin, further emphasizing that the understanding and observing the tenets of Natural Law and *pastahowin* are paramount to living a good life.”²³⁶ Transgressing the rules of *wahkohtowin* – the act of breaking our promise to the Creator - “can bring about divine retribution with grave consequences.”²³⁷ Understanding the consequences of *pastahowin*, therefore, is crucial in the development of ethical and moral thought/behaviour.²³⁸

²²⁹ Cardinal and Hildebrandt, *Treaty Elders of Saskatchewan: Our Dream Is That Our Peoples Will One Day Be Clearly Recognized as Nations*, 34.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 14.

²³² *Ibid.*

²³³ Makokis, “Teachings from Cree Elders.”

²³⁴ Cardinal and Hildebrandt, *Treaty Elders of Saskatchewan: Our Dream Is That Our Peoples Will One Day Be Clearly Recognized as Nations*, 15.

²³⁵ LaBoucane-Benson, “Reconciliation, Repatriation and Reconnection: A Framework for Building Resilience in Canadian Indigenous Families.”

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 92.

²³⁷ Cardinal and Hildebrandt, *Treaty Elders of Saskatchewan: Our Dream Is That Our Peoples Will One Day Be Clearly Recognized as Nations*, 7.

²³⁸ LaBoucane-Benson, “Reconciliation, Repatriation and Reconnection: A Framework for Building Resilience in Canadian Indigenous Families.”

Cree Principles/Values

The Cree legal tradition is informed by, and based upon, the values that were gifted to the people as well. The most common values/teachings/principles²³⁹ are described below.

- **Kindness:** (*kisewâtisiwin*) compassion; loving kindness. This is referred to as the first law or teaching, and is deeply connected to the laws of generosity and humility.²⁴⁰ As a constellation of laws, they direct our every thought and action.
- **Humility:** (*tapateyimisôwin*). “In traditional Cree culture, you do not speak about your accomplishments. You do not need to boast or brag about what you did, you let your life speak for itself. You wait to speak until someone asks you to speak. Within the value of humility is the focus and ability to praise other peoples’ work and accomplishments.”²⁴¹ “Self-glorification or ‘bragging’ can thus disrupt the reciprocal relationship. It can work against an egalitarian understanding and lead to hierarchical thinking. Thinking that one is better than someone else disrupts harmonious interactions and relationships.”²⁴²
- **Honesty:** (*tapwewin* or *kweyaskwatesowin*) Speaking the truth, which is connected to the concept of clean living (*kanacisowin*).²⁴³
- **Freedom:** (*tipeyimisowin*) to be self-determining and to possess liberty, which is connected to the principle of non-interference (the respect for every individual’s independence).²⁴⁴ Interfering with the sacred path of another by using manipulation or coercion is considered a *pastahowin*. “One is not to interfere with the sacred covenant between the Creator and another being or there will be negative consequences.”²⁴⁵
- **Working Together:** (*mâdawoh kamâtowin* or *wîchitowin*) is the act of collectively helping each other²⁴⁶ and the importance of unity or partnerships. This orientation is connected to the principle of sharing and being generous with other people and living beings (*Miyotehewin*), towards the development of peaceful relationships.²⁴⁷ In this way, humans are encouraged to not be greedy - to take only what they need, and share the rest with other living beings.²⁴⁸

²³⁹ Authors also referred to definitions provided by LeClaire et al., *Alberta Elders’ Cree Dictionary*.

²⁴⁰ Makokis, “Teachings from Cree Elders,” 94–95.

²⁴¹ Alberta Education, “Nehiyawewin: Cree Language and Culture Guide to Implementation, Grade Ten to Grade 12,” 5.

²⁴² Brundige, “*Tanisi Isinisohtamahk Kitaskino: Cree Philosophy. Akwa Kayaskiacimowin*,” 59.

²⁴³ Alberta Education, “Nehiyawewin: Cree Language and Culture Guide to Implementation, Grade Ten to Grade 12,” 519.

²⁴⁴ McShane and Hastings, “Culturally Sensitive Approaches to Research on Child Development and Family Practices in First Peoples Communities.”

²⁴⁵ Dorion, “Opikinawasowin: The Life Long Process of Growing Cree and Métis Children,” 53.

²⁴⁶ Bearskin et al., “Mâdawoh Kamâtowin, ‘Coming Together to Help Each Other in Wellness’”; Makokis, “Teachings from Cree Elders.”

²⁴⁷ Pazderka et al., “Nitsiyhkâson.”

²⁴⁸ Dorion, “Opikinawasowin: The Life Long Process of Growing Cree and Métis Children.”

- Living Together in Harmony: (Witaskewin). “Cree people...historically, were a generous, friendly and trusting people. Life was not always perfect, but the aim was striving for harmony.”²⁴⁹ Survival of the individual, family and nation was dependent upon harmonious relationships.²⁵⁰ Key to maintaining harmony was the principle of reciprocity in relationships. “A world where the development of reciprocity stems from a recognition and respect that each living being has its own separate existence and within that separate existence is the need to live in harmony is egalitarian in nature. From harmony comes the possibility for relationship building and societal flourishing, be that an animal society, a plant society or a human society.”²⁵¹
- Respectful Relationship: (manâtsiwin or kisteanemetowin). “Far more important than having the same beliefs was an ability to engage in respectful interaction”²⁵² with all other living beings. Everything must be respected. “The systems of First Nations people, based on collectives, participatory democracy, cooperation, and kinship, are grounded in a philosophy shaped from the spirit of the land and a belief that the environment, cosmos, plant, animal, and human realms are all equal and interconnected.”²⁵³ “Underlying this egalitarian conception is a world that can and does respond to plurality.”²⁵⁴
- Strength: (sohkisowin). This value refers to possessing not only a strong body, but also to have determination²⁵⁵ (strength of character) and self-discipline,²⁵⁶ as well as (*sohkeyihtamowin*) or strength of the mind.²⁵⁷ In addition, “emotional restraint promotes self-control and discourages the expression of strong emotional reactions, either positive or negative.”²⁵⁸

Framework: Spiral of Interconnectedness²⁵⁹

The spiral²⁶⁰ in Figure 1 is used here as a symbol of the Cree interconnected worldview and the nature of the relationship between the people and all the beings in their world - animate, inanimate and spiritual. The spiral is a symbol of the connectedness of the Indigenous individual, family, and community. It reminds us that all living beings are at once connected yet have boundaries that define them. The spaces between the levels in the spiral are significant (depicted in yellow), in that they represent the respectful space that allows the individual family or community to self-determine. Therefore, the spiral is supported (kept upright) by the strength of these principles of *wahkohtowin*. The rules and values are

²⁴⁹ Brundige, “*Tanisi Isinisohtamahk Kitaskino: Cree Philosophy. Akwa Kayaskiacimowin,*” 173.

²⁵⁰ Blue Quills First Nations College, “Mobilizing Our Collective Moral Courage: A Framework for Supporting the Health of First Nations Children, Families, and Communities,” 4.

²⁵¹ Brundige, “*Tanisi Isinisohtamahk Kitaskino: Cree Philosophy. Akwa Kayaskiacimowin,*” 111.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 85.

²⁵³ Makokis, “Teachings from Cree Elders,” 6.

²⁵⁴ Brundige, “*Tanisi Isinisohtamahk Kitaskino: Cree Philosophy. Akwa Kayaskiacimowin,*” 110–111.

²⁵⁵ Makokis, “Teachings from Cree Elders.”

²⁵⁶ Dorion, “Opikinawasowin: The Life Long Process of Growing Cree and Métis Children.”

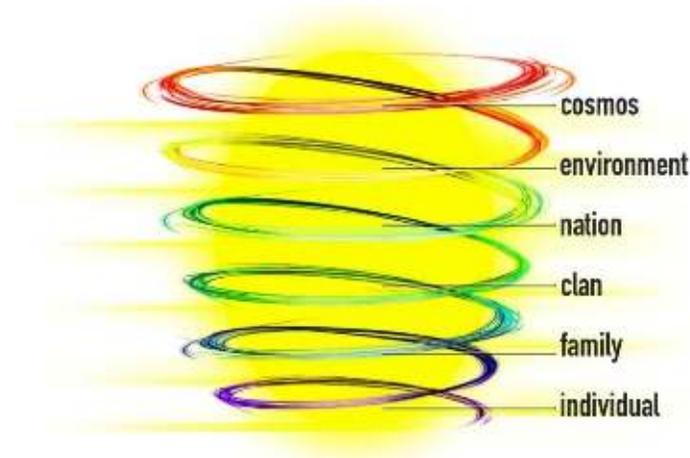
²⁵⁷ Makokis, “Teachings from Cree Elders,” 99.

²⁵⁸ McShane and Hastings, “Culturally Sensitive Approaches to Research on Child Development and Family Practices in First Peoples Communities,” 43.

²⁵⁹ LaBoucane-Benson, “Reconciliation, Repatriation and Reconnection: A Framework for Building Resilience in Canadian Indigenous Families.”

²⁶⁰ LaBoucane-Benson, “Reconciliation, Repatriation and Reconnection: A Framework for Building Resilience in Canadian Indigenous Families.”

essentially the scaffolding that ensures healthy boundaries within all relationships throughout the spiral. Indeed, this upright, dynamic and harmonious spiral is the actualization of the best possible life we can attain. The on-going act of building, strengthening and renewing of our relationships, is the essence of *miyo-pimatisiwin* – seeking the good life.



*Figure 1: Healthy Spiral of Relationships*²⁵⁸

Thus, from a Cree worldview, human relationships with all living things are bounded by an ethical framework of rules, norms and social codes that are provided in the teachings of *wahkohtowin* – the primary, critical collection of laws ensuring that all people live with each other and within the entire cosmos in peace and harmony (*witaskewin*) thus ensuring the survival of the people.²⁶¹ Harold Cardinal provided a specific example of the teachings of *wahkohtowin*: “What I would call the doctrine of Wahkohtowin speaks to the laws that we have as nations that govern the conduct of our relationship with each other and with all things in life. There are laws, there are teachings that go with how, for example, if you are a fisherman with what your duties are to the fish you take, what relationship you have to respect if you are going to continue to be able to feed your family from that fish. How that relationship [works] is two ways, our laws teach us that, because not only are we related to that particular species but that species is related to us.”²⁶²

Medicine Wheel Framework

The medicine wheel is a similar framework or model that is commonly used by Cree people, in that it is grounded in holism and focusses on relationships. It is unique, however, in that ascribes laws/values/teachings to the different quadrants of the wheel. “To better understand teachings of the Cree Medicine Wheel, concepts are usually oriented on the ‘Doors’, or directions, of east, south, west and north. The center represents the Self...The Four Colors represent the four races of humankind.”²⁶³

²⁶¹ Cardinal, H., & Hildebrandt, W. (2000).

²⁶² Transcript of speech in Cardinal (2001) cited in LaBoucane-Benson, “Reconciliation, Repatriation and Reconnection: A Framework for Building Resilience in Canadian Indigenous Families,” 93.

²⁶³ Wenger-Nabigon, “The Cree Medicine Wheel as an Organizing Paradigm of Theories of Human Development,” 114.

Each door represents specific values, teachings, medicines²⁶⁴ and seasons. “The East Door (spring) represents beginnings, positive aspects of renewal, good feelings, good food, vision, purpose and direction... The South Door (summer) teaches about relationships with self, family and community, and is the place where values and identity are learned... The West Door (fall) represents respect, reason, and water...[and] Understanding the North Door (winter) holds a key to understanding the process of change. This is the direction of caring, change, movement, and air, which has the power to move things around.”²⁶⁵ Understanding the positive (life lived with Cree values/teachings) and negative (what occurs in the absence of the value/teaching) provides instructions needed to live a good life (*pimatisiwin*).

The medicine wheel framework has been used to demonstrate the principles relate to child rearing; “the philosophical framework for child rearing is embodied within the concept of *Opikinawasowin*, which translates as the ‘child rearing way’ this principle is a highly-valued aspect of traditional Cree life.”²⁶⁶ “*Opikinawasowin* is interpreted as a life-long process of growing children and that process begins right from pre-conception, through all the stages of life, until death.”²⁶⁷ The *Opikinawasowin* teachings include (beginning in the east), the gifts of:

1. Life,
2. Discipline,
3. Communication,
4. Natural law/nature,
5. Learning,
6. Experience,
7. Story,
8. Spirituality and celebration,
9. Extended family and community,
10. Values,
11. Children,
12. Elders, and
13. Parenting²⁶⁸

The thirteen teachings form what can be referred to as a parenting bundle. “The metaphor of a parenting bundle is used because a *nayohcikan* (bundle) is a sacred object where we place items of special significance related to a specific purpose it is symbolically carried forward on our backs.”²⁶⁹

²⁶⁴ Quinn, “Coming Full Circle - The Lifelong Journey of Becoming,” 2016.

²⁶⁵ Wenger-Nabigon, “The Cree Medicine Wheel as an Organizing Paradigm of Theories of Human Development,” 144–147.

²⁶⁶ Dorion, “Opikinawasowin: The Life Long Process of Growing Cree and Métis Children,” 47.

²⁶⁷ Elder Isabelle Impey teaching in Dorion, “Opikinawasowin: The Life Long Process of Growing Cree and Métis Children,” 49.

²⁶⁸ Dorion, “Opikinawasowin: The Life Long Process of Growing Cree and Métis Children.”

²⁶⁹ Wolfart & Ahenakew, 1998 cited in Dorion, “Opikinawasowin: The Life Long Process of Growing Cree and Métis Children,” 48.

Cree Pedagogy: Ways of Knowing Law

“Traditional Cree pedagogy—methods of teaching and ways of knowing and learning—is based on the principle of oneness with nature. It is a holistic approach that encourages the idea that everything interconnects. It involves mutual respect, attention and the desire to learn.”²⁷⁰ The ways children were taught rules, values, norms and ethics embodied a holistic, experiential and spiritual pedagogy. “The education systems that we had wasn’t confined to sitting on the floor and sitting on the desk, it was by example...It was by a gentle teaching and these values were passed on like respect and love for land and honesty and good behaviour.”²⁷¹ However, later in life, deeper understanding of Cree philosophy and/or history required a commitment to a rigorous learning journey, which included “formal and long-established ways, procedures, and processes that First Nations persons are required to follow when seeking particular kinds of knowledge that are rooted in spiritual traditions and laws. The rules that are applied to this way of learning are strict, and the seekers of knowledge are required to follow meticulous procedures and processes as they prepare for and enter the ‘quest for knowledge journey.’”²⁷² Within the Cree oral tradition, “the way knowledge is pursued and secured in the oral traditions of the First Nations is fundamentally different from such a pursuit in the larger society. The conceptual level at which these concepts were discussed requires a background understanding based on years of detailed, rigorous, disciplined training of the mind and body.”²⁷³

Language

Embedded within the Cree language is the ethical framework for living. Language is described as the ‘moral compass’ that imparts the roles, responsibilities and relationships/kinship with each other and with all living things.²⁷⁴ Elders teach “that our language is a spiritual language. For example, “miskîsik” means an eye. “Mis” refers to a body part, and the root word “kîsik” means the heavens; it reminds us that our ability to see is a spiritual gift that we are related to the Creator, and every relationship carries responsibilities.”²⁷⁵ It is common to refer to people with a name that identifies the relationship with that person; for example, addressing someone as ‘nephew’ or ‘cousin’ – as a way to acknowledge the relationship and demonstrate respect.”²⁷⁶

Further, “the meanings Cree people attach to kinship terms for example, go beyond immediate family “blood” relationships,”²⁷⁷ and can include people from other family groups (for example children

²⁷⁰ Alberta Education, “Nehiyawewin: Cree Language and Culture Guide to Implementation, Grade Ten to Grade 12,” 6.

²⁷¹ Interview in Hansen and Antsanen, “Elders’ Teachings about Resilience and Its Implications for Education in Dene and Cree Communities,” 8.

²⁷² Cardinal and Hildebrandt, *Treaty Elders of Saskatchewan: Our Dream Is That Our Peoples Will One Day Be Clearly Recognized as Nations*, 2.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 28.

²⁷⁴ Leona Makokis, quoted in Blue Quills First Nations College and Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research, *The Gathering: A Compendium of Stories and Presentations Exploring Positive, Strengths-Based Outcomes Related to Enhancing First Nations and Métis Child Wellbeing of Kids-in-Care in Alberta*, 6.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁷ Brundige, “Tanisi Isinisohtamahk Kitaskino: Cree Philosophy. Akwa Kayaskiacimowin,” 250.

acknowledge aunts and uncles that are not blood related), as well as non-human family relationships.²⁷⁸ For example “There is a non-divisibility in “my” and “grandmother” that extends to relationships beyond paternal or maternal relations. Nohkum [mushum] and nimosum [kokum] refers to all grandmothers and grandfathers in the community...Kinship relationships are not to be taken lightly, for they mean we are intimately interconnected to each other’s survival. We are as intimately connected to children as we are to grandparents--we all form the circle of life and represent continuity. The same is true for other relationships, such as uncles, aunts, and cousins. Responsibility to kinship relationships is very important because we understand that individuals are not disconnected from the kinship relationship. It is a myth that we are self-sufficient individuals. While we may excel at different skills, the skills are only possible, in the first place, because of our interdependent relationships.”²⁷⁹

Gender equality is also embedded in the Cree language: “personal pronouns in the Swampy Cree language are not gender prescribed...This is not to say there is no idea of a male or female person but rather the primary focus is toward a life spirit rather than a specific male or female. When [telling heroic stories], one’s hero is not gendered [therefore] the child does not necessarily learn to discriminate male superiority over a female inferiority.”²⁸⁰

The Land

“The land with its rocks, trees, creatures and seasons as the source of our knowledge, is a teacher to our children. As children mature into teenagers and later into adulthood, language provides the spiritual grounding that nurtures their relationship within the human family, and just as importantly with all living things: plants, animals, rocks, water, and mother earth.”²⁸¹ Cree pedagogy acknowledges that the natural world has information important to survival, which we must learn through interconnected relationship with these living beings. “We learned early that our lives would be affected, sooner or later, and for our good or to our harm, by our every action towards our environment and nature. We also perceived that the animals around us, the trees and all other living things, affected each other, and us, by the way they lived; and we realised that in order to survive in nature we had to understand all of these things – we had to have a full understanding of ourselves, who were a part of that environment and of our fellow man.”²⁸²

Protocol

Respect and reciprocity are learned in many ways, including through the understanding of protocol offerings. Offering tobacco to the land (in exchange, for example, for the harvesting of medicine, food or water) is a demonstration of respect for the gifts received, as well as an act of reciprocity - a way of giving back or sacrificing for that gift. “Of all life on earth we understand that animals and plants are not dependent on humans for existence, sustenance or their continual existence; they do not need us for

²⁷⁸ Brundige, “*Tanisi Isinisohtamahk Kitaskino: Cree Philosophy. Akwa Kayaskiacimowin.*”

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 261.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 34.

²⁸¹ Leona Makokis, quoted in Blue Quills First Nations College and Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research, *The Gathering: A Compendium of Stories and Presentations Exploring Positive, Strengths-Based Outcomes Related to Enhancing First Nations and Métis Child Wellbeing of Kids-in-Care in Alberta*, 7.

²⁸² Cardinal, *Indian Education in Alberta*, 5.

food, clothing or shelter. Humans on the other hand, are dependent on both animals and plants for food, clothing, and shelter. We cannot exist without them; all our ability to reason would be to no avail if we did not have plants and animals.... Therefore they sought to create a world whereby the benefits they received from the animals and plants would not go unrecognized, unappreciated or unacknowledged.”²⁸³ “We learn that it is not enough to offer a gift, one still has to treat the other with respect, in other words, the gift must be preceded and followed with respectful interaction.”²⁸⁴

Tobacco is also offered to Elders, ceremonialists, and teachers to ensure “that we begin or renew the relationship between the learner and the teacher in a good way. Respect is shown through the presentation of tobacco and other gifts to a teacher when asking for help. The gift is a type of sacrifice the seeker makes: it demonstrates that the request is important; that the seeker understands that s/he must give something up to receive help; and that the seeker holds the knowledge the teacher possesses in high esteem. The presentation of the protocol is also an acknowledgement of the time and effort the teacher has dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge. Observing this protocol therefore affirms commitment to – and enhances – the learning process.”²⁸⁵

Ceremony

“Through ceremony and oral knowledge transmission, people [are] taught to conduct their lives in accordance with natural laws.”²⁸⁶ “Regular prayer can help establish a sense of routine and security in children and give them a personal connection to Creator,”²⁸⁷ which is the foundation of ethical and moral development.²⁸⁸ Ceremonies provide the context for moral development²⁸⁹ and access to “understand all the elements of nature...[The individual] perceived the forces behind all these elements, and the interrelatedness of all these forces... he perceived even those forces in nature that were not embodied in a materialistic form such as an animal, a plant, or another human being, and he communicated with those forces. By the knowledge imparted by all these forces of nature he had the clarity to construct his own universe, ever expanding, always awesome, unfathomable and he was totally aware of his own relationship with his universe.”²⁹⁰

Ceremonies are offered by learned ceremonialists and Elders. They are an opportunity to build relationships between the old and the young, and provide an important educational vehicle for passing on rules, oral histories and experiences. “Ceremonies, fasts, sun dances, and sweat lodge are all places

²⁸³ Brundige, “*Tanisi Isinisohtamahk Kitaskino: Cree Philosophy. Akwa Kayaskiacimowin,*” 101–102.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 103.

²⁸⁵ LaBoucane-Benson et al., “Are We Seeking Pimatisiwin or Creating Pomewin?,” 2.

²⁸⁶ Blue Quills First Nations College, “Mobilizing Our Collective Moral Courage: A Framework for Supporting the Health of First Nations Children, Families, and Communities,” 4.

²⁸⁷ Dorion, “Opikinawasowin: The Life Long Process of Growing Cree and Métis Children,” 60.

²⁸⁸ Cardinal and Hildebrandt, *Treaty Elders of Saskatchewan: Our Dream Is That Our Peoples Will One Day Be Clearly Recognized as Nations.*

²⁸⁹ Brundige, “*Tanisi Isinisohtamahk Kitaskino: Cree Philosophy. Akwa Kayaskiacimowin.*”

²⁹⁰ Cardinal and Cardinal, *Indian Education in Alberta*, 5.

where young Cree and Metis children learn to develop self-discipline within the loving support of their family and community.”²⁹¹

Ceremonies are used to mark important milestones, developmental processes²⁹² or stages of life, as well as impart specific knowledge needed for the next stage. Participation in a fasting ceremony, for example, is used to find one’s life purpose.²⁹³ Puberty, and the entrance into adulthood [is] particularly important, with ceremony and celebration used to mark the occasion. “Girls, at the onset of menstruation [are] isolated, in the care of an old woman, perhaps grandmother. Boys [seek] a teacher and begin their vision quest.”²⁹⁴

Ceremonies also have very specific stories, with the teaching of specific values in pre-determined ways. For example, in the sweatlodge, the turtle teachings give instruction on the values of kindness, determination and honesty.²⁹⁵ Ceremonies will also use specific medicines that have value-based teachings.

Stories

“In Nehiyaw [Cree] culture, oral tradition has been the most important method for passing information and knowledge from one generation to another.”²⁹⁶ Stories are therefore “a form of intergenerational communication [which] is a key aspect within the traditional learning system”²⁹⁷ that inform our moral being.²⁹⁸ Stories help us to “learn about the things that are the essential ingredients to being ‘fully human.’ We learn how to respect our human relatives, our animal relatives, our animal cousins and our plant kin. We learn about our responsibilities to our sacred Mother Earth and our place in the order of life.”²⁹⁹ Stories also often contain information regarding the transgression of rules and laws; tales of *pastahowin* detail the consequences of immoral behaviour.³⁰⁰ Stories can be “embedded with history, social rules, prohibitions, genealogy, ecological knowledge, and multiple survival strategies,”³⁰¹ but they are more than merely descriptions of social norms, but rather narratives that “make sense of the world around Cree individuals and communities.”³⁰²

²⁹¹ James Burns quoted in Dorion, “Opikinawasowin: The Life Long Process of Growing Cree and Métis Children,” 61.

²⁹² Dorion, “Opikinawasowin: The Life Long Process of Growing Cree and Métis Children.”

²⁹³ Leona Makokis quoted in Blue Quills First Nations College and Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research, *The Gathering: A Compendium of Stories and Presentations Exploring Positive, Strengths-Based Outcomes Related to Enhancing First Nations and Métis Child Wellbeing of Kids-in-Care in Alberta*, 8.

²⁹⁴ Stuart, “Cree Indian Family Systems,” 15.

²⁹⁵ Makokis, “Teachings from Cree Elders.”

²⁹⁶ Alberta Education, “Nehiyawewin: Cree Language and Culture Guide to Implementation, Grade Ten to Grade 12,” 8.

²⁹⁷ Dorion, “Opikinawasowin: The Life Long Process of Growing Cree and Métis Children,” 10.

²⁹⁸ Brundige, “*Tanisi Isinisohtamahk Kitaskino: Cree Philosophy. Akwa Kayaskiacimowin.*”

²⁹⁹ Roby Mason quoted in Brundige, 36.

³⁰⁰ Blue Quills First Nations College, “Mobilizing Our Collective Moral Courage: A Framework for Supporting the Health of First Nations Children, Families, and Communities.”

³⁰¹ Brundige, “*Tanisi Isinisohtamahk Kitaskino: Cree Philosophy. Akwa Kayaskiacimowin.*” 4.

³⁰² Friedland, “Navigating through Narratives of Despair,” 278.

There are also many Cree stories about animals, who are portrayed as thinking, feeling beings that are part of our extended family. Within these stories “metaphysical, epistemological and ethical underpinnings [are] presented, such as the idea that humans and animals can interact and have meaningful relationships... it becomes clear that ethical relations should not be restricted to a human-to-human interaction, for we learn that animals are just as capable of feeling as humans.”³⁰³

There are many types of stories, and specific times/seasons for each of the stories to be told:

- *acimowin*: factual story
- *acimowina*: stories
- *acimisowin*: personal stories
- *niacimisowan*: I am telling a story about myself
- *waywiyacimisowin*: funny, humorous stories

“Some stories are short with a particular ending or moral and all are full of humour. Many stories are open ended, long extended stories with many levels of meaning. Stories are repeated over and over and change over time to reflect life in the community. As listeners mature and gain life experience, the meaning and lessons in the stories reveal themselves in different ways. What you discovered in a story as a child can be very different when you are an adult. A story written on paper becomes frozen in time while the beauty of an oral story is that it remains a living, flexible and dynamic part of culture and language.”³⁰⁴ The oral tradition of stories includes embedding the story into ceremonies or songs.³⁰⁵

Elders make “a clear distinction between *tipacimowina* [personal stories] and the ones that are considered to be *ahstayohkanak* the sacred oral stories of the Cree people. These *ahstayohkanak* stories have specific protocols, rules, and methods for telling them.”³⁰⁶ Factual stories “were often told by specialists, the historians and teachers.”³⁰⁷ Elders are especially highly respected in society, carrying a vast body of knowledge borne from lived experience.³⁰⁸ However, all storytellers are “respected within traditional Nehiyaw culture. Storytellers carry within their stories the legends, spiritual truths and history of the Cree people. Stories pass on the values and beliefs that are important to Cree people, and stories preserve the language.”³⁰⁹

Critical thinking and reflection are expected from the listener. Often, the moral of the story is not clear – it requires thought and discernment.³¹⁰ The listener is expected to listen to the context of the story, decide whether to believe the story, based upon the listener’s own experience and judgement. “In other words the context provides the listener with information that helps the listener decide whether to accept or reject the story being related. Acceptance or rejection of the story as containing a truth

³⁰³ Brundige, “*Tanisi Isinisohtamahk Kitaskino: Cree Philosophy. Akwa Kayaskiacimowin*,” 53–54.

³⁰⁴ Alberta Education, “*Nehiyawewin: Cree Language and Culture Guide to Implementation, Grade Ten to Grade 12*,” 8.

³⁰⁵ Brundige, “*Tanisi Isinisohtamahk Kitaskino: Cree Philosophy. Akwa Kayaskiacimowin*.”

³⁰⁶ Dorion, “*Opikinawasowin: The Life Long Process of Growing Cree and Métis Children*,” 48.

³⁰⁷ Brundige, “*Tanisi Isinisohtamahk Kitaskino: Cree Philosophy. Akwa Kayaskiacimowin*,” 37.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 41.

³⁰⁹ Alberta Education, “*Nehiyawewin: Cree Language and Culture Guide to Implementation, Grade Ten to Grade 12*,” 8.

³¹⁰ Makokis, “*Teachings from Cree Elders*.”

specific to an individual or community need or understanding is dependent on the assessment of the listener(s) and not on the authority of an expert.”³¹¹

Families are the Context for Learning the Rules

Pre-Contact, families was at the centre of all political and economic activity in the community, exercising rights to territory and resources.³¹² The Indigenous interconnected family was also the principle unit for the education and socialization of children. “As is the case in contemporary society in Canada, among Indigenous peoples traditionally it has been the responsibility of the family to nurture children and introduce them to their responsibilities as members of society,”³¹³ as well as the acceptable standards of behaviour.³¹⁴ It is through relationships with a large network of immediate, extended, clan and adopted family that Indigenous children “understand and respond to society’s expectations, and it helped Indigenous society engage individuals in constructive ways and discipline them should they venture on a course that conflicted with prevailing social values and expectations of behaviour.”³¹⁵ This was accomplished, however, in an environment where children felt “wanted, loved, and a sense of belonging.”³¹⁶ Elder Peter Waskahat stated: “We were very careful we had our own teachings, our own education system – teaching children that way of life was taught by grandparents and extended families; they were taught how to view and respect the land and everything in Creation. Through that the young people were taught how to live, what the Creator’s laws were, what were the natural laws, what were these First Nation’s laws...teachings revolved around a way of life that was based on their values.”³¹⁷

From a Cree perspective, children are taught experientially³¹⁸ through relationships, and are expected to learn through observation and participation in those experiences, rather than being told what to do. This methodology highlights the “importance of letting the child experience the natural consequences of bad behavior. They believe it is vitally important for the child to learn difficult lessons themselves, rather than vicariously.”³¹⁹ This pedagogy “is related to the autonomy given to children from an early age. It is felt that the child will acquire all the necessary knowledge through experience.”³²⁰ As children grow older, the teachings become gender-specific, with role and responsibilities taught in ceremonies and processes that are led by men for boys and by women for girls. The goal throughout the educational journey is to instill a desire to learn³²¹ and to think critically.

³¹¹ Brundige, “*Tanisi Isinisohtamahk Kitaskino: Cree Philosophy. Akwa Kayaskiacimowin,*” 40–41.

³¹² Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, vols. III, 11.

³¹³ Ibid.

³¹⁴ Wenger-Nabigon, “The Cree Medicine Wheel as an Organizing Paradigm of Theories of Human Development,” 148.

³¹⁵ Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, vols. III, 16.

³¹⁶ Dorion, “Opikinawasowin: The Life Long Process of Growing Cree and Métis Children,” 92.

³¹⁷ Cardinal and Hildebrandt, *Treaty Elders of Saskatchewan: Our Dream Is That Our Peoples Will One Day Be Clearly Recognized as Nations*, 6.

³¹⁸ Dorion, “Opikinawasowin: The Life Long Process of Growing Cree and Métis Children,” 92.

³¹⁹ Pazderka et al., “Nitsiyihkâson,” 59–60.

³²⁰ Stuart, “Cree Indian Family Systems,” 23.

³²¹ National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, “Family Is the Focus,” 6.

Grandparents

Grandparents held an important educational role in the family, including passing on wisdom, teachings, and stories, as well as offering ceremonies and role modelling that instilled and reaffirmed the rules and values of *wahkohtowin*. “Grandparents instill valuable lessons to children about their history, language and culture, and importantly, that life is a cycle including youth, maturity, old age and death. A grandparent’s wisdom and gift is preparing for the next cycle in life, acknowledging that all life comes to an end, but also continues.”³²²

Grandmothers have a particularly important role in carrying the child-rearing bundle, which is a constellation of stories and knowledge to guide parents and oversee issues that arise in the process of parenting.³²³ “The grandmothers played a key role in monitoring and ensuring the safety of all children in the community [p] and they protected the innocence of children. In traditional society, the grandmothers had the authority to discipline anyone, man or woman, who was not upholding the honor of *Opikinawasowin* parenting.”³²⁴ Methodology employed by grandmothers was traditionally based in the teachings of kindness; “my grandparents never said ‘you’re doing it wrong.’ Instead they showed us how to do things properly. It is important to eat together, sit together, love one another and help each other; this is what I’m teaching my grandchildren. Listening is most important.”³²⁵

Women

Women hold an esteemed, important role in the raising of children – both in building the foundation for children to live Cree laws, and instilling values such as reciprocity,³²⁶ fidelity,³²⁷ gentleness and deep connectedness. The Cree tipi teachings provide the foundation for the role of women in Cree society. “The skin [of the tipi] is her dress, the pegs which close the hide are her ribs, and the poles reaching up to the sky are her arms, the smoke leaving through the flaps is her breath and the fire pit inside the tepee is placed just off center like how the human heart occurs slightly off to one side. The tepee woman reinforces the grandmother law where the tepee is the property and domain of the female. Additionally, the Cree word for doorway is “Iskwahtem” and the root word is “Iskwew” meaning woman. philosophically, culturally, and linguistically recognize the female as the first doorway all life passes through.”³²⁸ Mothers teach children throughout their lives, right into adulthood. Teachings that mothers give are connected to resilience, in that they assist their children to endure difficult times throughout their lives.³²⁹

³²² *Ibid.*, 11.

³²³ Dorion, “Opikinawasowin: The Life Long Process of Growing Cree and Métis Children,” 7.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, 60.

³²⁵ Lillian Elias quoted in National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, “Family Is the Focus,” 10–11.

³²⁶ Dorion, “Opikinawasowin: The Life Long Process of Growing Cree and Métis Children.”

³²⁷ Cardinal and Hildebrandt, *Treaty Elders of Saskatchewan: Our Dream Is That Our Peoples Will One Day Be Clearly Recognized as Nations*.

³²⁸ Wolfart and Ahenakew 1998 cited in Dorion, “Opikinawasowin: The Life Long Process of Growing Cree and Métis Children,” 88.

³²⁹ Isaak et al., “Surviving, Healing and Moving Forward,” December 1, 2015, 791.

Further, pregnant women are given child-rearing information from grandmothers that will ensure the safety and healthy development of their child, as well as instill confidence in the new mothers.³³⁰ These include “such practices as the use of “cradle boards” or “moss bags,” spiritual care of the baby’s umbilical cord, and “amulet or medicine pouch” teachings.”³³¹

Colonization: Distorted Moral and Ethical Development

The Euro-Canadian dismissal of the Cree legal traditions, including traditional Cree ways of teaching and learning, has been devastating. “The myth of Indigenous people as lawless-as people without any internal regulation or intellectual resources for managing their own affairs-has too often been used as a trope for European theorists and jurists to make claims about property and other rights, with no basis whatsoever. There have been devastating political and legal consequences for Indigenous societies based on illogical assumptions about an absence of law.”³³²

As early as the 17th century European-based education was introduced to “convert First Nations people into productive, “civilized” citizens.”³³³ “Education was viewed as a key tool for the advancement of the assimilationist goals held in common by the church, the federal government and the general Canadian population.”³³⁴ The boarding and residential school systems, designed to separate children from the culture, language, spirituality and parents, devalued Indigenous knowledge.³³⁵ The goal of these systems was to assimilate Indigenous children into Western lifestyle through Christian-based education. As such, the focus was on Christianization towards cultural genocide³³⁶ rather than academic achievement.

Even as the residential schools closed, the government policy focus remained on assimilation. “In 1951, against the backdrop of the rising welfare state and critiques of the [p] residential school system, the federal government amended the Indian Act to allow for the enrollment of First Nations children into public and private schools. First Nations communities and political leaders pointed out that the move toward integrated education was in many respects, merely a new incarnation of the Canadian assimilationist agenda.”³³⁷ Throughout Canadian history, “Indigenous learners are schooled in an education system that is grounded in the interests and ideals of the colonizer.”³³⁸

Colonial legislation, including, but not limited to the residential school policy, has interfered with Cree children’s capacity to learn their *wahkohtowin*; however, the ability for Cree children to learn (and feel

³³⁰ Wiebe et al., “Restoring the Blessings of the Morning Star.”

³³¹ Ibid., 59.

³³² Friedland, “Navigating through Narratives of Despair,” 276.

³³³ Korpala and Wong, “Education and the Health of the First Nations People of Canada,” 137.

³³⁴ Blue Quills First Nations College, “Mobilizing Our Collective Moral Courage: A Framework for Supporting the Health of First Nations Children, Families, and Communities,” 6.

³³⁵ Leona Makokis quoted in Blue Quills First Nations College and Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research, *The Gathering: A Compendium of Stories and Presentations Exploring Positive, Strengths-Based Outcomes Related to Enhancing First Nations and Métis Child Wellbeing of Kids-in-Care in Alberta*, 8.

³³⁶ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada’s Residential Schools*.

³³⁷ Blue Quills First Nations College, “Mobilizing Our Collective Moral Courage: A Framework for Supporting the Health of First Nations Children, Families, and Communities,” 6–7.

³³⁸ Hansen and Antsanen, “Elders’ Teachings about Resilience and Its Implications for Education in Dene and Cree Communities,” 5.

connected to) Western laws, rules or norms was diminished by colonial racism, heteropatriarchy, and the belief in the inferior status of the Indigenous intellect, spirituality, culture and worldview.

Disruption in the Transmission of Normative Knowledge

As generations of Indigenous children were abducted from their families to be raised in residential schools, enormous change began to be evident in Indigenous families across Canada. Pre-contact, the family was the all-encompassing unit, a mediator between the individual and the social, economic and political spheres of a larger society.³³⁹ Government policies forced children to stay in residential schools with little or no contact with their families, depriving children of the principal agency that helped them make sense of the world.³⁴⁰ Children were raised in environments devoid of a caring adult that could be trusted to protect them. As such, their emotional, social and spiritual development was arrested.³⁴¹ “Like the reserve experience of their parents (where the First Nations people were secluded on plots of land and controlled by an Indian agent), these children were, in effect, isolated from their families and placed in an institution reserved for de-cultural practices. The children were removed from caring, loving homes into a harsh, cold, institutionalized reality. They were subjected to priests, nuns, lay teachers and supervisors who viewed them as heathens, and imparted the ‘fear of God’ as a method of control.”³⁴²

Parents were also made to feel inferior; due to their Indigenous identity and/or the poverty they lived in, officials deemed parents incapable to raise their children. They were made to relinquish their responsibility to interpret the world for their children³⁴³ and withstand the shame of not being able to protect the gifts they were bestowed by the Creator.³⁴⁴ The loss of connection and communication between children and their parents and grandparents severely damaged essential family relationships, blocking the transmission of cultural, ethical, and normative knowledge between generations.

Punishment at residential schools was “viewed as a mechanism that would transform wild, ‘uncivilized,’ and permissive Indigenous life into white Canadian order and civility.”³⁴⁵ “Accordingly, discipline, regimentation, and punishment were the daily realities of the residential school student’s life. Residential school employees were encouraged to be firm with students, and, in many cases, this pedagogical philosophy was used to sanction and excuse extremes of violence and abuse”³⁴⁶ such as strapping, beatings (with fists, whips or rods), withholding food and solitary confinement (locked in closets, basements or bathrooms). At times, more extreme punishment was used, including chaining students to benches and shackling, as well as public humiliation and shaming.³⁴⁷ Despite that lack of

³³⁹ Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, vols. III, 16.

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

³⁴¹ Ibid., vol. III, 16.

³⁴² Makokis, “Teachings from Cree Elders,” 155–156.

³⁴³ Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, vols. III, 16.

³⁴⁴ Ibid., vols. III, 21.

³⁴⁵ Colmant 2000 cited in Kirmayer et al., “Suicide Among Aboriginal People in Canada,” 66.

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

³⁴⁷ Ibid., 66–67.

food available to children, they were severely punished for stealing food, as well as for talking back, bed wetting and talking to students of the opposite sex.³⁴⁸

The most egregious of these offences was speaking their Indigenous language.³⁴⁹ Children were taught that Cree was the language of the devil, creating an additional grave spiritual consequence for using their first language. “Because we have been so separated from these teachings that are defined in our language, we cannot transmit them to our children; therefore they lack the guidance to help create a world in balance and health. It is apparent that present day chaos within Canadian Indigenous people has history and connection with the loss of our language.”³⁵⁰

Neither adults at the schools, nor government officials responsible for the schools protected children were from abuse and violence perpetrated by staff or other students in the residential schools,³⁵¹ Children’s parents were left powerless to protect them, and thus the students were “left vulnerable and unprotected”³⁵² – having to fend for themselves, developing survival skills, rather than experience or develop nurturing relationships.

Residential schools interfered with the capacity of the extended Cree family and community to educate children in Cree law, as well as family roles and responsibilities was diminished. “Through parental separation, abuse, and neglect, residential schools deprived children of an understanding of close, loving familial relationships on which to base their own parenting.”³⁵³ Survivors grew up to become parents themselves and transmitted their lack of knowledge of the rules, values and norms to their children. Disruptions in the intergenerational transmission of Cree fathering³⁵⁴ and mothering skills occurred. This loss of parenting skills³⁵⁵ resulted the mass removal of children by the Provincial child welfare systems. The outcome of colonial policy is the continued marginalization and subjugation³⁵⁶ of the Indigenous family, further diminishing its capacity to create environments when children develop Cree morality and ethics. “Today the exclusion of the elders and their guidance continues to be pervasive as young pregnant women frequently struggle without extended family and community teaching to guide them.”³⁵⁷

It can be argued then, that attendance at residential school and later the apprehension of children into government care, resulted in generations of Indigenous children who learned neither the rules, ethics and values of *wahkohtowin*, nor those of European culture. Rather, in these hostile environments, they

³⁴⁸ Ibid., 66.

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

³⁵⁰ Leona Makokis quoted in Blue Quills First Nations College and Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research, *The Gathering: A Compendium of Stories and Presentations Exploring Positive, Strengths-Based Outcomes Related to Enhancing First Nations and Métis Child Wellbeing of Kids-in-Care in Alberta*, 8.

³⁵¹ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada’s Residential Schools*, 109.

³⁵² Ibid., 108.

³⁵³ Barnes et al 2006 cited in Korpala and Wong, “Education and the Health of the First Nations People of Canada,” 138.

³⁵⁴ Muir and Bohr, “Contemporary Practice of Traditional Aboriginal Child Rearing,” 72.

³⁵⁵ Makokis, “Teachings from Cree Elders.”

³⁵⁶ Navia, “Uncovering Colonial Legacies.”

³⁵⁷ Wiebe et al., “Restoring the Blessings of the Morning Star,” 56.

learned how to survive - how to steal food when they were hungry, to lie for self- preservation, trust no one and to shut down emotionally.

Historic Trauma: Lawlessness

Distrust of Canadian Law

Although abuse in residential schools was known to Indian agents, other government officials and church leaders, no person with authority took action to charge and prosecute the offenders, putting their own interests ahead of the safety of the children.³⁵⁸ “The law, and the ways in which it was enforced (or not), became a shield behind which churches, governments, and individuals could hide to avoid the consequences of horrific truths.”³⁵⁹ “In addition, the right of Indigenous communities and leaders to function in accordance with their own customs, traditions, laws, and cultures was taken away by law. Those who continued to act in accordance with those cultures could be, and were, prosecuted. Indigenous people came to see law as a tool of government oppression... Many Indigenous people have a deep and abiding distrust of Canada’s political and legal systems because of the damage they have caused. They often see Canada’s legal system as being an arm of a Canadian governing structure that has been diametrically opposed to their interests.”³⁶⁰

Introduction of Violence and Abuse

Violence and abuse are abhorred in Cree legal traditions. One of the most devastating outcomes of residential school policy has been the introduction of widespread abuse. At the time of residential schooling, many children did not report the abuse for fear of negative repercussion. If they did, often they were told that they were to blame for the abuse or they were not believed.³⁶¹ “As of January 31, 2015... there were 37,951 claims for injuries resulting from physical and sexual abuse at residential schools...By the end of 2014, the Independent Assessment Process (for claims of sexual or serious physical abuse) had resolved 30,939 of those claims, awarding \$2,690,000,000 in compensation... The number of claims for compensation for abuse is equivalent to approximately 48% of the number of former students who were eligible to make such claims. This number does not include those former students who died prior to May 2005.”³⁶²

Indigenous people have been subjected to numerous types of trauma, causing personal and inter-generational traumatic effects that have torn at the fabric of family and community connectedness. “In residential schools, [survivors] learned that adults often exert power and control through abuse. The lessons learned in childhood are often repeated in adulthood with the result that many survivors of the residential school system often inflict abuse on their own children. These children in turn use the same tools on their children.”³⁶³ As a result, children who were victimized physically and sexually sometimes

³⁵⁸ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada’s Residential Schools*.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 202.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁶¹ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada’s Residential Schools*.

³⁶² *Ibid.*, 105–106.

³⁶³ Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, vols. III, 65.

perpetrated violence as adults. Children who were neglected and unloved, sometimes became detached, neglectful parents. Many survivors turned to alcohol and drugs to deal with their spiritual and emotional pain.³⁶⁴ “Students who were treated and punished like prisoners in the schools often graduated to real prisons. For many, the path from residential school to prison was a short one.”³⁶⁵ Further, it is argued that “religious institutions in Canada tend to support and reinforce the dominance of men over women and therefore perpetuate the cultural attitudes that tolerate violence against women.”³⁶⁶

Traumatic Behaviour

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

PTSD occurs in individuals who have experienced significant physical, sexual or emotional trauma and manifests as on-going, debilitating psychological challenges which interfere with many (or all) aspects of the individual’s life.³⁶⁷ “During a traumatic event, the victim is made completely helpless by an outside force,”³⁶⁸ and survivors of trauma report losing their sense of control, connection and meaning.³⁶⁹

Many children, having survived horrific abuse while at residential schools or in foster/biological families, developed into adults who suffered from PTSD, which manifested as: “Repeated re-living of the traumatic event, which can include hallucinations, flashbacks caused by is one of the hallmarks of PTSD. Sensory stimuli, such as sights, sounds, smells or tastes associated with the event, become triggers for these flashbacks. Persons suffering from PTSD learn to maintain a constant state of vigilance to avoid anything that may cause a flashback. They may use addictions to numb themselves from sensory stimulation that could trigger recall of the initial trauma. PTSD is marked by complex biological changes, as well as severe psychological symptoms, often occurring in combination, such as depression or mental illness and substance abuse. PTSD impacts every part of a survivor’s life, including mental, physical, emotional and spiritual aspects.”³⁷⁰

Left untreated, PTSD can also lead to a variety of patterned emotional responses which can at times serve to re-victimize the survivors: choosing partners that are abusive, re-enactments (often linked to high-risk behaviours such as unsafe sex or criminal behaviour), fears of authority and domestic violence.³⁷¹ Trauma survivors may also suppress, repress, deny, or avoid the feelings associated with trauma, as a means of coping with the effects of trauma.³⁷²

³⁶⁴ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada’s Residential Schools*, 172.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 136.

³⁶⁶ Canadian panel on violence against women in Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, vols. III, 65.

³⁶⁷ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence - from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*.

³⁶⁸ Chansonneuve, *Reclaiming Connections*, 49.

³⁶⁹ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence - from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*.

³⁷⁰ Chansonneuve, *Reclaiming Connections*, 53. Chansonneuve refers to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, 4th Edition* (DSM-IV-TR), published by the American Psychiatric Association (2000).

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 58–61.

³⁷² Chansonneuve, *Reclaiming Connections*.

Intergenerational Trauma

“The widespread abuse of students made its way back to many communities as students began internalizing, normalizing, and recreating the dysfunctional sexual relationships of the residential school in their communities.”³⁷³ When trauma is not resolved by an individual who was abused as a child, it can be passed on to the next generation,³⁷⁴ having devastating effects on the family over successive generations. Intergenerational cycles of family and community violence have emerged in some (though not all) Indigenous family systems, having been introduced through multiple generations of children were subjected to abuse at residential schools, who then later passed on this abusive behaviour to their children (or extended family); the transference of parenting skills was disrupted through the residential school experience – especially as children in the schools learned the only method of control and power was through abuse and internalized these lessons when parenting their own children. Later, when children were apprehended from survivors for neglect and/or abuse, they were often placed in abusive foster and adoptive families. Residential school policies and the placement policies in child welfare have thus contributed to perpetuate the cycle of violence and intergenerational trauma through generations.³⁷⁵

Suicide

The residential school system separated children from loving family, a sense of safety and belonging. “Suicide is associated with a history of separations, losses, and emotional deprivation early in life.”³⁷⁶ The regimental, institutional nature of the schools “resembled prisons, where [students] were to stay ten months of the year for twenty-four hours a day. Total institutions, such as prisons and boarding schools, increase suicide risk when they isolate and seclude the individual.”³⁷⁷ The mental health issues associated with residential schools have been passed on inter-generationally, combined with acculturation stress and “failing to acquire and value Indigenous values and identity, while also failing to identify with the cultural values of the larger society, have been repeatedly described as risk factors for Indigenous adolescent suicide.”³⁷⁸

³⁷³ Bull 1991 cited in Kirmayer et al., “Suicide Among Aboriginal People in Canada,” 70.

³⁷⁴ Aboriginal Healing Foundation Program Handbook, 2nd Edition 1991, cited in Chansonneuve, *Reclaiming Connections*, 51.

³⁷⁵ Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, vol. III, Ch 2.

³⁷⁶ Kirmayer et al., “Suicide Among Aboriginal People in Canada,” 71.

³⁷⁷ Ibid.

³⁷⁸ Bechtold, 1994; Johnson and Tomren, 1999 cited in Kirmayer et al., “Suicide Among Aboriginal People in Canada,” 78.

Collapsed Spiral of Interconnectedness

Earlier, an image of a spiral was presented as a symbol of the connectedness of the Indigenous individual family and community. The spaces between the levels in the spiral are significant, in that they demonstrate the respectful space between each level that allows the individual family or community to determine their own path, in healthy relationship with each other. This space represents the rules and values 'scaffolding' that supports, upholds the spiral of healthy human relationships. Without this infrastructure, the spiral collapses on itself; the relational boundaries are transgressed and the spiral becomes a tangled knot.³⁷⁹



Thus, for the Indigenous family and community, the introduction of pervasive and intergenerational violence by residential schools, the overwhelming grief and loss, and the subsequent traumatic response have had devastating effects on the Indigenous family and community. When the rules of relationships are not followed, healthy boundaries are transgressed, and spiritual, psychological, emotional, physical, sexual and lateral violence occurs within families and in communities. Families who carry the burden of historic trauma often experience overwhelming feelings of hopelessness, helplessness and powerlessness.

Healing: Decolonization and Reclaiming Wahkohtowin

Reclaim Cree Legal Tradition

Returning to the Cree legal tradition is a “movement to restore the ethical relationships that give structure to Indigenous communities. Ethics are rooted in values, the deep beliefs that we hold about the order of reality, often expressed in terms of right and wrong. Conventional behaviours that conform to the ethical rules demonstrate that we belong in a society or community, that we know how to behave.”³⁸⁰ Reclaiming Cree law is first to acknowledge that its concepts are useful in modern society, rather than perpetuating the myths of cultural malaise, lawlessness, deficiency³⁸¹ and primitiveness. “For this to happen however, we need to establish more symmetrical and respectful relationships between Indigenous laws and legal actors and state laws and legal actors,”³⁸² whereby the state acknowledges that reclaiming Cree worldview and the philosophy, science and pedagogy that flows from it, is critical in addressing intergenerational historic trauma-informed behaviours. In other words, Cree scientific inquiry would be used to make sense of the issues Cree people face today, to craft the solution and to ascertain if the outcomes are satisfactory.

³⁷⁹ LaBoucane-Benson, “Reconciliation, Repatriation and Reconnection: A Framework for Building Resilience in Canadian Indigenous Families.”

³⁸⁰ Castellano, “Aboriginal Family Trends,” 25.

³⁸¹ Friedland, “Navigating through Narratives of Despair.”

³⁸² Ibid., 307.

Reclaiming Indigenous Family as Mediator

“If disruption of the family and its capacity to mediate between individuals and their world invariably stunted individuals’ development and destroyed their capacity to regulate their own behaviour, there would be few healthy Indigenous people alive today. However, there is plenty of evidence that the extended family has provided a safety net for many.”³⁸³ Indeed, some Indigenous extended families have been remarkably resilient; despite residential school legacies and systemic racism, they have managed to maintain their interconnectedness and strong family roles, raising children who are bi-culturally successful (in the Canadian and Indigenous society).

Others have undergone healing processes, reconciling family relationships, while reclaiming traditional rules and responsibilities. This is a difficult task, whereby individuals and families have had to overcome devastating legacies of abuse, isolation and fear. “As part of their healing, individuals are encouraged to determine who their actions have harmed, make amends, and rejoin the family and community.”³⁸⁴

Some families, however, are still struggling with “the effects of colonization such as addictions, family violence, sexual abuse, suicide, and other symptoms.”³⁸⁵ These families typically do not know the history of colonization nor how they find themselves in this situation. “The lack of an intelligible narrative to place one’s actions and experiences into is an extremely deep loss, community destroying, and potentially life-threatening.”³⁸⁶ Further, parents and grandparents feel deeply ashamed of their actions and situation: “the dignity of the whole family may be at stake when it faces discrimination, lack of employment, or various forms of humiliation in the social world and when forced to receive service, particularly from outside the community.”³⁸⁷

Adopting Cree law as a means of reclaiming the rules, roles and responsibilities is very difficult work and not a “silver bullet.”³⁸⁸ It is at times deeply philosophical, and requires the capacity to look objectively at what one has learned in Canadian society about Cree culture, reflect upon it critically and choose to challenge deeply embedded ideas about law, authority and responsibilities. Essentially, it is a process of re-orientation towards an Indigenous, interconnected worldview and a reclamation of the rules with in it.³⁸⁹

Often, parents are seeking/learning cultural knowledge at the same time as their children.³⁹⁰ In this process, they are reclaiming the traditional roles within the interconnected web of relationships. Women are seeking grandmother teachings about the leadership roles of women, and participating in puberty (rites of passage) ceremonies to decolonize.³⁹¹ In addition, pregnant women are seeking

³⁸³ Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, vols. III, 18.

³⁸⁴ Waldram, “Healing History?,” 378.

³⁸⁵ Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996; Minore et al, 1991 in Dorion, “Opikinawasowin: The life long process of growing Cree and Métis children,” 32

³⁸⁶ Friedland, “Navigating through Narratives of Despair,” 279.

³⁸⁷ Carriere and Richardson, “Relationship Is Everything,” 61.

³⁸⁸ Friedland, “Navigating through Narratives of Despair,” 280.

³⁸⁹ LaBoucane-Benson, “Reconciliation, Repatriation and Reconnection: A Framework for Building Resilience in Canadian Indigenous Families.”

³⁹⁰ Carriere and Richardson, “Relationship Is Everything.”

³⁹¹ Dorion, “Opikinawasowin: The Life Long Process of Growing Cree and Métis Children.”

teachings regarding appropriate behaviour during pregnancy,³⁹² highlighting the need to “bring elders, grandmothers, and other key female relatives back into the circle surrounding pregnancy in the community and birthing women in hospitals. The elders and grandmothers are essential to providing traditional wisdom and guidance, and well as spiritual grounding for women in childbirth.”³⁹³

For men, healing is often a process of reclaiming their roles as protectors and providers for their families and communities. This can involve reframing “beliefs about women and their relationships with other family members. [It includes] the teachings about the important balance between men and women, the power women hold in their capacity for creation and the knowledge gleaned in ceremony assist [men] to develop healthy beliefs about and boundaries with women.”³⁹⁴ Further, “the western patriarchal system discouraged men from openly expressing their emotions with their children and others,”³⁹⁵ suggesting that healing may also involve the exploration and recovery of their emotional capacity.

Grandparents and ceremonialists play an important part in the reclamation of parenting skills for mothers and fathers. “Because traditional stories were untouched by the church and governmental authorities, they became one of the core vessels for the transmission of Indigenous culture, knowledge, and community life.”³⁹⁶ Therefore, grandparents remain knowledge holders, and despite the residential school era, many still know the original teachings/stories and can pass them on to parents and children.³⁹⁷ Within many Cree communities, programs and practices are “underway to recover some of the cultural and spiritual practices which build physical, sexual, and reproductive health, particularly opportunities for female elders to teach young women throughout the lifecycle.”³⁹⁸ Others are reclaiming the tipi teachings, which hold instructions regarding the roles of women, men, children, and grandparents.³⁹⁹ “Many Elders are the keepers of traditional knowledge and hold the important task of teaching, raising their grandchildren and supporting young parents. Yet Elders, too, need dignity, safety, and security to live out their traditional ways of being. Dignity includes having the freedom to extend caring to others, which is what Elders have often done in their communities.”⁴⁰⁰

Reclaim Indigenous Culture and Pedagogy

“Indigenous communities are clear about the essential values and philosophy that must guide the development of programs and services. These include shared parenting and community responsibility for children, the importance of language as a source of renewed culture, knowledge of history and

³⁹² Wiebe et al., “Restoring the Blessings of the Morning Star,” 59.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*, 63.

³⁹⁴ LaBoucane-Benson, “Reconciliation, Repatriation and Reconnection: A Framework for Building Resilience in Canadian Indigenous Families,” 184.

³⁹⁵ Kelly 2008 cited in Dorion, “Opikinawasowin: The Life Long Process of Growing Cree and Métis Children,” 38.

³⁹⁶ Hatala, Desjardins, and Bombay, “Reframing Narratives of Aboriginal Health Inequity Exploring Cree Elder Resilience and Well-Being in Contexts of Historical Trauma,” 10.

³⁹⁷ National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, “Family Is the Focus,” 9.

³⁹⁸ Wiebe et al., “Restoring the Blessings of the Morning Star,” 65.

³⁹⁹ Makokis, “Teachings from Cree Elders,” 127.

⁴⁰⁰ Carriere and Richardson, “Relationship Is Everything,” 61.

tradition as an essential element of identity, the importance of kinship and connection to each other, and a respectful approach to all of life.”⁴⁰¹

The most effective way to reclaim a lived understanding of *wahkohtowin* is to pursue that knowledge through traditional pedagogy: ceremony, language, connectedness to the land and storytelling. Educational initiatives can adopt Cree pedagogy and teach Cree law and values, so that “children would be able to succeed with pride and dignity because, in our education system, our children will understand who they are and be proud of who they are.”⁴⁰² Community-based programs and services can also be grounded in Cree worldview and incorporate Cree pedagogy: “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.”⁴⁰³

Indeed, from a Cree dynamic-reality perspective, constant change is expected in reaction to a changing internal and external environment.⁴⁰⁴ Further, Cree worldview holds that “when a person made a mistake in life, there were people that would counsel them. There was a process of reconciliation. It was done through the oral language. It was done through Elders. There they talked about getting that person back into a balanced life and were made aware of how to focus on what was important in life.”⁴⁰⁵ Thus, in the right environment, with the right approach, healing and decolonization would be expected to occur.

For some programs, this has begun with circle-based restorative family programs, which require “a shift in paradigms, by voicing the alternatives of child development structure and intent from an Indigenous worldview.”⁴⁰⁶ These programs have proven successful, as “it is through the use of circles that people redevelop relationships, feel empowered, finding voice, and consensus on issues. The circle approach can be used to build an integrated program effort across all disciplines and sectors. In this approach we can hold ourselves accountable and restore our people to our cultural practice and respectful relationships.”⁴⁰⁷ Other programmatic success with youth has been noted when a bi-cultural approach is employed, whereby activities and practices include ceremonies, “expressive art, yoga, meditation, smudging, drumming, beading, being with elders, learning the culture, having good relationships with role models, and navigating addictions.”⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰¹ LaFrance, Bodor, and Bastien, “Synchronicity or Serendipity,” 305.

⁴⁰² Bernie Makokis quoted in Makokis, “Teachings from Cree Elders,” 178.

⁴⁰³ LaFrance and Bastien, “Here Be Dragons! Reconciling Indigenous and Western Knowledge to Improve Aboriginal Child Welfare,” 120.

⁴⁰⁴ Brundige, “*Tanisi Isinisohtamahk Kitaskino: Cree Philosophy. Akwa Kayaskiacimowin.*”

⁴⁰⁵ Cardinal and Hildebrandt, *Treaty Elders of Saskatchewan: Our Dream Is That Our Peoples Will One Day Be Clearly Recognized as Nations*, 16.

⁴⁰⁶ Simard and Blight, “Developing a Culturally Restorative Approach to Aboriginal Child and Youth Development,” 52.

⁴⁰⁷ Leona Makokis quoted in Blue Quills First Nations College and Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research, *The Gathering: A Compendium of Stories and Presentations Exploring Positive, Strengths-Based Outcomes Related to Enhancing First Nations and Métis Child Wellbeing of Kids-in-Care in Alberta*, 9.

⁴⁰⁸ Sasakamoose et al., “First Nation and Métis Youth Perspectives of Health An Indigenous Qualitative Inquiry,” 647.

Development of Positive Individual and Collective Identity

Cree Identity

The Nature of the Cree Identity

Cree identity is a product of belonging to, and in relationship with, the collective: a vast network of people/beings who are living, role-modelling, and expressing *wahkohtowin*. “What makes the reasonable Cree person Cree is not physical location, biological identity, or blood quantum; rather, it is that she reasons with and through the Cree legal tradition.”⁴⁰⁹

At the very center of Cree identity is the capacity to change in response to a constantly changing environment. Identity is formed through an individual’s relationships, which are experienced within the vast web of relationships. As these relationships change, the individual’s understanding of who they are as a Cree person will change as well. For example, as a woman progresses through her life, her identity transforms to include daughter, then mother, then *kokum*, as well as in response to the changing world around her, showing that “Cree-ness [is] found in the action of moving in relationship with *kakanowniwakomakinak*, ‘all our relatives.’”⁴¹⁰ Because relationships involve change, “a spirit of Cree-ness can continue to move in the world even though historical Cree people have little resemblance to contemporary Cree people.”⁴¹¹

Cree worldview assumes that one person will both consecutively and simultaneously have multiple⁴¹² and unique identities; from this perspective, the Cree person will recognize and honour the diversity of others.⁴¹³ These identities are borne from familial relationships (which include clan affiliation) as well as relationships with non-human and non-material living beings. “In the same way, we are constantly creating and recreating new relationships and how we interact in those changing relationships, is to a large degree, a reflection of our Creeness.”⁴¹⁴

Cree Identity Formation

Cree identity and belonging is formed through interaction with Cree pedagogy – language, stories, songs and ceremonies – in the context of the web of relationships. “Creeness seems to be two things, it is a way of being tied to a particular land (with distinctive knowledge) and it is a general view that sees all persons (human and non-human) as community beings in particular places. So, Creeness is an identity and a way of understanding identities.”⁴¹⁵

Stories

⁴⁰⁹ Friedland, “Navigating through Narratives of Despair,” 276.

⁴¹⁰ Brundige, “*Tanisi Isinisohtamahk Kitaskino*: Cree Philosophy. *Akwa Kayaskiacimowin*,” 84.

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁴¹² *Ibid.*, 87.

⁴¹³ Brundige, “*Tanisi Isinisohtamahk Kitaskino*: Cree Philosophy. *Akwa Kayaskiacimowin*.”

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 194.

Story-telling is central to the development of Cree identity; stories are part of “a well-rounded education system that reveals what it means to be Swampy Cree.”⁴¹⁶ From a Cree perspective, stories contain “*the meaning of our existence, while providing the means with which to develop our cultural and individual identities.*”⁴¹⁷ Therefore, when Cree person hears the stories of her ancestors, her family and her creation, a common bond with their family is formed,⁴¹⁸ and she is also able to create a very personal understanding of what it means to be a Cree person. “The stories are the fabric that binds the culture, the community and the family together. Stories weave their way through centuries of connections, thus making the story an integral part of the Swampy Cree person's very being. *In effect, I am the story.*”⁴¹⁹

Stories are passed from generation to generation in a way that acknowledges changing realities; they cause “*us to re-experience the past in the present even if the storytellers and the words change. Retelling and re-experiencing brings memory back to life. This is how Creeness lives on through changes.*”⁴²⁰

Stories also involve relationships with non-material and non-human actors and individuals who may have both human and non-human identities. In contrast, “the rationale behind the Western assumption stem in part from the Aristotelian idea that individuals are defined by their species so that, for example, an individual could not be both bear and man in his life. To make such a claim would be a simple contradiction. Swampy Cree stories, however, are full of such persons, which for Western logic are impossible.”⁴²¹ These stories assist Cree people to embrace multiple identities, as well as acknowledge their kinship with other living beings. They call on Cree people to be mindful and pursue respectful, good relationships.

Ceremony

Ceremonies represent the experiential pedagogy that allows Cree people to connect their spirit to the spirit of their ancestors, their non-human relations and all of creation. Participation fosters feelings of belonging to the web of relationships, as well as promoting unity, reverence⁴²² and a sense of duty to all living things. Within ceremonies are specific stories, songs and rituals – educational opportunities to explore deeply who one is, what one’s purpose in life is and what gifts one has. This is reinforced through the clan system. It is believed that “each newborn infant already had been ascribed to a clan before birth. In the spirit world, where the clan system was derived, they identify a newborn child as inheriting a characteristic that belongs among the spirit clans. This characteristic will assist and enable the child in the physical world to meet his/her gift and live a purposeful life.”⁴²³

Indigenous people have also marked important milestones in life as a way of communally acknowledging the next stage of life, and assisting the individual to fully embrace this new aspect of identity. For example, Indigenous women “have practiced a variety of ceremonial activities, including rites of passage to mark progress along the life path and important social and physical milestones.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid., 37.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid., 128.

⁴¹⁸ Dorion, “Opikinawasowin: The Life Long Process of Growing Cree and Métis Children,” 95.

⁴¹⁹ Brundige, “*Tanisi Isinisohtamahk Kitaskino: Cree Philosophy. Akwa Kayaskiacimowin,*” 42–43.

⁴²⁰ Ibid., 70.

⁴²¹ Ibid., 10.

⁴²² Korpala and Wong, “Education and the Health of the First Nations People of Canada.”

⁴²³ Makokis, “Teachings from Cree Elders,” 134–135.

Ceremonies existed to celebrate puberty, pregnancy, childbirth, and the passing of the placenta. These ceremonies reinforced spiritual and cultural understandings of these events and fostered belonging and social harmony within the community.”⁴²⁴

Colonization: Attack on the Indigenous Identity

Legislated Inferiority

For two hundred years, governments in Canada have framed Indigenous people as an issue and have taken many actions to rid itself of ‘the Indian problem.’ Every piece of legislation passed and policy created were grounded in “two basic concepts: 1) the Christian god had given the Christian nations the right to colonize the lands they ‘discovered’ as long as they converted the Indigenous populations; and 2) the Europeans were bringing the benefits of civilization (a concept that was intertwined with Christianity) to the ‘heathen.’ In short, it was contended that people were being colonized for their own benefit, either in this world or the next.”⁴²⁵ In addition to residential school policies and the removal of children by child welfare, three pieces of legislation are connected to the disruption of the formation of a healthy Indigenous (Cree) identity.

In 1857, the ***Act to Encourage the Gradual Civilization of Indian Tribes in this Province, and to Amend the Laws Relating to Indians (The Gradual Civilization Act)*** was passed to introduce the process of enfranchisement, whereby Indian men (not women) could become full British subjects who were free from the protected status of being an Indian. This process was voluntary only for a man; his wife and children would be automatically enfranchised with him.⁴²⁶ The Act was based on two underlying assumptions: that to have Indian status was to be deemed inferior to European colonizers, and that it is the natural desire of all people to work towards assuming a British identity. The Gradual Civilization Act was an assault on Indigenous identity, as it created an environment whereby “only Indians who renounced their communities, cultures and languages could gain the respect of colonial and later Canadian society.”⁴²⁷ The relationship, set out by the proclamation of 1763 between the Crown, the colonies and autonomous tribal nations, was thus being transformed by the Act into one of domination, control and assimilation by Canada over Indigenous people.

In 1869, the ***Act For The Gradual Enfranchisement Of Indians, The Better Management Of Indian Affairs, And To Extend The Provisions Of The Act 31st Victoria*** instituted compulsory enfranchisement for Indian men, as opposed to being voluntary. Notably, there was tremendous resistance to this policy and very few men complied. In addition, the Act introduced the law that if an Indigenous woman married a non-Indigenous man, she and any children born from this marriage would be excluded from Indian status, thus moving forward the colonial agenda of assimilation.⁴²⁸

⁴²⁴ Wiebe et al., “Restoring the Blessings of the Morning Star,” 60.

⁴²⁵ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada’s Residential Schools*, 46.

⁴²⁶ Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, vols. I, 249.

⁴²⁷ *Ibid.*, vols. I, 251.

⁴²⁸ Makarenko, “The Indian Act: Historical Overview.”

In 1876 the first **Indian Act** was passed bringing together aspects of the Civilization and Enfranchisement legislation, enacting many recommendations from inquiries and commissions of the past, and moving forward an explicit agenda of assimilation of Indigenous people into Canadian society. In 1884 the *Indian Act* was amended to protect Indians from their own cultures,⁴²⁹ prohibiting ceremonies such as the Potlatch, the *Tamanawas* dance, and later the Sundance. A jail term of two to six months would be given to anyone engaging or assisting in these (and because of the power of the Indian Agent, all) ceremonies. “In 1920, the federal government amended the *Indian Act* to give it the power to strip individuals of their status against their will. In explaining the purpose of the amendment to a parliamentary committee, Indian Affairs Deputy Minister Duncan Campbell Scott said that “our object is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic, and there is no Indian question, and no Indian Department that is the whole object of this Bill.”⁴³⁰

The *Indian Act* (and the Acts and commissions it was founded upon) was a part of the Canadian government’s attempt at cultural genocide. “Cultural genocide is the destruction of those structures and practices that allow the group to continue as a group. States that engage in cultural genocide set out to destroy the political and social institutions of the targeted group. Land is seized, and populations are forcibly transferred and their movement is restricted. Languages are banned. Spiritual leaders are persecuted, spiritual practices are forbidden, and objects of spiritual value are confiscated and destroyed. And, most significantly to the issue at hand, families are disrupted to prevent the transmission of cultural values and identity from one generation to the next.”⁴³¹

Historic Trauma: The Colonized Psyche

Acculturation, Marginalization and Identity Confusion

The goal of the *Indian Act* was to force Indigenous people, in a short period of time to adopt European culture and spirituality and thus eradicate Indigenous cultures. “Acculturation stress is a result of a change in the relationships, knowledge, languages, social institutions, beliefs, values, and ethical rules that bind people and give them a collective sense of who they are and where they belong. For Indigenous people, such stresses have included: loss of land, traditional subsistence activities, and control over living conditions; suppression of belief systems and spirituality; weakening of social and political institutions; and racial discrimination.”⁴³² In the transition, for example, “young males may have experienced the greatest acculturative stress due to the discrepancies between traditional male roles of hunter, provider, and band member and the limited economic and job opportunities of contemporary settlement life.”⁴³³

However, two additional factors compounded the stress of acculturation: first, the Canadian government’s policies of cultural genocide created isolation; indeed, at the residential schools, children “lost their identity, their feeling of self-worth, their self-esteem, their place within their own society and

⁴²⁹ Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, vols. I, 267.

⁴³⁰ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada’s Residential Schools*, 54.

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁴³² Kirmayer et al., “Suicide Among Aboriginal People in Canada,” 63, referencing Novins et al, 1999.

⁴³³ *Ibid.*, 64.

their whole reason for being. Some children harboured great resentment toward their parents, grandparents and their whole community for subjecting them to the horrors of the residential schools and found they could trust no one, not even themselves, for self-betrayal was common in order to survive... Later when these children returned home, they were aliens. They did not speak their own language, so they could not communicate with anyone other than their own counterparts. Some looked down on their families because of their lack of English, their lifestyle, and some were just plain hostile. They had formed no bonds with their families, and some couldn't survive without the regimentation they had become so accustomed to."⁴³⁴

The second factor compounding acculturation stress centers on pervasive racism in Euro-Canadian society that has rejected (and continues to reject) Indigenous people unless they discard critical aspects of their indigeneity (legal traditions, values, ceremonies, language). In current Canadian society, the "assaults on Indigenous identity, culture and community institutions continue today. Indigenous people recounted racially motivated incidents experienced in their daily lives. The stereotyping and devaluing of Indigenous women, a combination of racism and sexism, are among the most damaging of attitudes that find expression in Canadian society."⁴³⁵ Thus, the colonial, negative mythological "Indian" identity (which is made real in the *Indian Act*) replaces the authentic Cree identity. "*In adopting the given idea of 'Indianess' many of America's Indigenous people find themselves representing what we think is authentic in an attempt to protect our identities. Unfortunately, this simply reinforces the Western world's hideous prescription of our identities, furthering our own alienation from each other as Indigenous peoples.*"⁴³⁶

The result for many Indigenous people has been not only marginalization, but a "deculturation, in which individuals acquire the skills, values, and tradition of no one culture."⁴³⁷ The result is a type of identity confusion⁴³⁸ - people who feel affiliation neither to the mainstream colonial culture, nor to the traditional culture they learned to fear or despise.

Foster placement and adoption in families from non-Indigenous cultures serves to compound the issue of identity confusion. These children have not learned their culture, laws or values (Cree children, for example, do not learn their *wahkohtowin*). They have no connection to, nor feel a sense of belonging to, their Indigenous family/community, and they experience all the racism towards 'Indians' in Canadian society. "The Indigenous adoptee in a non-Indigenous family is further challenged by their Indigenous status. They have little information as to what this really means and rely on messages from their parents and the broader environment in which she lives."⁴³⁹

Many adults who have grown up as wards of the government have experienced "cultural dislocation and liminality (marginalization), identity confusion, emotional emptiness, attachment disorders, abuse, substance addictions, racism from foster families, and self-hatred (York, 1990)."⁴⁴⁰ For some youth,

⁴³⁴ Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, vols. III, 33.

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*, vols. III, 57.

⁴³⁶ Brundige, "*Tanisi Isinisohtamahk Kitaskino: Cree Philosophy. Akwa Kayaskiacimowin*," 145.

⁴³⁷ Berry, 1980, referenced in Kirmayer et al., "Suicide Among Aboriginal People in Canada," 63.

⁴³⁸ Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, III, 17.

⁴³⁹ Richard, "A Commentary Against Aboriginal to Non-Aboriginal Adoption," 104.

⁴⁴⁰ Kirmayer et al., "Suicide Among Aboriginal People in Canada," 75.

living in the city means on-going experiences with racism – constant attacks on their identity: *“I honestly don’t like being Native... If people didn’t treat me the way they did because of my skin colour, then I wouldn’t mind being Native. I wouldn’t mind learning my culture and everything. I lost my identity. But this is what I have to do to survive.”*⁴⁴¹

For some youth, “growing up in foster care enabled them to have access to material benefits that would be otherwise difficult to obtain such as having their own room, eating foods rich in nutritional value and also adopt white culture to fit in. Youth also mentioned how being whitewashed or westernized had helped them adopt ‘positive’ values, through beliefs in Christianity and the protestant work ethic. However, having access to these ‘more civilized’ environments and attempting to fit in, did not mean that they could escape from being seen as inferior and not to be trusted”⁴⁴² by Euro-Canadian society. On the other hand, Indigenous youth who have grown up within the Indigenous community, may see the foster child as “an apple” - red on the outside but white on the inside.⁴⁴³ This highlights the “cultural divide between city life and what youth refer to as ‘Rez life.’ For many youth, reserves epitomize inequality and lack of opportunities. However, they also see reserves as cultural centres where Indigenous cultural practices and rights to land can be preserved. City life is often equated with assimilation and a symbolic loss of Indigenous status.”⁴⁴⁴

Colonized Identity, Fear and Shame

Indigenous people in Canada have been subjected to this pervasive, devastating contempt for Indigenous identity for centuries, grounded in long-standing governmental actions to assimilate Indigenous people and therefore exterminate Indigenous identity, ridding the colony (and later country) of the Indian Nations and the Indian problem. The assimilation policies “aimed at ‘civilizing’ the Indian were predicated on the belief that a sense of shame (shame about being Indian) should be inculcated in the minds, souls and hearts of First Nations children. Generation upon generation of First Nations children were forcibly removed from their homes and brought into ‘educational institutions’ where, among other things, they were programmed to abhor anything that contained, reflected or symbolized their First Nations Heritage.”⁴⁴⁵ While there has been demonstrated resistance to enfranchisement and the abduction of children to residential schools, there has also been significant damage done to Indigenous people’s view of themselves and their sense of belonging.

Legislated enfranchisement created a belief within the Canadian population of Indigenous inferiority along with the assumption that all Indigenous people should seek to become fully transformed British subjects or fully assimilated Canadian citizens - in other words, more fully human. This proved to be another of “the most effective weapons of colonialism, in its attempt to force the colonized to internalize a value system in which they are rendered subhuman, incapable of rational thought or

⁴⁴¹ Michee (youth collaborator), quoted in Navia, “Uncovering Colonial Legacies,” 50.

⁴⁴² Ibid., 49.

⁴⁴³ Navia, “Uncovering Colonial Legacies,”

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁵ (Cardinal & Hildebrandt, 2000, p 21).

morality.”⁴⁴⁶ The de-humanizing process of colonization, therefore, removes the ability of the oppressed to create meaning of their lives and their reality. Cree Elders have spoken passionately against how the colonizer has defined who they are: *“In the Indian world...you have to realise there is an Indian mind...there is an Indigenous mind...I don’t like that word Indian, I don’t like that word Indigenous, I don’t like that word first nations - to me that’s where we are running into problems. Because we have always allowed other nations, other people from foreign lands to define who we are. We never had the opportunity to define who we are... [The European settlers] had an opportunity over a hundred years to come tell us who we should be and how we should live. They have never heard our understanding of who we are. They don’t know our relationship we that have with our creator and our grandfathers. They don’t understand the stories and the reason why we are here and we are put on mother earth here at this time and what our responsibilities are in this country, our responsibilities to our families and children.”*⁴⁴⁷

Indigenous people are therefore left to see themselves only through the eyes of the colonizer, eventually losing sight of the strength and worth of their traditional culture and accepting the colonizer’s narrative that foreign religion, competition, capitalism and individualism are superior and more civilized. *“Ashamed of our Cree identity, we were no longer connected to our life force, so we felt disconnected from our Cree world. Additionally, without the education that was designed to assimilate us, we were not accepted into the mainstream world. We were left floating - not fitting, and not belonging.”*⁴⁴⁸

Some Indigenous people have grown to fear their traditional Indigenous culture, having accepted that it is at best childish and delusional and at worst a form of evil. Even in the act of resistance, “the ultimate violence which colonialism does to its victims, namely that it creates a culture in which the ruled are constantly tempted to fight their rulers within the psychological limits set by the latter.”⁴⁴⁹

Racism

Racism in Canada stems from assumptions that were brought by settlers and grounded in “the belief that the colonizers were bringing civilization to savage people who could never civilize themselves. The ‘civilizing mission’ rested on a belief of racial and cultural superiority... Through a civilizing process, Europeans could, however, raise the people of the world up to their level. [However,] this view was replaced in the nineteenth century by a racism that chose to cloak itself in the language of science, and held that the peoples of the world had differing abilities. Some argued that, for genetic reasons, there were limits on the ability of the less-developed peoples to improve. In some cases, it was thought, contact with superior races could lead to only one outcome: the extinction of the inferior peoples.”⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁴⁶ Oliver, K. (2004). *The colonization of psychic space: A psychoanalytic social theory of oppression*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

⁴⁴⁷ Cree Elders Teaching Circle (2007) cited in LaBoucane-Benson, “Reconciliation, Repatriation and Reconnection: A Framework for Building Resilience in Canadian Indigenous Families,” 105–106.

⁴⁴⁸ Leona Makokis quoted in Blue Quills First Nations College and Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research, *The Gathering: A Compendium of Stories and Presentations Exploring Positive, Strengths-Based Outcomes Related to Enhancing First Nations and Métis Child Wellbeing of Kids-in-Care in Alberta*, 5.

⁴⁴⁹ Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy*, 3.

⁴⁵⁰ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada’s Residential Schools*, 47.

The Canadian educational system – both the residential school and the provincial public system - has perpetuated the racist stereotypes of Indigenous peoples. Even recently, “assessments of public-school textbooks showed that they continued to perpetuate racist stereotypes of Indigenous people,”⁴⁵¹ further entrenching a damaging myth of the “Indian” in Indigenous and non-Indigenous society.

These damaging views of Indigenous people have survived and still exist within Canadian society, resulting in both subtle and more overt systemic racism that continues to attack the psyche of Indigenous people throughout Canada. Within the mainstream Canadian media there has been a relentless reiteration of the “pervasive and pejorative colonial, racialized, and essentialized images of Indigenous people...[with] three essentialized characteristics: moral depravity, innate inferiority, and a lack of evolution, or stubborn resistance to progress.”⁴⁵² Further, the residual mainstream image of the ‘Indian’ – the noble and vicious savage⁴⁵³ - is a static stereotype of the past, coupled with the belief that the culture, language, ceremony and traditional law have nothing to offer individuals in a progressive society.

As a result, many Indigenous individuals have a difficult time speaking about the effect of this racism on their sense of self and belonging. “Trying to make unified coherent sense of our lived narratives from a location of intense pain and disconnectedness is very difficult for an Indigenous person”⁴⁵⁴ who may still carry the self-loathing that comes from internalizing the negative stereotypes. “*We are caught between the narratives of our ancestry and the narrative of the European...It would take enormous force of mind and spirit to untangle the intricacies of the European narrative that have framed our conceptual understanding of ourselves.*”⁴⁵⁵

Healing: Decolonizing the Cree Identity

Cultural Continuity and Reclaiming Cree Pedagogy

Cultural continuity is “the contemporary preservation of traditional culture,”⁴⁵⁶ whereby retaining or reclaiming Cree ceremonies, laws and collective identity acts as a safeguard against identity confusion and isolation. The phenomenon of cultural continuity is connected to the resistance of the Indigenous individual, family and nation. Even though enfranchisement was made mandatory by law and “despite the coercive measures that the government adopted, it failed to achieve its policy goals. Although Indigenous peoples and cultures have been badly damaged, they continue to exist. Indigenous people have refused to surrender their identity.”⁴⁵⁷ Indeed, enfranchisement was profoundly resisted; languages were spoken, ceremonies were practiced underground and children were hidden from residential schools and child welfare. As such, there remains culture, language, ceremony, ritual and stories to reclaim.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid., 75.

⁴⁵² Cronlund and Robertson (2011) referenced in Friedland, “Navigating through Narratives of Despair,” 282.

⁴⁵³ Brundige, “*Tanisi Isinisohtamahk Kitaskino: Cree Philosophy. Akwa Kayaskiacimowin.*”

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid., 136.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid., 151.

⁴⁵⁶ Oster et al., “Cultural Continuity, Traditional Indigenous Language, and Diabetes in Alberta First Nations,” 1.

⁴⁵⁷ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada’s Residential Schools*, 6.

Children also resisted while in residential schools, and these “subtle forms of resistance to the institutional structure and oppression helped to foster a sense of Indigenous identity and continuity with “traditional” cultural forms of Cree community life, while again also restoring an important source of agency, achievement, and morality.”⁴⁵⁸ For Elders who hold this traditional knowledge, they have maintained a very strong Indigenous identity, and thus are “less influenced by the changing flux of materialism and modern Euro-Canadian social and cultural reality, while less influenced by experiences of marginalization or discrimination.”⁴⁵⁹ They are role models and exemplars for those who wish to reclaim this knowledge. For example, one Elder shared that, “through her father’s actions of resistance and struggle, [she] was exposed to the possibility of this mode of being, agency, and engagement with the world, an actor with the possibility of changing the course of social events (i.e., resistance). Despite the rapid cultural change and transformation happening around her, [she] was raised primarily within traditional Indigenous cultural ways and teachings, which she later noted was one of the reasons why she was able to assume an elder identity and guide others in the community today.”⁴⁶⁰

This reclamation process has proven very powerful in the development of a positive Indigenous identity for people suffering from the intergenerational effects of historic trauma. Regular engagement in traditional practices, increased awareness and participation in ceremonies with spiritual exploration, can result in the development of a coherent cultural identity, belonging, spiritual transformation and creation of shared meaning, thus mitigating the traumatic effects of colonization, building resilience and the capacity to help others in their community.⁴⁶¹ Thus, cultural continuity is closely correlated with the development of positive personal and collective identity.⁴⁶²

However, to be ultimately successful, non-Indigenous Canadians must also participate in the decolonization process. “The Elders also believe that Canada must take those measures necessary to reverse the negative stereotypes that European colonial policies and institutions have created of First Nations peoples. It is their view that ‘respect’ is an essential pillar upon which good relations (*miyo-wicehtowin*) can be brought about...Establishing and recognizing the legitimacy of the First Nation’s perspective would begin to unravel the destructive effects of colonial mythology about First Nations.”⁴⁶³

Reconciling Christianity and Traditional Spiritualism

For many residential school survivors, spiritual confusion and disconnect is a result of being forced to adopt Christianity. “A number of Survivors spoke...about the many contradictions they now see between their adult knowledge of Christian ethics and biblical teachings and how they were treated in the schools. These contradictions indicate the spiritual fear and confusion that so many Survivors have experienced. Children who returned home from the residential schools were unable to relate to families

⁴⁵⁸ (Hatala, Desjardins, and Bombay, “Reframing Narratives of Aboriginal Health Inequity Exploring Cree Elder Resilience and Well-Being in Contexts of Historical Trauma,” 8. et al P. 8)

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴⁶¹ Nutton and Fast, “Historical Trauma, Substance Use, and Indigenous Peoples”; Gone, “Redressing First Nations Historical Trauma”; Isaak et al., “Surviving, Healing and Moving Forward,” December 1, 2015.

⁴⁶² Tousignant and Sioui, “Resilience and Aboriginal Communities in Crisis: Theory and Interventions,” 48.

⁴⁶³ Cardinal and Hildebrandt, *Treaty Elders of Saskatchewan: Our Dream Is That Our Peoples Will One Day Be Clearly Recognized as Nations*, 22–23.

who still spoke their traditional languages and practised traditional spirituality. Survivors who wanted to learn the spiritual teachings of their ancestors were criticized and sometimes ostracized by their own family members who were Christian, and by the church. Survivors and their relatives reported that these tensions led to family breakdown—such is the depth of this spiritual conflict.”⁴⁶⁴ This conflict extends to the entire community, at times pitting Indigenous Christians against traditionalists.⁴⁶⁵

In this context, healing for many people has meant reconciliation between Christian and Cree spiritualism. For some survivors, they could find the common ground between Christian teachings and those they learned from Cree Elders, creating equivalencies.⁴⁶⁶ “This approach allowed [the survivor] to successfully integrate the worlds of the residential school system and his traditional culture, and, by doing so, to maintain psychological and emotional health in the midst of a changing cultural landscape.”⁴⁶⁷ For others, reconciliation has been a process of seeking traditional teachings as a form of healing, and finding common ground between the teachings of Christ and *wahkohtowin* teachings. This may involve participation in church groups that embrace the similarities and practice both.

For many survivors, however, Christianity is too connected to their personal experiences of pain and trauma. For these individuals, who either never were Christian or “no longer subscribe to Christian teachings, have found the reclaiming of their Indigenous spirituality important to their healing and sense of identity. [They] have no desire to integrate Indigenous spirituality into Christian religious institutions. Rather, they believe that Indigenous spirituality and Western religion should coexist on separate but parallel paths.”⁴⁶⁸

Ceremonies, and the embedded stories, songs and rituals, assist the Indigenous person to reclaim their relationships within the web of interconnectedness; to adopt an identity that is grounded in a “spiritual way of life, a spiritual/moral way of interacting in the world. A fundamental feature of understanding our ancestor's spirituality is recognition that the place with which we come into the world is inextricably linked to who we are.”⁴⁶⁹ Seeking out traditional teachings is a part of becoming more resilient in mainstream society; reliance on traditional teachings and participation in ceremonies increase an individual's awareness and acceptance of their Indigenous identity.⁴⁷⁰

Stories to Reclaim Identity

Story telling builds a positive identity by first providing “a stable underlying essence of the self that endures over time and across situations; and second, by narratively constructing links across disparate aspects or versions of the self through descriptions of change and transformation.”⁴⁷¹ Cree stories,

⁴⁶⁴ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada's Residential Schools*, 225–226.

⁴⁶⁵ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada's Residential Schools*.

⁴⁶⁶ Hatala, Desjardins, and Bombay, “Reframing Narratives of Aboriginal Health Inequity Exploring Cree Elder Resilience and Well-Being in Contexts of Historical Trauma.”

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁴⁶⁸ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada's Residential Schools*, 227.

⁴⁶⁹ Brundige, “*Tanisi Isinisohtamahk Kitaskino: Cree Philosophy. Akwa Kayaskiacimowin*,” 197.

⁴⁷⁰ Isaak et al., “Surviving, Healing and Moving Forward,” December 1, 2015, 792.

⁴⁷¹ Lalonde(2006) cited in Hatala, Desjardins, and Bombay, “Reframing Narratives of Aboriginal Health Inequity Exploring Cree Elder Resilience and Well-Being in Contexts of Historical Trauma,” 10–11.

therefore, provide information about how to be Cree in contemporary society by informing thoughts, beliefs and actions within the “the morality of our ancestor’s narrative. The Swampy Cree narrative continues to teach our place of interconnectedness, and the value of relationships. Our recognition of the interconnected relationship to family and land, is how Swampy Cree people understood identity, both historically and today.”⁴⁷² Cree stories create the understanding of how to be authentically Cree, by calling the listener to reflect upon and integrate their understanding of the moral of the story into their own lives (to adopt a more interconnected and relationship identity) and therefore eschewing the colonial identity of the “Indian.”

Further, traditional activities with embedded stories, song, and dance are powerful tools for creating a sense of belonging. Art, for example, provides an opportunity “to release and express oneself and explore the identity. [For example,] beadwork would be a great opportunity for youth to learn from elders and participate in a process that eases the mind while promoting the culture.”⁴⁷³ Activities such as “Pow Wows promote the adaptation of traditional dances and ceremonies to contemporary contexts.”⁴⁷⁴ Thus, contemporary Indigenous individual and collective identity “encompasses a pride in history and traditional culture but also in all the contemporary achievements and new ways of being Indigenous.”⁴⁷⁵

Role of the Land in Shaping Identity

Land, or place, is still deeply connected to the Cree identity. “*The land is my identity and the land has not gone anywhere. I am still on my land, I was born on my land and I will die on my land and my body will return to the land; therefore, they have not taken my land from me. They can however, take my land from me in terms of my understanding of land and its relationship to my identity.*”⁴⁷⁶ For some Cree people, reclaiming or strengthening an intimate relationship with the land (restoring land memory⁴⁷⁷) is a part of the healing process. This may include learning to harvest and prepare traditional foods⁴⁷⁸ as a part of healing their positive individual and collective identity. Creating mentorship relationships with knowledge keepers to learn traditional ways further strengthens one’s connectedness to the web of relationships.

However, for Indigenous people who are raised and live in the city, location and place, or where one is from, is still significant.⁴⁷⁹ Urban Indigeneity “on the one hand, can potentially lead to assimilation, but, on the other, has given rise to a distinct form of urbanized resistance.”⁴⁸⁰ Adopting an interconnected worldview, along with the rules of *wahkohtowin*, are as relevant in the city as in the bush.

⁴⁷² Brundige, “*Tanisi Isinisohtamahk Kitaskino: Cree Philosophy. Akwa Kayaskiacimowin,*” 198.

⁴⁷³ Sasakamoose et al., “First Nation and Métis Youth Perspectives of Health An Indigenous Qualitative Inquiry,” 644.

⁴⁷⁴ Navia, “Uncovering Colonial Legacies,” 79.

⁴⁷⁵ Tousignant and Sioui, “Resilience and Aboriginal Communities in Crisis: Theory and Interventions,” 49.

⁴⁷⁶ Brundige, “*Tanisi Isinisohtamahk Kitaskino: Cree Philosophy. Akwa Kayaskiacimowin,*” 224.

⁴⁷⁷ Brundige, “*Tanisi Isinisohtamahk Kitaskino: Cree Philosophy. Akwa Kayaskiacimowin.*”

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., 224.

⁴⁸⁰ Navia, “Uncovering Colonial Legacies,” 82.

Asserting Unique and Multiple Identity

Historic trauma in part manifests as the Cree person's sense of self being caught between two opposing narratives: "First, we have the history, culture, and social reality of our traditional narratives that inform our understandings of who we are. Second, we have the historical, cultural, and social reality of the European myth of who we are."⁴⁸¹ In fact, the process of decolonization does not prescribe the Cree person to adopt one or the other 'absolute' identity. Rather, healing the Cree identity is a process of co-authoring⁴⁸² one's own unique Cree identity by confronting "the duality of narratives and the pain of constantly being caught between them."⁴⁸³ Healing is a process of reaching back to understand the laws, values and interconnectedness of Cree ancestors and then using this worldview to inform current day thoughts, actions and relationships. This is possible "because European colonization, while setting certain restrictions on our self-identity, has not been able to fully destroy the patterns with which we organize the world and our place in the world."⁴⁸⁴

In the process of co-authoring, it is important to examine all colonial toxic narratives that inform a sub-human identity. Both the 'vicious, primitive Indian' as well as the 'noble savage' are dehumanizing narratives; they are both European myths that do not relate the rational, lawful, spiritual reality of the Cree worldview.⁴⁸⁵ Neither myth is an accurate portrayal of the Cree individual, family and society that grounds its relationships in *wahkohtowin*. "This process of coauthoring false images arises from the fact that too many of us have had our memories stolen, and believing ourselves to be 'Indians,' we are bewildered by the multiple and derogatory messages about 'Indians,' we receive. In the organization and reorganization to a morally acceptable image we are subsumed into a story that is not Swampy Cree. The most disastrous thing that could happen is for us to recreate and build our worldview based on what someone else has decided is our worldview."⁴⁸⁶ Further, taking on the identity of 'victim' works at cross purposed to co-authoring Cree identity; acts of resistance and stories/narratives of that resistance "helped to construct and preserve expressions of 'native presence over absence, nihilism, and victimity,' and an identity of Indigenosity defined against the invading dominance of 'Western' cultural norms."⁴⁸⁷ "The process of reclaiming our Indigenous narrative will strengthen our understanding of who we are as Cree people. We can begin the process of coauthoring a personal identity that will help us overcome the legacy of a forced identification."⁴⁸⁸

⁴⁸¹ Brundige, "Tanisi Isinisohtamahk Kitaskino: Cree Philosophy. *Akwa Kayaskiacimowin*," 133.

⁴⁸² Brundige, "Tanisi Isinisohtamahk Kitaskino: Cree Philosophy. *Akwa Kayaskiacimowin*."

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*, 138.

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁵ Brundige, "Tanisi Isinisohtamahk Kitaskino: Cree Philosophy. *Akwa Kayaskiacimowin*."

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 146–147.

⁴⁸⁷ Vizenor (2008) cited in Hatala, Desjardins, and Bombay, "Reframing Narratives of Aboriginal Health Inequity Exploring Cree Elder Resilience and Well-Being in Contexts of Historical Trauma," 8.

⁴⁸⁸ Brundige, "Tanisi Isinisohtamahk Kitaskino: Cree Philosophy. *Akwa Kayaskiacimowin*," 196.

Self Determination

Interconnected Foundations of Self Determination

The interconnected nature of family and community relationships in Cree and other Indigenous societies create a sophisticated, broad and inclusive family system: “The effect of these diverse, overlapping bonds was to create a dense network of relationships within which sharing and obligations of mutual aid ensured that an effective safety net was in place.”⁴⁸⁹ Relationships were therefore the cornerstone of the family and community; Indigenous individuals, families and communities were bound by rules within their culture that required them to establish and maintain positive relationships.

Often, this interconnected family-community system is represented by a spiral (Figure 1), that illustrates the manner in which the individual, family, clan, community, nation, environment and spirit world are connected. Each rung is equal in size and importance – and the space between the rungs keeps each rung separate, yet connected⁴⁹⁰. In this way all people, families, nations and the natural world is acknowledged as self-governing, with the capacity to act on their own behalf; they must act, however, in ways that respect all other living beings ability to take actions on their own behalf as well. The space between the rungs represents the rules (that are based upon specific values) that ensure respectful connectedness. These rules are the infrastructure that ensures all living beings are free to self determine their lives within the boundaries of the laws of *wahkohtowin*.⁴⁹¹

This is illustrated in the Swamp Cree example of building collective consensus while honouring individual perspectives. “When social decisions were made by historical Swampy Cree, the people came together as a community, but each ‘individual’ was recognized as having their own opinion (perception) and each person contributed to the discussion. Thus, individual rights (perceptions) and collective rights (perceptions) were brought together in relationship. No one person was thought to hold a truth above everyone else and everyone’s perceptions were granted equal opportunity to be represented. Understanding the full implications of consensus can help in the process of relationship building that is both reciprocal and respectful.”⁴⁹²

The Pedagogy of Self Determination

Development of Independent and Critical Thinking

The Cree language reflects the fluidity of the Cree interconnected worldview.⁴⁹³ The certainty that all things will eventually change, calls the Cree person to be constantly vigilant, watching for indicators of change, reflecting upon those indicators and thinking critically about the ‘new reality.’ “It is extremely

⁴⁸⁹ Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, vols. III, 5.

⁴⁹⁰ LaBoucane-Benson, “Reconciliation, Repatriation and Reconnection: A Framework for Building Resilience in Canadian Indigenous Families.”

⁴⁹¹ LaBoucane-Benson, “Reconciliation, Repatriation and Reconnection: A Framework for Building Resilience in Canadian Indigenous Families.”

⁴⁹² Brundige, “*Tanisi Isinisohtamahk Kitaskino: Cree Philosophy. Akwa Kayaskiacimowin*,” 124.

⁴⁹³ Brundige, “*Tanisi Isinisohtamahk Kitaskino: Cree Philosophy. Akwa Kayaskiacimowin*.”

telling of the Swampy Cree ethical worldview that our language precludes absolute or universal judgments, for it also indicates that each individual is responsible for his or her own interpretations and actions ultimately his/her own truth.”⁴⁹⁴ In addition, the Cree storytelling tradition was non-linear and fluid. “Storytelling in the old days, instead of shaping a narrow or particular way of thinking, allowed the listener to incorporate multiple pieces of information in order to reach a critical assessment of the story.”⁴⁹⁵ Therefore, the concept of wisdom, or being wise, was a product of substantive life experience, as well as the careful (and critical) reflection upon that experience and the understanding of “what the experiences mean. True wisdom requires much self-reflection. It is in this way, that First Nations recognize and credential people.”⁴⁹⁶

Self Sufficiency and Autonomy

In many Indigenous traditions, children are allowed to experience their environment,⁴⁹⁷ make choices and face the consequences of those choices. Permitting the child to act autonomously, in age appropriate ways, assists the child to develop independence and learn to make their own decisions.⁴⁹⁸ “Autonomy is highly valued, and children are allowed to make their own decisions and operate semi-independently at an early age with the freedom to experience natural consequences.”⁴⁹⁹ From this perspective, parents did not interfere in their child’s altercations/disagreements with others, believing that the “child should be encouraged to find his or her own voice, and to speak up for themselves.”⁵⁰⁰

Self-empowerment, responsibility and self-sufficiency are highly valued in the Cree worldview. Children were raised in environments that ensure they develop a sense of power over their lives and the agency to make decisions, set goals and achieve them.⁵⁰¹ For example, children would be taken hunting and given age-appropriate tasks and responsibilities to instill genuine pride of self-sufficiency.⁵⁰² Further, the pedagogy in the hunting camp promoted reflection and the capacity to solve problems. “*The old people might ask you why you never caught a rabbit and these are the ways in which the old people taught you: They might ask you what’s wrong? How come you’re not catching anything? Or why you’re not snaring anything? So, we have to figure it out ourselves, that’s the way they used to teach us about everything, you do it and they’ll find questions for you.*”⁵⁰³

Autonomy and self-sufficiency were always taught within the context of interconnectedness – respectful relationships with all living beings. It was not an act of selfishness, but rather the development of skills,

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., 11–12.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid., 35.

⁴⁹⁶ Patricia Monture-Angus quoted in Brundige, “*Tanisi Isinisohtamahk Kitaskino: Cree Philosophy. Akwa Kayaskiacimowin,*” 58.

⁴⁹⁷ Sheperd 2008 referenced in Muir and Bohr, “Contemporary Practice of Traditional Aboriginal Child Rearing,” 70.

⁴⁹⁸ Muir and Bohr, “Contemporary Practice of Traditional Aboriginal Child Rearing.”

⁴⁹⁹ Glover 2001, quoted in McShane and Hastings, “Culturally Sensitive Approaches to Research on Child Development and Family Practices in First Peoples Communities,” 37.

⁵⁰⁰ Pazderka et al., “Nitsiyihkâson,” 60.

⁵⁰¹ Simard and Blight, “Developing a Culturally Restorative Approach to Aboriginal Child and Youth Development.”

⁵⁰² Dorion, “Opikinawasowin: The Life Long Process of Growing Cree and Métis Children,” 81.

⁵⁰³ Interview in Hansen and Antsanen, “Elders’ Teachings about Resilience and Its Implications for Education in Dene and Cree Communities,” 9.

knowledge and capacity of the individual, so that they can enhance the capacity and strength of the web of relationships. The capacity to care for oneself and be available for others who need help.⁵⁰⁴

Colonization

The Indian Act

Colonization in Canada is the ongoing domination and displacement of Indigenous peoples without their consent,⁵⁰⁵ in an attempt to eradicate Indigenous cultural, familial, political, educational and spiritual systems and replace them with Christian European structures of power. The ultimate goal was assimilation and enfranchisement, as “Canada denied the right to participate fully in Canadian political, economic, and social life to those Indigenous people who refused to abandon their Indigenous identity.”⁵⁰⁶

In 1869, the *Act For The Gradual Enfranchisement Of Indians, The Better Management Of Indian Affairs, And To Extend The Provisions Of The Act 31st Victoria* set out the first provision for the election of Chief and Council on Indian reserves, who would also have very limited power to set bylaws.⁵⁰⁷ The enforced system of elected governments led to the destabilization of family and clan by making them no longer the foundation of economic and political activities.⁵⁰⁸ Indigenous women were further marginalized by a law that excluded them from participating in in band council elections, including voting or running for office: a provision that remained until 1951. The Act also “prohibited the sale of alcohol to Indigenous, on the paternalistic grounds of protecting Indigenous from themselves.”⁵⁰⁹

In 1876 the first *Indian Act* was passed bringing together aspects of the past legislation, enacting many recommendations from inquiries and commissions of the past, and moving forward an explicit agenda of assimilation of Indigenous people into Canadian society. “The transition from tribal nation in the tripartite imperial system to legal incompetent in the bilateral federal/provincial system was now complete. While protection remained a policy goal, it was no longer collective Indian tribal autonomy that was protected: it was the individual Indian recast as a dependent ward — in effect, the child of the state.”⁵¹⁰ As such, the Canadian government expressed its desire (and considered it the state’s responsibility) to facilitate the enfranchisement, education and civilization of the Indian people.⁵¹¹ It can be argued that the essence of the *Indian Act* has not changed since 1876: “*We are the only peoples in Canada who are consistently treated paternalistically and in a condescending manner by governments and the bureaucracies of government.*”⁵¹²

⁵⁰⁴ Wenger-Nabigon, “The Cree Medicine Wheel as an Organizing Paradigm of Theories of Human Development.”

⁵⁰⁵ Tully, “The Struggles of Indigenous Peoples for and of Freedom.”

⁵⁰⁶ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada’s Residential Schools*, 2.

⁵⁰⁷ Makarenko, “The Indian Act: Historical Overview.”

⁵⁰⁸ Tully, “The Struggles of Indigenous Peoples for and of Freedom.”

⁵⁰⁹ Makarenko, “The Indian Act: Historical Overview.”

⁵¹⁰ Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, vols. I, 255.

⁵¹¹ Ibid.

⁵¹² Ovide Mercredi (Mercredi & Turpel, 1993), the former President of the Assembly of First Nations, quoted in Makokis, “Teachings from Cree Elders,” 9.

The *Indian Act* was in no way a fair or equitable piece of legislation. When the first *Indian Act* was passed, it made no reference to the treaties that were in existence or were being currently negotiated⁵¹³ and there was no importance attached to the nation-to-nation nature of the treaties.⁵¹⁴ It is unlikely that the government had any intention of ethically upholding its obligations as stated in the Treaty documents through the implementation of the *Indian Act*: “moreover, there is evidence that, in many cases, hard-won oral promises made by the Treaty commissioners have never been recognized or acted upon by the Government.”⁵¹⁵

Almost every year after *The Act* passed, amendments were brought forward to respond to issues/barriers to assimilation of Indigenous peoples, undermining the right to self-government of First Nations. “The *Indian Act* gave the federal government the authority to veto decisions made by band councils and to depose chiefs and councillors. *The Act* placed restrictions on First Nations farmers’ ability to sell their crops and take out loans. Over the years, the government also assumed greater authority as to how reserve land could be disposed of: in some cases, entire reserves were relocated against the will of the residents. The *Indian Act* was a piece of colonial legislation by which, in the name of ‘protection,’ one group of people ruled and controlled another.”⁵¹⁶

Indigenous people on reserves were also under constant supervision of the federally appointed Indian Agent⁵¹⁷ for decades/generations. Many of the provisions or amendments to *The Act* from 1876 to 1951 were brought solely to increase the power of federal bureaucrats - specifically the Indian Agent who became a powerful figure and came to dominate all important aspects of band life.⁵¹⁸

“The *Indian Act* is a quagmire for Canada; it is the foremost legislative Act that affects First Nations across Canada. Its importance cannot be exaggerated nor can its influence be minimized. It is the principle instrument by which the federal Government and, indirectly, the provincial governments, have exercised control over the lives of First Nations people. It has been condemned as racist and colonial and held out in the international community as a huge blight on Canada’s human rights record.”⁵¹⁹

The criminal justice system has been a powerful colonizing tool used to diminish First Nations power to address transgressions of traditional (for the Cree – *wahkohtowin*) law, as well as a mechanism of cultural genocide. In 1881 Indian Agents were made Legal Justices of the Peace specifically for offences under the *Indian Act*, but later for some aspects of the criminal code as well. These Indian Agents were therefore allowed to “conduct trials whenever they thought necessary.”⁵²⁰ All forms of political protest and resistance were criminalized and the Indian Agent acted as the final word on justice issues⁵²¹ for decades. “Except as the accused, Indigenous people were completely excluded from the criminal justice

⁵¹³ Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, vols. I, 255.

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid.*, I, 256.

⁵¹⁵ Makokis, “Teachings from Cree Elders,” 18.

⁵¹⁶ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada’s Residential Schools*, 55.

⁵¹⁷ Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, I, 237.

⁵¹⁸ *Ibid.*, vols. I, 259.

⁵¹⁹ Makokis, “Teachings from Cree Elders,” 20, referencing Frideres 1997.

⁵²⁰ Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, vols. I, 266.

⁵²¹ *Ibid.*

system”⁵²²; until 1951, it was illegal for First Nations to hire a lawyer and “sue the Government of Canada without previous permission from the government.”⁵²³

Shift from Interdependence to Government Dependency

Collectively, Canada deemed Indigenous people to be child-like, wards of the state,⁵²⁴ interfering with the maintenance of traditional legal and political practices. The *Indian Act*, and its convoluted policies about Chief and Councils, combined with the paternalistic role of the Indian Agent distorted traditional forms of leadership within a healthy interconnected web of relationships. “*The use of legislation and institutions shifted our living in an interdependent state to that of dependency on a foreign colonial system.*”⁵²⁵ The system imposed by the *Indian Act* pitted “families and individuals against each other. This was as a ploy that wrecked havoc with reciprocity. It insinuated a need for the individual to do whatever it takes to survive, regardless of the consequences for the greater community.”⁵²⁶ “In many First Nations communities, governance models that were originally centred around collective well-being have been converted into hierarchical systems that privilege individualism.”⁵²⁷

Further, residential school policies “essentially declared Indigenous people to be unfit parents”⁵²⁸ due to their cultural and spiritual practices and genetics. Parents were denied their “responsibility to interpret the world for their children.”⁵²⁹ This had serious implications in the individual Indigenous person’s capacity to self-determine.

At the residential school, life was regimented, and focussed on strict control of every action, resembling prison more than an educational system.⁵³⁰ The government and the church exerted control over even the most intimate aspects of the children’s lives,⁵³¹ and even arranged marriages for the students as they left the school. Officials in the federal department of Indian Affairs “believed that because the department had spent money educating students, it had gained the right to determine whom they married. Government officials feared that if students married someone who had not also been educated at a residential school, they would revert to traditional ‘uncivilized’ ways.”⁵³² As a result, the forced

⁵²² Ibid.

⁵²³ Hansen and Antsanen, “Elders’ Teachings about Resilience and Its Implications for Education in Dene and Cree Communities,” 4.

⁵²⁴ Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, vols. 1, 255.

⁵²⁵ Leona Makokis quoted in Blue Quills First Nations College and Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research, *The Gathering: A Compendium of Stories and Presentations Exploring Positive, Strengths-Based Outcomes Related to Enhancing First Nations and Métis Child Wellbeing of Kids-in-Care in Alberta*, 5.

⁵²⁶ Brundige, “*Tanisi Isinisohtamahk Kitaskino: Cree Philosophy. Akwa Kayaskiacimowin*,” 183.

⁵²⁷ Blue Quills First Nations College, “Mobilizing Our Collective Moral Courage: A Framework for Supporting the Health of First Nations Children, Families, and Communities,” 17.

⁵²⁸ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada’s Residential Schools*, 4.

⁵²⁹ Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, vols. III, 16.

⁵³⁰ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada’s Residential Schools*.

⁵³¹ Ibid., 85.

⁵³² Ibid.

compliance⁵³³ experienced in residential school system “produced individuals who were not capable of leading an independent life within their own communities or in the dominant society.”⁵³⁴

This included the appropriation of traditional role of men within the Indigenous society - which included protector, provider and leader - through the intergenerational institutionalization of boys in residential schools,⁵³⁵ their sexual and physical victimization and their social isolation⁵³⁶ from traditional family and leadership structures. This has caused a widespread confusion about the place of maleness in First Nations⁵³⁷ and the value that men bring to their community. The consequences of these experiences, especially the reduced human and material resources in their lives, strongly affected the roles of males.⁵³⁸ The erosion of self-esteem that Indigenous men experience can be economic - the chronic unemployment they experience contributes to poverty, powerlessness and the abandonment of moral and social codes.⁵³⁹

Over time, some Indigenous people eventually accepted that by virtue of their being Indigenous, they lack the ability to solve their own problems. The development of a welfare dependency results, whereby Indigenous people do not feel capable or hopeful that they can affect change in their reality. The hegemony of the dominant paradigm is such that “it claims to be the only legitimate way to view the world”⁵⁴⁰ and therefore controls all facets of society. In the process, the capacity of the oppressed to make decisions for themselves was co-opted, instilling the belief that they can neither care nor provide for themselves and their families.

Hopelessness, Helplessness and Powerlessness

Throughout Canada’s colonial history, Indigeneity has resulted in marginalization.⁵⁴¹ The children in residential schools were powerless to protect themselves from malnourishment, corporeal punishment as well as physical, sexual, emotional and spiritual abuse. Even after the schools closed, and through to the current day lived experience of Indigenous youth, they report that “their experiences with child welfare, homelessness and incarceration are a testament of systems that have not only failed to protect them from harm, but often reinforced their subjugation.”⁵⁴² Their families and communities have been excluded for two hundred years through decisions that damage the web of connectedness and promote social disorder. The result is a deep distrust of and disconnectedness from service providers, such as child welfare workers who had the power to make decisions that would adversely affect them.⁵⁴³ “Indigenous children are treated as Terra Nullius, or land that is open for the taking. Their bodies

⁵³³ LaFrance and Bastien, “Here Be Dragons! Reconciling Indigenous and Western Knowledge to Improve Aboriginal Child Welfare.”

⁵³⁴ Milloy 1999 referenced in Kirmayer et al., “Suicide Among Aboriginal People in Canada,” 69–70.

⁵³⁵ Mussell, *Warrior-Caregivers*.

⁵³⁶ Ibid.

⁵³⁷ Ibid.

⁵³⁸ Ibid.

⁵³⁹ Ladson-Billings, “Racialized Discourses and Ethnic Epistemologies,” 258.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁴¹ Navia, “Uncovering Colonial Legacies.”

⁵⁴² Ibid., 69.

⁵⁴³ Navia, “Uncovering Colonial Legacies.”

become sites of conquest that the state claims as its property in order to retain control over Indigenous communities and limit their political power.”⁵⁴⁴

As a result, hopelessness, helplessness and powerlessness develops in many Indigenous individuals who have lived their entire life in a hegemonic society, where the child welfare and “the Paternalistic Father, the Minister of the Department of Indian Affairs, still continues to dictate the policies and guidelines without the involvement of First Nations people.”⁵⁴⁵ “Poverty, powerlessness and anomie have invaded the homes and hearts of Indigenous individuals. Poverty prevails because the economic vitality of nations has been undermined through the alienation of traditional lands and their wealth.

Powerlessness is rampant because the institutions of leadership and decision making have been displaced, leaving no defence against intrusion and exploitation. Anomie, the breakdown of ethical order, is a direct result of deliberate interventions that undermined the authority and cohesiveness of the family as well as other institutions pivotal to Indigenous life.”⁵⁴⁶

Historic Trauma: Powerlessness to Rage

Indigenous people who have been raised in environments marked by hopelessness, helplessness and powerlessness “experience extraordinary levels of frustration and anger... when cultural pathways are undermined, as they have been through Indigenous people’s experience of colonization, then the culture loses its control over individual behaviour and eventually violence may erupt,”⁵⁴⁷ Further, this violence may be perpetrated within the family unit, in part as a result of pervasive feelings of violation and loss of control, and in part as a product of learned abusive behaviour (victimization as a child). The cycles of intergenerational family violence that result from the outcomes of *Indian Act*, residential school policies and child welfare policies is associated with historic trauma-informed behaviours, including poor health outcomes, “internalized aggression and substance use.”⁵⁴⁸ Further, the lowest levels of educational success are in those communities with the highest percentages of descendants of residential school Survivors...Lower educational attainment for the children of Survivors has severely limited their employment and earning potential, just as it did for their parents. Indigenous people have lower median after-tax income, are more likely to experience unemployment, and are more likely to collect employment insurance and social assistance benefits.”⁵⁴⁹

This has become a vicious circle: “poverty and social stressors are major factors in child-welfare investigations involving Indigenous families. Indigenous parents were more likely to experience a host of serious risk factors, including domestic violence, alcohol abuse, lack of social supports, drug or solvent abuse, and a history of living in foster care or group homes. The direct connection between Indigenous poverty and high child-welfare apprehensions has been known for half a century. Yet, Indigenous

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid., 43.

⁵⁴⁵ Makokis, “Teachings from Cree Elders,” 38.

⁵⁴⁶ Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, vols. III, 68.

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid., vols. III, 66.

⁵⁴⁸ Nutton and Fast, “Historical Trauma, Substance Use, and Indigenous Peoples,” 842, referencing Brave Heart and Dbruyn 1998.

⁵⁴⁹ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada’s Residential Schools*, 146.

children are still taken away from their parents because their parents are poor.”⁵⁵⁰ The very outcomes of colonial policy become the justification to continue to remove children. In Alberta, Indigenous children are 73% of the child welfare caseload. However, there is no evidence to support the removal of children as an effective strategy towards the development of a positive identity nor does the removal of Indigenous children show any positive development in the capacity of the children to become self-determining, healthy Indigenous adults.

Healing

Toxic Trauma Narratives

Using the concept of historic trauma and trauma-informed behaviours is useful only in that it helps to frame current issues and behaviours in a historic context. However, “while acknowledging the immense social suffering Indigenous peoples have endured (and continue to endure) due to colonialism, the trauma narrative does not challenge the notion of Indigenous peoples as ‘simply victims, passively accepting their fate as colonized beings, internalizing pathology to the point where it becomes the norm in families and communities,’”⁵⁵¹ and may promote the stereotypes that Indigenous people are culturally deprived and incapable.⁵⁵² The historic trauma framework must therefore be used in the context of personal and collective responsibility, accountability, empowerment and self-determination.

Resistance is at the Core of Self-Determined Healing

There is widespread evidence of significant, ongoing Indigenous individual, family and nation resistance to colonization since the time of contact. This resistance includes actions and intergenerationally transmitted “stories of struggle and resistance against the societal power imbalances generally, and the enforcement of residential school legislation particularly.”⁵⁵³ At the very foundation of all healing strategies, is the reclamation of the right and capacity to self determine. *“Through her father’s actions of resistance and struggle, [The Elder] was exposed to the possibility of this mode of being, agency, and engagement with the world, an actor with the possibility of changing the course of social events (i.e., resistance). Despite the rapid cultural change and transformation happening around her, [the Elder] was raised primarily within traditional Indigenous cultural ways and teachings, which she later noted was one of the reasons why she was able to assume an elder identity and guide others in the community today.”*⁵⁵⁴

Cultural resistance, underground ceremonies, challenging laws such as the *Civilization Act* and *Enfranchisement Act*, hiding children from the residential school and child welfare workers, served to promote resilience and cultural continuity. Even at residential schools “subtle moments of resistance helped to foster some continuity with their previous lives and Indigenous identity. These moments of

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid., 139.

⁵⁵¹ Waldram 2004 cited in Friedland, “Navigating through Narratives of Despair,” 287.

⁵⁵² Friedland, “Navigating through Narratives of Despair.”

⁵⁵³ Hatala, Desjardins, and Bombay, “Reframing Narratives of Aboriginal Health Inequity Exploring Cree Elder Resilience and Well-Being in Contexts of Historical Trauma,” 6.

⁵⁵⁴ Wapos (Elder) quoted in in Hatala, Desjardins, and Bombay, “Reframing Narratives of Aboriginal Health Inequity Exploring Cree Elder Resilience and Well-Being in Contexts of Historical Trauma,” 7

resistance also helped to maintain, or perhaps restore, a sense of agency, of being able to ‘do,’ at least to some extent, thereby preventing a complete collapse of their sense of ability, agency, and initiative.”⁵⁵⁵ Resistance, no matter how small, was a way of retaining some form of control and attempting to register opposition⁵⁵⁶ to dehumanizing situations.

In the current context, resistance and rebellion are common practices of Indigenous people who would otherwise feel hopeless while navigating colonial systems or are in abusive situations. “Projecting aggression outward allowed them to separate themselves from an abusive environment and find solutions.”⁵⁵⁷ “Waves of recent resistance such as the Idle No More movement are evidence that Indigenous people have resisted reconciliation discourse that relegates harm done to the past and continue to fight for their sovereignty and rights by standing up against extractive industries and destructive state policies.”⁵⁵⁸

Much of the resistance and rebellion of Indigenous people has been against the imbalance of power held by government through polices and legislation. Rather than historic trauma being framed as specifically a “psychic wound,” it must be also conceptualized as dispossession and domination.⁵⁵⁹ Healing therefore “is not simply the recuperation, vitality, and preservation of ‘culture’ as such, but the role of individual and collective agency, and the opportunity to redress enduring inequities of power.”⁵⁶⁰

Organizations and communities continue the resistance and “are developing meaningful ways of implementing their own child welfare practices through the process of self-determination and governance, a basic human right that is enshrined in the Constitution Act.”⁵⁶¹ Services provided by Indigenous organizations and people, demonstrates collective efficacy, which “strengthens individual efficacy and makes individuals feel more capable of addressing their own needs.”⁵⁶² In addition, these organizations are actively decolonizing, reclaiming their interconnected worldview by working with Elders and mobilizing traditional knowledge in the creating programs and services that have the capacity to promote healing and self determination of their clients. Acts of self determination can have far reaching healing outcomes: “Communities that have made attempts to regain control of land and services have been found to have lower suicide rates, reduced reliance on social assistance, reduced unemployment, the emergence of diverse and viable economic enterprises on reservation lands, more effective management of social services and programs, including language and cultural components, and improved management of natural resources.”⁵⁶³

⁵⁵⁵ Hatala, Desjardins, and Bombay, “Reframing Narratives of Aboriginal Health Inequity Exploring Cree Elder Resilience and Well-Being in Contexts of Historical Trauma,” 7.

⁵⁵⁶ Hatala, Desjardins, and Bombay, “Reframing Narratives of Aboriginal Health Inequity Exploring Cree Elder Resilience and Well-Being in Contexts of Historical Trauma.”

⁵⁵⁷ Tousignant and Sioui, “Resilience and Aboriginal Communities in Crisis: Theory and Interventions,” 46.

⁵⁵⁸ Navia, “Uncovering Colonial Legacies,” 15.

⁵⁵⁹ Kirmayer, Gone, and Moses, “Rethinking Historical Trauma.”

⁵⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 305.

⁵⁶¹ Quinn, “Coming Full Circle - The Lifelong Journey of Becoming,” 2016, 28.

⁵⁶² Sasakamoose et al., “First Nation and Métis Youth Perspectives of Health An Indigenous Qualitative Inquiry,” 640.

⁵⁶³ Nutton and Fast, “Historical Trauma, Substance Use, and Indigenous Peoples,” 842.

Many programs offered by Indigenous organizations and communities are focussed on strengthening and preserving the Indigenous family; the family being the primary agent of change.⁵⁶⁴ “Healing the wounds of Indigenous families is absolutely essential to achieving the rest of the Indigenous agenda of self-reliance and self-determination. The family is the mediating structure, the bridge between the private world of the vulnerable child and the unfamiliar, too often hostile world of non-Indigenous society.”⁵⁶⁵

Healing Programs

Colonization affects every Indigenous person differently; that is to say that the same experience will illicit different responses in individuals. “No two people would internalize and experience public cultural narratives—of trauma or resilience—in the same way... Because individuals differ in the ways in which they experience, interpret, process, and remember events, it is important to acknowledge that community-wide traumatic events do not necessarily result in individualized distress.”⁵⁶⁶ In the same way, healing from historic trauma is a very personal and “highly individualized: while placed in historic context, the individual alone is responsible for repairing his or her life.”⁵⁶⁷ “Individuals cannot be forced to ‘heal.’ They must make the decision to undertake the healing journey themselves, take responsibility for their actions, and seek to repair the social relationships that have been damaged by their self-centered and destructive behaviors.”⁵⁶⁸

Historic trauma is an explanatory framework whereby “history is not denied; rather, history helps individuals understand their circumstances, how they came to be damaged, and why their healing journey must involve a reconnection with family and culture.”⁵⁶⁹ It is an effective healing framework only when individuals take responsibility for their actions, make amends (whenever possible) and develop the capacity to make good decisions⁵⁷⁰ for themselves. “Rebuilding one’s moral integrity requires accepting one’s own agency and judgment in both past and present circumstances. This need is all the more pressing in the context of colonization, where Indigenous people’s moral agency, intellectual capacity, and legal reasoning have been systemically devalued or dismissed by the dominant settler society for so long.”⁵⁷¹ As such, healing programs must create an environment where individuals can situate their behaviour within the context of colonial and family history, understand (be responsible for) their own historic trauma informed behaviours, as well as create the desire to make amends and move forward on their own long-term healing journey.

⁵⁶⁴ National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, “Family Is the Focus,” 13.

⁵⁶⁵ Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, vols. III, 20.

⁵⁶⁶ Hatala, Desjardins, and Bombay, “Reframing Narratives of Aboriginal Health Inequity Exploring Cree Elder Resilience and Well-Being in Contexts of Historical Trauma,” 3.

⁵⁶⁷ Waldram, “Healing History?,” 380.

⁵⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 377.

⁵⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷⁰ Isaak et al., “Surviving, Healing and Moving Forward,” December 1, 2015.

⁵⁷¹ Friedland, “Navigating through Narratives of Despair,” 288.

Healing Pedagogy

Reclaiming language and the participation in traditional ceremonies (with stories, song and ritual) are the both educational tools to instruct the individual on how to live the good life (*pimatisiwin*), as well as being “widely recognized as a form of anti- or counter-colonial repudiation of long histories of Euro-centric domination that instead re-affirms the value and vitality of Native life.”⁵⁷² For example, participating in traditional ceremonies to move through grief and loss is a decolonizing strategy; ceremonies to release the spirits of children who died at residential schools are ways of reclaiming traditional ceremonies, healing survivors and caring for ancestors who were harmed by colonial policies. The spirits are viewed as “*troubled spirits. They haven’t found their way to their final resting place. So we try and pray ... that they will leave, leave this world and go home to the Creator to take the place that the Creator has prepared for them. Now that’s [the] long and short of what we do in our ceremonies, our spirituality... So it really does come down to a belief system as to how we honour the ones that are coming to earth and then how they’re leaving. So we do have those obligations, those responsibilities to honour the people who leave this physical world, to help them go off in a good way.*”⁵⁷³

⁵⁷² Gone, “Redressing First Nations Historical Trauma,” 696.

⁵⁷³ Focus group participant quoted in Park, “Remembering the Children,” 436.

Recommended Training Outline

Background

The Government of Alberta, in their 2008 report entitled *Alberta Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (AIS- 2008)* found that “the rate of substantiated investigations was more than five times higher than in Indigenous child investigations than for non-Indigenous children.”⁵⁷⁴ The overrepresentation of Indigenous children that come into contact with Child and Family Services (CFS) highlights the importance of further investigation into the individual experiences of First Nation and Metis peoples and communities with trauma, and grief and loss and how this affects a child’s development. Previous research has identified specific types of trauma— for example, historical trauma, intergenerational trauma, and race-based trauma—that Indigenous people have and continue to experience due to the impact of multi-generational colonial practices including residential schools and the 60’s scoop⁵⁷⁵. Given that unresolved grief, like trauma, can span across generations, it is vital to the well-being and development of Indigenous children that significant research and attention be focused on this issue.

Infants, children and youth who come to the attention of CFS and Delegated First Nation Agencies are often children whose development has been comprised as a result of **adverse childhood experiences**. Every responsive and supportive interaction between a caregiver, infant, child or youth has the possibility to alter their developmental trajectory by helping them achieve safety and stability to improve their health and well-being⁵⁷⁶.

In June 2015, CFS approved provincial dissemination of the Foundations of Caregiver Support (FCS) Framework document¹. The document outlines principles, guidelines and practices that enable caregivers to support the safety and well-being of infants, children, and youth from early intervention through temporary care to a stable and secure home. By developing caregivers’ capacity to respond and appropriately interpret children’s behaviors, FCS builds upon CFS’ Child Intervention Practice Framework, Signs of Safety, and Prevention and Early Intervention Framework.

⁵⁷⁴ http://cwrp.ca/sites/default/files/publications/en/AB_AIS-2008_MacLaurin_etal_2013.pdf

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http://www.google.ca/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0ahUKEwjt5aSKuMjKAhUDs4MKHaroDKUQFggiMAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fjournals.sfu.ca%2Ffpcfr%2Findex.php%2FFPCFR%2Farticle%2Fdownload%2F181%2F150&usg=AFQjCNFOpmegrAYvTsS9lggO_Qs5_S7vs_Q

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<https://intranet.humanservices.alberta.ca/home/homepages/CFS/CFSP/Documents/FCS%20Foundational%20Document.pdf>

Proposed Framework for a Training Module

The purpose of the *Trauma, Child Development, Healing and Resilience* project is to both contribute to the FCS document, as well as inform the development of a care-giver training module. As such, we recommend the training module be organized to follow the categories and sub-categories offered in this research. They include:

- Pre-Colonization Societies: Using the Spiral of Relationships model⁵⁷⁷ describe the Interconnected worldview, and how it gives rise to the four dimensions of the healthy society: the web of relationships, legal tradition, development of healthy identity and belonging, and self-determination.
- Historic Trauma: use the four domains to describe how colonization has eroded the Indigenous individual, family and community to fully realize each of these domains.
 - From interconnectedness to profound isolation;
 - From strict legal traditions to lawlessness;
 - From self-respect and belonging to colonized identity; and
 - From self-determination to powerlessness and despair.
- Healing: use the *Indigenous Model of Building Family and Community Resilience*⁵⁷⁸ to address each of the four domains. Describe how family services and healing programs can translate the model into effective family services.
- Care-Giver Responsibility: make the connection between the work/contribution of each caregiver to the important work of healing and reconciliation. Provide opportunities for reflection, and create the motivation/determination of each care-giver to employ this model in their day-to-day practice.

⁵⁷⁷ LaBoucane-Benson, 2009

⁵⁷⁸ *ibid*

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Annotated Bibliography

Reference	Group Studied	Summary	Contributions
<p>Archibald, L. (2006). <i>Decolonization and healing: Indigenous experiences in the United States, New Zealand, Australia and Greenland.</i> Ottawa: The Indigenous Healing Foundation.</p>	<p>Secondary research of processes of colonization and healing in four countries.</p>	<p>This report explores colonization, decolonization and healing among Indigenous people in four nation-states: United States, Australia, New Zealand, and Greenland. The author finds that the nations are similar to Canada in the lower socioeconomic and health status of Indigenous people compared to non-Indigenous citizens. The author provides detailed information on historic trauma, as well as an overview of various scholarly approaches to healing from historic trauma. She compares Laenui's Process of Decolonization, Herman's Three Phases of Recovery from PTSD and her own framework for healing from historic trauma, which includes focusing on personal and collective journeys, personal and cultural safety, remembering and mourning, and rebuilding cultural traditions while visioning the future.</p>	<p><i>Interconnected Worldview</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being colonized involves loss of culture, language, resources, autonomy, which directly impacts health, social and economic status. <p><i>In all four categories</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comparison of healing processes: (1) Laenui's Process of Decolonization (sociopolitical); (2) Judith Herman's Three Phases of Recovery from PTSD (personal); (3) Healing from Historic Trauma (personal and collective). <p><i>Outlier</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not every Indigenous person is overwhelmed by historic trauma; individuals and communities have different histories and experiences. • Need to integrate sociopolitical work of decolonization with personal healing journeys.
<p>Bearskin, R. L. B., Cameron, B. L., Weber-Pillwax, C., Stout, M. K. D., Voyageur, E., Reid, A., Bill, L., & Martial, R. (2016). <i>Mâdawoh kamâtowin, "coming together to help each other in wellness": Honouring indigenous nursing knowledge.</i> <i>International Journal of Indigenous Health</i>, 11(1), 18–33.</p>	<p>Four Indigenous nurse scholars</p>	<p>The article uses Indigenous research methodologies to explore how Indigenous knowledge systems and identity shape the practices of 4 Indigenous nurse scholars, focusing on Cree ways of knowing. The perspectives of the Indigenous nurses point to the ways that Cree upbringing and Cree knowledge has shaped their practice and their worldviews. The article also discusses Cree ways of knowing.</p>	<p><i>Interconnected Worldview</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Mâdawoh kamâtowin</i>: "to help each other in a collective sense." • The roots of upbringing of participants run deeply into family and therefore creation of the world. Traditional knowledge comes from roots of ancestries. • Memory of ancestors in blood/genetic make-up. <p><i>Rules for Good Relationships</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indigenous people hold the experiential understandings of their knowledge systems and their ontological and epistemological roots, which guide how they interact with

			<p>and within the world.</p> <p>Outlier</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health care to Indigenous people is often racialized despite knowledge of colonization.
<p>Blue Quills First Nations College. (2013). <i>Mobilizing our collective moral courage: a framework for supporting the health of First Nations children, families, and communities</i>. Blue Quills First Nations College. Retrieved from http://www.bluequills.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/ECD-Framework-Documents-April-17-2013.pdf</p>	<p>Framework that draws from secondary research</p>	<p>This document draws from Indigenous knowledge and research from a variety of disciplines to create a multi-strategic framework for supporting the health of children, families and communities. The framework is intended to provide a foundation to guide collaborative actions to work across cultures, disciplines, and sectors. The document includes historical context; a set of principles to reach shared goals; discussion on addressing challenges; and selected actions that can be undertaken by various stakeholders.</p>	<p>Interconnected Worldview</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The essential 'life force', which encompasses everything: "the child's birth in the home; the raising and socialization of children; the teaching of relationships, ceremonies, traditions, and rites of passage; the world of work; and the total immersion in the rhythms of the seasons" (Leona Makokis, quoted in Blue Quills, 2013, p.5). <p>Rules for Good Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through ceremony and oral knowledge transmission, people were taught to conduct their lives in accordance with natural laws. • Each person was responsible for living the seven teachings of love, respect, courage, honesty, humility, wisdom and truth. • Colonization instituted individualism in place of the collective world view of First Nations, and how child welfare became the new form of assimilation after the residential schools. <p>Self-Determination</p> <p>Self-determination is one of the most important factors for health of Indigenous peoples.</p>
<p>Blue Quills First Nations College, & Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research. (2010). <i>The gathering: A compendium of stories and presentations exploring positive, strengths-based outcomes related to enhancing First Nations and Métis child wellbeing of kids-in-care in Alberta</i>. Edmonton, AB: Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research.</p>	<p>Children and adults involved in First Nations and Métis child protection.</p>	<p>The Alberta Centre for Child Family and Community Research (The Centre) contracted with Blue Quills First Nations College (BQFNC) and the graduate-level University of Calgary Social Work students at BGFNC to collect stories of success from First Nations and Métis children currently in care, First Nations and Métis children who had transitioned out of care, First Nations and Métis Child Welfare Case Workers and First Nations and Métis community people involved with providing support and services to children in care. The</p>	<p>Interconnected Worldview</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concept of 'life force' encompasses birth, raising and socializing children, teaching relationships, ceremonies, traditions, rites of passage. Also, emphasizes circular pattern of inter-related parts. • Human life cycle spans 7 stages: happy life, fast life, wandering life, truth, decision time, planting stage, and wisdom associated with Elders. • Collective perspective more valued than individual perspective. <p>Rules for Good Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language is the 'moral compass' for Cree people, conveying sense of spiritual relationship to all, and a sense of

		<p>research project focuses on identifying 'successes' of Indigenous children in care or exiting care, and identifies ways to improve the experience of success. Particularly relevant to child development is the opening statement by Leona Makokis, which describes Cree language and traditional ceremony/teachings in supporting the development of healthy children.</p>	<p>responsibility (loss of language is significant).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children are gifts and adults responsible to nurture them. • Circle approach restores cultural practice of respectful relationships. <p>Positive Identity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reinstating child or adult as community member is repatriation. <p>Self-Determination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation in ceremony helps find life purpose.
<p>Brundige, L. F. (2004). <i>Tanisi isinisohtamahk kitaskino: Cree philosophy. Akwa kayaskiacimowin</i> (PhD Dissertation). University of Oregon.</p>	<p>Swampy Cree philosophy that draws from secondary literature and traditional knowledge</p>	<p>This dissertation focuses on how worldview (ontology, epistemology) and social codes, morals and norms are developed in children living within Cree society. Change, reciprocity, life cycles and language are the keys to understanding Creeness. Brundige focuses on the Cree language and on stories to describe not only the Cree worldview, but to describe teachings and how pre-contact Cree society was organized. She argues that Creeness is both an identity and a way of understanding identities. She concludes with the concept of 'coauthoring' as a way for Cree people to recover philosophical traditions and bridge Western philosophy, or at least open a dialogue.</p>	<p>Interconnected Worldview</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cree language shapes worldview. • Learning one's place in the world is remaining connected to story of land and changes. • Detailed descriptions of stories, ceremonies, and symbols in pre-colonial Cree society, and in contemporary contexts. • Juxtaposition of Cree philosophy to Western philosophy that separated Cree people from their ways of understanding the world and their identity. <p>Rules for Good Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describes six types of Cree stories and the kinds of teachings and epistemology embedded in them. • Cree language does not recognize gender; teaches equality between men and women. • Kinship is social obligation and mutual respect. <p>Positive Identity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cree identity changes and moves through time. <p>Self-Determination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reclaiming Indigenous narrative is reclaiming selves and communities. • Coauthoring is integrating traditional knowledge in contemporary society: humanizing.
<p>Canada. (1996). <i>The Royal Commission on Indigenous Peoples volume 3: Gathering strength</i>. Ottawa.</p>	<p>Evidence gathered from interviews, stories,</p>	<p>Volume 3 of the RCAP report covers social policy, health and healing, education, housing, and arts, but most relevant to this review is the section on</p>	<p>Interconnected Worldview</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children hold a special place in Indigenous cultures. According to tradition, they are gifts from the spirit world and must be treated very gently lest they become

	<p>secondary research of many Indigenous communities across Canada</p>	<p>the family. The report details traditional role and structure of families among Canada's Indigenous people, pointing out that the family is the social institution because family includes extended family and kin. The report details the destruction that the residential school system wreaked on families and children for generations. However, as families are seen as the centre of colonization processes, the report also argues that families are at the centre for healing and resilience. "Families," the commission found, "consistently occupied the central position between individual and community." (p. 9)</p>	<p>disillusioned with this world and return to a more congenial place.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children are at the centre of families, which are in turn the centre of Indigenous communities and nations. • 'Family' is the social institution of Indigenous communities, and understood more broadly than the Western nuclear family because family includes extended family and kin. <p>Rules for Good Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families responsible for nurturing children, even into adulthood. • Family is at the centre of colonization, in which the Canadian government set to assimilate Indigenous children through the eradication of their language, culture and spirituality by removing them from the extended family unit. • Domestic violence is an absence of values/rules due to colonization. <p>Positive Identity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children experience identity confusion and impairment of learning when reared by parents who are uncomfortable with their Indigenous identity, are unable to build positive relationships and have not learned the rules and responsibilities (due to residential schools/child welfare). <p>Self-Determination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family violence is about loss of self-determination (a result of hopelessness, helplessness and powerlessness).
<p>Cardinal, H., & Hildebrandt, W. (2000). <i>Treaty Elders of Saskatchewan: Our dream is that our peoples will one day be clearly recognized as nations.</i> Calgary, AB: University of Calgary Press.</p>	<p>Research with Saskatchewan Elders (in Treaty 6 territory).</p>	<p>This book examines the treaty relationship in Saskatchewan through an exploration of worldview and concepts as they would have been applied by First Nations Treaty signatories. Through their interviews, the authors describe how principles of respect, kindness, freedom, peace and sharing form the Indigenous concepts of kinship and governance. While the book does not focus centrally on childhood or child development, it presents</p>	<p>Interconnected Worldview</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The land, waters and all life-giving forces in North America were, and are, an integral part of a sacred relationship with the creator. • Gifts from the creator are both physical (everything we need to survive was given to us by the creator) and metaphysical (the rules regarding how we are to interact with all of these life-giving gifts). <p>Rules for Good Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of the circle, which symbolizes oneness, and a statement of allegiance; rooted in <i>wahkohtowin</i>. • Overview of the Cree doctrine of <i>wahkohtowin</i> (the laws

		<p>important worldviews that inform the development of healthy individuals and communities in Saskatchewan nations. Through the words of Elders, the authors argue that the principles and laws governing familial relationships (<i>witisanihitowin</i>) are a part of the larger set of rules that form the doctrine of good relationships (<i>wahkohtowin</i>).</p>	<p>governing all relations) and <i>miyo-wicehtowin</i> (the laws governing good relations).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching children was responsibility of grandparents and extended families. • Rules and guiding values exist for every specific relationship within the complex web of relationships. <p>Self-Determination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education is a form of self-determination.
<p>Carriere, J., & Richardson, C. (2009). From longing to belonging: Attachment theory, connectedness, and Indigenous children in Canada. In S. McKay, D. Fuchs, & I. Brown (Eds.), <i>Passion for action in child and family services: Voices from the prairies</i> (pp. 49–68). Regina, SK: Canadian Plains Research Center.</p>	<p>Examination of existing research.</p>	<p>The authors argue that the pervasive use of attachment theory in child welfare is problematic in making decisions affecting Indigenous families in Canada. They suggest that ‘connectedness’ is a better term than ‘attachment’, predicated on the idea of kinship as understood from an Indigenous rather than anthropological perspective. Connectedness and building kinship is central to providing balance to the lives of Indigenous children in care. The authors then make suggestions to child welfare workers for engaging in culturally sensitive ways to nurture indigenous children's lives and cultures. They focus on the idea of cultivating dignity in parents and in children as they age. The authors suggest ways that parents can be supported through each stage of the child's life, focusing on both mothers and fathers.</p>	<p>Interconnected Worldview</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kinship is described within a complex web of relationships that includes extended family, friends and the natural world. • Contemporary importance of ‘connectedness’ in adoption, and fostering the feeling of belonging in children. <p>Rules for Good Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Needs of children at different stages of development are explored. • Describes how parents foster dignity in their children by creating safe spaces with respectful rules. • Discusses how parents can be supported (for example: stable employment, adequate time away from work for infant care) <p>Positive Identity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kinship connections for indigenous children provide with cultural and ancestral knowledge. <p>Outlier</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attachment theory inappropriate for Indigenous children in care • Lack of dignity translates into pathologizing by professionals
<p>Castellano, M. (2002). Indigenous family trends: Extended families, nuclear families, families of the heart. Vanier Institute of the Family. Retrieved from http://www.urbancentre.utoronto</p>	<p>Secondary research on contemporary Indigenous families in Canada</p>	<p>This report undertakes describing traditional and contemporary Indigenous families in Canada. Castellano argues that the family was the "principal institution mediating participation of individuals in social,</p>	<p>Interconnected Worldview</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stories are understood as manifestations of larger reality; they are spiritual in nature and grounded in the belief that all living beings are related. • Concept of balance between whole and component parts, often represented in medicine wheel.

<p>.ca/pdfs/elibrary/VIFIndigenous.pdf</p>		<p>economic and political life." She also describes the importance of the circle, including the medicine wheel, which encapsulates the whole and the component parts. Castellano suggests that the contemporary movement toward traditional knowledges and healing as a way of building ethical relationships that can give structure to Indigenous communities.</p>	<p>Rules for Good Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extended family distributed responsibilities of care, and clan systems extended these responsibilities even further. • Indigenous people adhere to ethical rules of behaviour to share their behaviour—reclaiming traditions is restoring ethical relationships and giving structure to Indigenous communities. <p>Outlier</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In contemporary Indigenous communities, social services have taken on role of extended family (but operate in a different worldview).
<p>Dorion, L. (2003). Métis family life. Gabriel Dumont Institute. Retrieved from http://www.metismuseum.ca/resource.php/01262</p>	<p>Secondary research on Métis life in Canada</p>	<p>This article provides an overview of the historic and contemporary underpinnings of Métis family structures. Dorion describes relationships among families; in particular she focusses on parenting approaches and the expectations of children in traditional Métis communities.</p>	<p>Interconnected Worldview</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children were viewed as gifts from the Creator to be cherished, and parents tended to be permissive, allowing children to eat and sleep as they wanted. • Family units also tended to be larger, with extended families living under one roof. <p>Rules for Good Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discipline tended to focus on talking rather than yelling or punishment. • The church pressured families to consecrate relationship through marriage in church; saw customary marriages as immoral. <p>Self-Determination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children were expected to cooperate yet also be self-reliant. • Métis children were expected to learn from experience and come to their own conclusions.
<p>Dorion, L. (2010). <i>Opikinawasowin: The life long process of growing Cree and Métis children.</i> Athabasca University, Athabasca, AB.</p>	<p>Narrative and oral history with seven Saskatchewan Cree and Métis Elders</p>	<p>This research project explores the teachings of seven Cree and Metis Elders about traditional child rearing, <i>Opikinawasowin</i>. The study documents thirteen traditional parenting teachings grounded in traditional knowledge, ceremony and story. Elders emphasized the need to restore male and female balance in families and communities, as well as the need to restore the role of</p>	<p>Interconnected Worldview</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A description of the 13 teachings in <i>Opikinawasowin</i> to grow children, from birth to adulthood. • Cree culture has specific ceremonies to celebrate each step of child’s development such as first steps and first laugh. <p>Rules for Good Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to restore balance between genders to instil in children and grow a more balanced society • Storytelling is central mode of transferring traditional knowledge.

		<p>grandmothers in overseeing and guiding childrearing. Other insights included the need to support parents in their personal healing journey using traditional cultural practices such as ceremonies and by giving them extended family and community supports so they can consciously work on themselves and their parenting practices. Additionally, it is believed individuals, parents, families, communities, and nations need to develop a collective vision for parenting which includes returning children to the heart center of Cree and Métis societies. The study identifies 54 recommendations for further discussion regarding the revival of traditional parenting teachings and practices in contemporary Cree and Métis families and communities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People who were raised within families, who still practiced traditional childrearing ways, were able to gain cultural strength and resilience which served to guide them as community role models during their Eldership years. • Cree and Metis families gain a significant amount of resilience from learning and living traditional cultural teachings. <p>Self-Determination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to restore the powers of the grandmothers to oversee and monitor the implementation of childrearing. • Ideas for reclaiming traditional parenting practices are framed as decolonization rather than healing or resilience.
<p>Friedland, H. (2016). Navigating through narratives of despair: Making space for the Cree reasonable person in the Canadian justice system part ii: forum - recent developments in Indigenous law. <i>University of New Brunswick Law Journal</i>, 67, 269–312.</p>	<p>Secondary research/ philosophical discussion on Cree legal framework.</p>	<p>Friedland reviews current media, legal and political narratives, as well as the spaces within Canadian justice system with potential for Indigenous laws to be rigorously and transparently applied. She demonstrates that Cree nations were not lawless prior to colonization but in fact had laws and rules conveyed through stories. She then chronicles the ways in which colonization has devastated Cree communities, destroying stories, traditions, and threatening lives. She concludes arguing for the contemporary need of making space for the reasonable Cree person in the justice system of Canada. Noteworthy is Friedland's caution that</p>	<p>Interconnected Worldview</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colonization has destroyed stories, traditions, lives. <p>Rules for Good Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cree nations were not lawless prior to colonization but in fact had laws and rules. Story-telling and narratives gave the rules meaning, as 'laws' were social rules for people (children) to internalize and live. • Current cognitive research has found that stories are ways that the mind organizes information. <p>Positive Identity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identity means thinking like a Cree person. • Pervasiveness of negative myths and racist stereotypes of Indigenous people continue in 2016. <p>Self-determination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrative of historical trauma erroneously suggests lack of agency, both historically and in current context.

		the narrative of historical trauma suggests an absence of agency (historical and contemporaneously). She suggests that responsibility and accountability are important components in contemporary healing of historic grief and loss.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsibility and accountability important in healing.
Gone, J. P. (2013). Redressing First Nations historical trauma: Theorizing mechanisms for indigenous culture as mental health treatment. <i>Transcultural Psychiatry</i> , 50(5), 683–706.	Secondary research; reflections on community treatment program on Manitoba FN reserve. Includes case study of a residential school survivor in the treatment program.	Gone takes up the concept of historical trauma, to illustrate the significance of participation in traditional cultural practices for therapeutic recovery from historical trauma. In contrast to PTSD, Gone sees historical trauma as a more relevant concept that captures the complex, collective, cumulative, and intergenerational impacts of Euro-American and Euro-Canadian colonization on First Nations peoples. The article provides arguments on the importance of historical trauma in emphasizing the interconnected nature of trauma, and that healing from historic trauma is about shifting collective identity.	<p>Interconnected Worldview</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Juxtaposes historical trauma to PTSD: historical trauma is more relevant because of focus on collective complex impacts • Necessary healing elements: values and worldviews; personal and cultural safety; capacity to heal. <p>Positive Identity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spiritual transformations and accompanying shifts in collective identity, purpose, and meaning-making underlie transformation in healing. <p>Self-determination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional practices as part of healing are anti-colonial because they reaffirm Indigenous life over Eurocentric.
Graham, C., & Davoren, T. (2015). <i>Sharing their stories: Narratives of young Metis parents and Elders about parenting.</i> Prince George, BC: National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health. Retrieved from http://www.nccah-ccnsa.ca/Publications/Lists/Publications/Attachments/149/2015-08-20-RPT-MetisSharingStories-DavorenGraham-EN-Web.pdf	Discussions with 18 Métis parents, "aspiring parents," and grandparents in British Columbia.	Graham and Davoren describe Métis narratives on parenting in the context of historical and contemporary experiences. They describe four overarching themes: (1) culture and identity; (2) parenting and family; (3) health and well-being; (4) education and learning. In the traditional Métis world view, children and families were the centre of their communities. Through colonization history, the Métis became the 'forgotten people', reduced to irrelevance in Canadian society, and denied membership in Euro-centric	<p>Interconnected Worldview</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For the Métis people, children and families were the centre of their communities. • Children were raised by parents, extended family, and community. <p>Rules for Good Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children were thought to each have unique talents or gifts; adults had the responsibility to help children explore and find their own gift. • Children needed to learn listening, caring, sharing, respect, and self-respect. • Elders and traditional knowledge holders were seen as being important to educating Métis children, both inside and outside of formal school settings. Concerns were raised,

		<p>society as well as denied status under the Indian Act. There has been a loss of parenting skills, and children have suffered a loss of self-esteem and inability to express feelings.</p>	<p>however, about the lack of legitimacy given to Elders because many lacked a formal education.</p> <p>Positive Identity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raising children in Métis culture is raising them with pride in their identity. • Residential schools caused loss of self-esteem and loss of respect for parents. • Métis were reduced to a position of irrelevance within the fabric of Canadian society. They were denied full membership in mainstream society because they were Indigenous, and were also denied status as Indians under the Indian Act. • Colonization has resulted in traditional teachings related to the land were not being passed from one generation to the next as it had been in the past. This had a devastating impact on the identity of many Métis as their culture is intrinsically connected to the land.
<p>Hansen, J., & Hansen, R. (2016). Elders’ teachings about resilience and its implications for education in Dene and Cree communities. <i>International Indigenous Policy Journal</i>, 7(1), 1–17.</p>	<p>Interviews with Cree and Dene Elders in northern Manitoba</p>	<p>The purpose of this study is to address Eurocentrism in education and exploring the concept of resilience in Indigenous education. Through their interviews with Elders, the researchers identify cultural models, values, and possibilities of Indigenous resilience in Dene and Cree nations. The authors argue that a traditional, culturally appropriate model of education is important to Indigenous resilience development. They describe the central importance of spirituality in education, including connection to the land, and respect for self and others. Elders provide stories of traditional teaching and learning, particularly learning by doing and by observing.</p>	<p>Interconnected Worldview</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spiritual teachings of relationships to land is reflected in Dene language. • Self-respect is connected to respect for others, including animals and land • Indigenous education should include feelings and spiritual understandings. <p>Rules for Good Relations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Values were passed on through 'gentle teaching'. <p>Positive Identity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stereotypes (due to colonization) cause internalization of negative feelings. <p>Self-Determination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children expected to figure out answers for themselves, learn autonomy. <p>Outlier</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • any Indigenous person who succeeds in Eurocentric education demonstrates resilience.
<p>Hatala, A. R., Desjardins, M., & Bombay, A. (2016). Reframing</p>	<p>Narrative interviews</p>	<p>The authors argue that processes of resilience must be included in health</p>	<p>Rules for Good Relations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stories used to transmit culture, knowledge, and rules.

<p>narratives of Indigenous health inequity exploring Cree Elder resilience and well-being in contexts of historical trauma. <i>Qualitative Health Research, 26(14), 1911–1927.</i></p>	<p>with four Cree Elders in Saskatchewan.</p>	<p>research, rather than just focusing on historical and contemporary trauma. They argue for health research to 'reframe' Indigenous health inequities in ways that "affirm the idiosyncratic means by which both resilience and historical processes of marginalization, discrimination, and suffering can co-occur in the lives of Indigenous peoples" (p. 2). The article offers important contribution to childhood development in describing processes of resilience and healing through maintaining traditions, storytelling, and fostering a sense of agency.</p>	<p>Positive Identity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resistance to dominant structures part of a healthy identity. • Identifying as Elder and Ceremonialists maintains cultural continuity, mitigating the negative effects of forced Christianity. <p>Self-Determination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individuals have a choice of response to trauma. • Resistance to aspects of colonization (such as ideas of inferior Indigenous identity; and superiority of Christianist) develops a sense of agency.
<p>Isaak, C. A., Stewart, D. E., Mota, N. P., Munro, G., Katz, L. Y., & Sareen, J. (2015). Surviving, healing and moving forward: Journeys towards resilience among Canadian Cree adults. <i>International Journal of Social Psychiatry, 61(8), 788–795.</i></p>	<p>Interviews with ten Cree adults.</p>	<p>The researchers investigated "meanings and mechanisms of resilience following maltreatment." They found that participants described resilience as a journey of survival or of overcoming. They also found that there were multiple pathways to healing that included traditional teachings. Many participants also spoke of importance of family and other social supports. They often drew on the teachings they had as young children.</p>	<p>Interconnected Worldview</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connecting/reconnecting to traditional teachings, culture, spirituality was central to healing. • Family and social supports were important on healing journey. <p>Rules for Good Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Childhood teachings carried participants through hard times. • First Nations women have traditionally been the foundation of family and community, and the ones who transmitted cultural beliefs and customs to children. <p>Positive Identity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reclaiming positive Cree identity is important in the healing process. <p>Self-Determination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forgiveness is an act of self-determination in healing.
<p>Kirmayer, L., Brass, G., Holton, T., Paul, K., Simpson, C., & Tait, C. (2007). Suicide among Indigenous people in Canada. Ottawa: The Indigenous Healing Foundation.</p>	<p>Secondary research on Indigenous youth in Canada.</p>	<p>This article focuses on the high rates of suicide among Indigenous people, youth in particular, providing social, cultural and historical factors that contribute to the problem. They note that while much of the literature on suicide in the general population is relevant to the</p>	<p>Interconnected Worldview</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governmental policies of forced assimilation have resulted in profound disruption in the transmission of culture and the ability of individuals to form healthy relationships. • The impact of the residential school system and other systematic practices of cultural suppression and forced assimilation can be seen at the levels of individual

		<p>experience of Indigenous people, there are specific cultural, historical, and political considerations that contribute to the high prevalence, and that require the rethinking of conventional models and assumptions. This report emphasizes what is distinctive about Indigenous people in Canada in order to identify important gaps in knowledge, and to guide the development and adaptation of culturally appropriate strategies of prevention. In this way, young people will move with their parents, elders, and communities from a position of marginalization, powerlessness, and pessimism to one of agency, creativity, self-confidence, and hope.</p>	<p>experience, family systems, communities, and whole nations or peoples.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding of the role of larger social factors is therefore crucial to identifying the most important contributors to suicide for any specific Indigenous population, community, or individual. <p>Rules for Good Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colonization inhibited the creation of positive moral and social codes in children. • Colonization interfered with traditional methods of teaching rules and responsibilities; damaged social organization within First Nation families and communities. <p>Positive Identity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Factors that have interfered with the development of a positive Indigenous identity include: acculturation stress and marginalization; governmental policies of assimilation; and cultural suppression. • Children were taught (and adopted) the idea of the inferior Indigenous identity. Combined with the loss of meaningful roles and responsibilities, identity confusion was created and transmitted intergenerationally. <p>Self-determination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colonization the Indigenous individuals and families unable to lead an independent life within their own community nor in mainstream society. • Rather than focus on mental health/therapeutic, should address social problems by supporting community development and political empowerment.
<p>Kirmayer, L. J., Gone, J. P., & Moses, J. (2014). Rethinking historical trauma. <i>Transcultural Psychiatry</i>, 51(3), 299–319</p>	<p>Secondary research on Canadian Indigenous communities.</p>	<p>The notions of historical trauma, loss, and grief have drawn attention to the enduring effects of colonization, marginalization, and cultural oppression in the lives of Indigenous peoples and communities. The recognition that the violence and suffering experienced by one generation can have effects on subsequent generations provides an</p>	<p>Interconnected Worldview</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survivors of residential/boarding schools, experience the effects of grief and loss of important connections to family, as well as aspects of identity, including language and culture. • For Indigenous families and communities, the losses included their children and a sense of control over their own lives and futures. • Detailed descriptions of intergenerational trauma, grief

		<p>important insight into the origins of mental health problems. However, the kinds of adversity faced by each generation differ, and the construct of trauma does not capture many of the important elements that are rooted in structural problems, including poverty and discrimination. Understanding the ways in which trauma impacts mental health requires a broader view of identity, community, adaptation and resistance as forms of resilience.</p>	<p>and loss, and resilience/healing</p> <p>Positive Identity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Racist stereotypes still exist in the current context, affecting the formation or adoption of a positive Indigenous identity. <p>Self-Determination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healing requires a balance of medical knowledge and Western scholarship with considerations of cultural, social, and historical contexts. • Description of current structural issues that interfere with capacity to heal (for example: poverty) that cause stress and ongoing trauma, not just historical experiences of trauma. • Access to healing resources for Indigenous communities is controlled by bureaucracies that work at cross-purposes to local communal identity and solidarity.
<p>Korpai, D., & Wong, A. (2015). Education and the health of the First Nations people of Canada. <i>AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples</i>, 11(2), 132–146.</p>	<p>Literature review on First Nations in Canada.</p>	<p>The authors frame education as a social determinant of health, arguing that all forms of education are not necessarily beneficial. In this literature review, the authors examine the complex relationship between education and health of First Nations people. Examining First Nations education prior to colonization, the authors note that knowledge systems were not only embedded in culture and experiential learning, but that communities collectively educated children using stories and the environment. However, Euro-centric schools and missionaries introduced formal schools with the intent of producing 'civilized' citizens.</p>	<p>Interconnected Worldview</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through parental separation, abuse, and neglect, residential schools deprived children of an understanding of close, loving familial relationships on which to base their own parenting. <p>Rules for Good Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-colonial education systems were embedded in experiential learning practices. • Communities assumed collectively responsibility for educating children, including life skills, values and norms. • Formalized schooling of missionaries assumed Indigenous youth needed to be 'civilized'; children forcibly removed from homes and culture. <p>Positive Identity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spirituality, grounded by the local geography and ecology, created strong individual and community identity. • Relationship between physical/social environment and culture/identity are central to FN health. <p>Outlier</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distinction between 'education' (empowering) and 'schooling' (imparting institutionally sanctioned knowledge

<p>LaFrance, J., & Bastien, B. (2007). Here be dragons! Reconciling Indigenous and western knowledge to improve Indigenous child welfare. <i>First Peoples Child & Family Review</i>, 3(1), 105–126.</p>	<p>Appreciative inquiry involving AB Child Services, University of Calgary social work, Blood Reserve, Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation and Region 10 (Métis Settlements) Child and Family Services Authority.</p>	<p>The authors aim to reconcile Indigenous and Western knowledge to improve child welfare practice. The first half of the article describes pre-colonial values and traditions, making the central point that Indigenous philosophies fundamentally differ from Euro-Canadian values, rooted in divergent perceptions of the relationship between the self and the universe. as well as processes of colonization, particularly in how child welfare became the tool of assimilation. The second half of the article focuses on the Alberta project 'Making Our Hearts Sing' that endeavoured to foster collaboration between child welfare stakeholders and Indigenous communities.</p>	<p>in hierarchical structure)</p> <p>Interconnected Worldview</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communities emphasize the contemporary importance of shared parenting in within the community. • Importance of language in cultural renewal. • Important to recognize kinship connections with each other and with all living being on the planet. • Euro-centric philosophy introduced split of mind and body. • The difficulty in the task of returning to traditional values and knowledge within a Euro-centric system will require the 'collective wisdom' of all involved to address the 'jagged world views' (Littlebear, 2000). • Receiving a traditional name connects children with the land, their family and the entire universe. <p>Rules for Good Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. <p>Positive Identity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge of tradition and history to cultivate a healthy identity. <p>Self Determination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communal well being is a collective sacred responsibility and is the essence of the purpose for living. • The residential school system failed to meet the total needs of the child because it used all aspects of daily life to force compliance, rather than develop the capacity of the children to make choices for themselves.
<p>LaFrance, J., Bodor, R., & Bastien, B. (2008). Synchronicity or serendipity? Indigenous wisdom and childhood resilience. In L. Liebenberg & M. Ungar (Eds.), <i>Resilience in Action</i> (pp. 289–320). Toronto, ON: University of</p>	<p>Part overview of secondary research; part juxtaposing words of Elders with reliance</p>	<p>The chapter focuses on ways of providing child welfare services that incorporating traditional Indigenous worldviews and modern theories of youth resilience.</p>	<p>Interconnected Worldview</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indigenous worldview as eco-philosophy that values interconnectedness. • Child welfare perpetuated genocide of Indigenous family, destroying culture, connection and relationships and leaving generations without parenting skills. • Indigenous people need a resilience framework that reflects

Toronto Press.	theory		<p>their worldview.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families are at the core of the process for healing and renewal. <p>Rules for Good Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear Indigenous values and philosophy to guide development of programs and services, such as language, kinship, respectful approach to life, which are similar to factors of resilience. <p>Positive Identity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colonization through residential schools created sense of alienation and loss of identity. <p>Self-Determination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resilience should build capacity to become self-determining individual and family.
Makokis, L. (2001). <i>Teachings from Cree Elders: A grounded theory study of Indigenous leadership</i> . University of San Diego, San Diego, CA	Analysis of narrative interviews of seven Cree Elders in Alberta.	Makokis describes traditional Cree language, traditional knowledge and ceremony. She argues that over the past two hundred and fifty years, the relationship between First Nations and Euro-Canadians has shifted from an equal partnership to one of colonized and colonizer. The dissertation offers important information about traditional Cree worldviews, language, values, and ceremony, which included the gift of spirit and responsibility to the land that is embedded in the Cree language and the traditional knowledge that guides daily lives which dwells in the ceremonies. Makokis argues that the key to healing is reviving the Cree language. The birth and development of children are central in the thesis, as Makokis describes the Cree understandings of childhood and how best to teach Cree children from traditional knowledge and ceremony.	<p>Interconnected Worldview</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A detailed description of how First Nation philosophy is shaped from the spirit of the land and a belief that the environment, cosmos, plant, animal, and human realms are all equal and interconnected. • All things have been created and given to the Cree by the Creator (a result of this relationship). • The key to healing is reviving the Cree language, which has worldview embedded in it. <p>Rules for Good Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detailed information about traditional teachings, and how they are passed on in ceremonies. • Storytelling as a way of instilling values; storytelling is the Cree education system. • Description of the 7 laws of the Cree people: (1) Love (eagle); (2) Respect (buffalo); (3) Courage (bear); (4) Honesty (Sabe/Mistapew); (5) Humility (wolf); (6) Wisdom (beaver); (7) Truth (turtle) • Mentorship was a powerful tool for teaching children positive identity, rules and responsibilities. <p>Positive Identity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children must understand who they are or they can get lost. • Provides teachings regarding how Cree believe that children

			<p>are born with a spirit and a clan, enabling the child to live a purposeful life.</p> <p>Self-Determination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An analysis of the Treaty-making process and the Indian Act as disempowering for First Nations people and communities. • First Nation communities feel helpless and controlled because the Department of Indian affairs dictates policies and guidelines. • To become self-governing Indigenous people first need to understand the colonization process, then mobilize their own knowledge is rebuilding their own structures. • The laws of working collectively and collaboratively were lost, resulting in community breakdown.
<p>Maxwell, K. (2014). Historicizing historical trauma theory: Troubling the trans-generational transmission paradigm. <i>Transcultural Psychiatry</i>, 51(3), 407–435.</p>	<p>Literature analysis</p>	<p>Maxwell conducts a critique of historical trauma by historicizing the concept, arguing that it is a result of 2 older and opposing discourses: (1) Native healing; and (2) colonial professional critiques of Indigenous family life. The former maintains a therapeutic focus while the latter pathologizes Indigenous parenting and child-rearing practices. She argues that the emergence of 'historical trauma' shifts focus away from collective struggles against colonialism toward focusing on victimhood, and then only narrowly on physical and sexual abuse of residential schools.</p>	<p>Interconnected Worldview</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The mental health professionals at the heart remedying historic trauma continue to impose Western values on normative understandings of function and dysfunction in selfhood, family and social relations, and child-rearing. <p>Rules for Good Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describes how the narrative of collective historic trauma creates the notion of widespread family dysfunction, which results in increased state intervention. The imposition of Western normative values of parenting and childhood on the Indigenous individual and community therefore continues. <p>Positive Identity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The national narrative on historic trauma is simplified and does not value the local Indigenous experiences and narratives. • There has been a promotion of the idea that historic trauma is now a part of the Indigenous identity (Indianness). <p>Self Determination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The idea of “trauma” may be problematic as it is vague, pathologizes rather than liberates, dooms to victimhood rather than inspires to action. • Focussing on historic trauma can take the focus away from how people struggled against colonialism (agency) <p>Outlier</p>

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More research needed to understand how Indigenous people use the concept of historical trauma, and the possible material effects.
<p>McGuire-Kishebakabaykwe, P. (2010). Exploring resilience and Indigenous ways of knowing. <i>Pimatisiwin: A Journal of Indigenous & Indigenous Community Health</i>, 8(2), 117–131.</p>	Literature review	<p>The article focuses on Anishinaabe people in northern Ontario (Robinson-Superior Treaty area), examining aspects of Indigenous resilience, knowledge, and healing. The exploration is grounded in the relationships between Indigenous identity, land, and resilience. McGuire-Kishebakabaykwe includes a useful overview of literature on resilience. The author is concerned not only with knowledge, but the questions of what knowledge is valued. How resilience is built through traditions is relevant to questions of resilience in childhood development. The author's definition of Indigenous resilience is about an innate determination to succeed, within historical and current colonization processes.</p>	<p>Interconnected Worldview</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indigenous knowledge is a living process, a relationship, and a way of life. <p>Positive Identity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When Indigenous knowledge is 'othered,' it dehumanizes First Nations people, and assumes that Indigenous cultures are static and inert rather than Indigenous people as "dynamic subjects interacting with the social world" (p. 124). <p>Rules for Good Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge creation is personal and collective process based on responsibility and informed by relationships. <p>Outlier</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides a definition of Indigenous resilience: an innate determination to succeed, even within historical and current colonization processes.
<p>McShane, K. E., & Hastings, P. D. (2004). Culturally sensitive approaches to research on child development and family practices in First Peoples communities. <i>First Peoples Child & Family Review</i>, 1(1), 33–48</p> <p>RESILIENCE</p>	Literature review	<p>The article includes an overview of 'healthy psychosocial development' and walk through what they call the 'features of child-rearing' that support healthy development and parenting that fosters 'less adaptive' behaviours but note these are derived from Western cultural background. The article focuses on how to conduct research more appropriately and effectively, but the authors also focus on values/worldviews, views on development, and child-rearing. Note that some of the points made in the article may still be framed from a</p>	<p>Interconnected Worldview</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describes the extensive nature of Indigenous families that include extended family and kin. <p>Rules for Good Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The education of children is accomplished in and through relationships. • Traditionally, grandparents and other relatives were responsible for disciplining children so that the bond of love between parents and children would be protected. • Children are taught that potential interpersonal conflicts can be avoided by utilizing the practices of non-interference, non-competitiveness, emotional restraint, and sharing. <p>Self-Determination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Autonomy is a highly-valued attribute in traditional society,

		Western standpoint (e.g. Indigenous are adult-centered whereas Western is child-centered meaning children are assumed to be able to do adult tasks).	whereby children are encouraged to make decisions for themselves. This is often viewed by Western people as neglect.
Muir, N., & Bohr, Y. (2014). Contemporary practice of traditional Indigenous child rearing: A review. <i>First Peoples Child & Family Review</i> , 9(1), 66.	Literature review	The authors conduct a literature review on Indigenous child rearing to determine whether traditional practices continue, how those practices differ from 'mainstream' child rearing, and how those practices may have changed in light of colonialism and 'mainstream influences'. Note that as a literature review, the article covers many Indigenous peoples around the world, and while they endeavour to draw from Canadian-specific research, some references are from non-Canadian research. Also, some of the quotations appear to be general observations of literature overall, which at times obscures the specific child-rearing practices of particular nations.	<p>Interconnected Worldview</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anishinaabe families are interconnected, include immediate family, extended family, community family, Nationhood family, clan family, and cultural family. • In the research, Indigenous extended families were highly valued, interconnected and structured. <p>Rules for Good Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indigenous mothers are less likely to 'force the child to behave appropriately, threaten with negative consequence or use punishment' and instead aimed to teach values and social rules. • Indigenous cultures understand childhood development differently from Western concepts. It is more of an individual trajectory, where education is tailored to the individual child when they appear ready, rather than prescribed by age. <p>Self Determination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every child is treated as a unique individual; For instance, the Inuit tailor their approach to developing autonomy and respecting the distinct ability of that child instead of assuming identical levels of development for all children of the same age. • The concept of child autonomy in Indigenous cultures held that children were to be respected and allowed children the freedom to make their own decisions which leads to independence.
National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health. (2015). <i>Family is the focus</i> . Prince George, BC: National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health. Retrieved from http://www.nccah-ccnsa.ca/Publications/Lists/Publications/	140 participants at event in BC	This document is a report of an event in BC that focused on children and families, exploring traditional and contemporary roles of First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, parents and families and how they can be strengthened and best supported. Participants shared information,	<p>Interconnected Worldview</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focusing on family, including extended family, has the biggest influence on health determinants for children. • Families are where individuals (children) come to know themselves and their place in the world. <p>Rules for Good Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning fosters the well-being of children. • It is a sacred principle for adults to teach children the love of

<p>Attachments/155/2015-11-24-RPT-FamilyFocus-EN-Web.pdf</p>		<p>knowledge, and experience on the roles and responsibilities of family in the health and well-being of Indigenous communities; the supports needed for family well-being; and the programs, practices and resources focused on rebuilding the cultural strengths of families.</p>	<p>learning; traditional teachings and ceremony are important ways not only to teach a love of learning but for children to learn the natural law of interconnectedness.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healing in part must acknowledge the integral role of Cree and Métis grandparents as knowledge keepers. They did not tell children they were doing something wrong – but rather showed them how to do it properly. • Families touch our individual and collective being from the personal to the professional to the political. To be strong as nations, we must nurture and support our families and communities. • Describes the importance of interconnectedness is the teaching of children; being together in all of the daily activities. <p>Positive Identity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The concept of Stability is put forward, as important for the healthy development of children and youth. This includes demonstrating/instilling pride of identity and where we come from in children and grandchildren. <p>Self Determination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents of the agents of change in the healing process. • Ceremony is a key agent of resilience and transformation; through ceremony individuals can find their own strengths.
<p>Navia, D. (2015). <i>Uncovering colonial legacies: Voices of Indigenous youth in child welfare (dis)placements</i> (Thesis). University of Calgary, Calgary, AB.</p>	<p>20 Indigenous youth in southern Alberta</p>	<p>The author examines the ways in which settler colonialism shapes child welfare placements, or as she terms it, (dis)placements. Navia weaves stories and art of her 20 youth collaborators through critical race scholarship to produce compelling arguments and narratives embedded in the experiences and voices of Indigenous youth in the Calgary area/Treaty 7. The thesis makes a searing critique of child welfare, including forcible confinement and social workers blaming youth for trying to escape group homes that function much like prisons. Navia describes the</p>	<p>Interconnected Worldview</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • She emphasizes that storytelling is "inherently political and should be recognized as a form of creative rebellion" (p. 26). • Love (good relationships) is the guiding value of resistance to colonization. • Learning through relationship with the land is pedagogy: that can teach Indigenous peoples to live life in respectful interdependent ways. <p>Positive Identity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth in non-Indigenous foster homes feel disconnected from Indigenous communities and also feel alienated in the Euro-Canadian culture. • Youth feel judged for being visibly Indigenous and uncomfortable with their identity; as a result they feel they

		<p>active resistance of youth in three forms: refusal, resurgence, and renewal. The thesis is also an excellent source for scholarship on Indigenous, decolonial, and critical race studies.</p>	<p>are surviving day to day.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indigenous youth being themselves is a form of resistance. • The author describes the concept of heteropatriarchy-- where Indigenous cultures traditionally valued women and two-spirit people, colonization now means they are the most marginalized of Indigenous people. • Importance of Pow Wows in connecting traditional cultures to contemporary contexts. <p>Self-Determination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The thesis makes a searing critique of removal of children from their family and culture by child welfare, arguing that Indigenous children have been a <i>terra nullis</i>, like land, to be claimed and colonized by the state. • Although First Nations may be negotiating with Child Welfare at a higher political level, Indigenous children are removed by force and their families are left without voice or participation. • Youth experiences with child welfare, homelessness and incarceration demonstrate that the state has failed to protect them from harm and reinforced their subjugation. <p>Outlier</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indigenous youth create unique forms of urban resistance that deserve further study. • critique of reconciliation, drawing from Glen Coulthard: reconciliation makes Indigenous people the object while leaving colonial structures intact.
<p>Nutton, J., & Fast, E. (2015). Historical trauma, substance use, and Indigenous peoples: Seven generations of harm from a “big event.” <i>Substance Use & Misuse</i>, 50(7), 839–847.</p>	<p>Secondary research</p>	<p>The authors use the term 'Big Event' to theorize the disparity in rates of substance use among Indigenous populations as a result of historical trauma attributed to colonial policies. They conducted a critical review of studies, and propose 'Big Solutions' to ameliorate some of the negative effects: (1) decolonizing strategies; (2) identity development; and (3) culturally adapted interventions. The authors note that</p>	<p>Interconnected Worldview</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Substance misuse is a result of both the reservation system and residential school policy, as well as negatively impacts their ability to be competent, emotionally available, supportive, and involved parents. <p>Positive Identity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural identity and engagement in traditional practices are potential protective factors against the impact of historical trauma and may mitigate substance misuse, as well as foster greater self esteem and academic achievement. • A strong and coherent sense of identity critical to healing

		while certainly residential school attendance increases the risk of substance abuse, but also that substance use negatively impacts healthy parenting. Note that the authors provide an overview of scholarship on historical trauma.	process. Self Determination <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The authors suggest that communities with greater control over their land and services have lower suicide rates. • Alcohol misuse is linked to colonization: policies that led to Indigenous peoples’ loss of control over their land, culture, and way of life, in turn, was associated with a response of internalized aggression and substance use.
Park, A. S. J. (2016). Remembering the children: Decolonizing community-based restorative justice for Indian Residential Schools. <i>Contemporary Justice Review</i> , 19(4), 424–444.	Case study of indigenous and church members of Remembering the Children Society	The article's focus is restorative justice, and the need to move beyond official transitional justice to focus on community-centred and community-led activities that connect truth-telling and restorative justice. Park provides a detailed history of Red Deer Industrial School, which has the dubious distinction of having the highest number of deaths of any residential schools in Canada. The author's study focuses on Remembering the Children Society, a partnership between Indigenous communities and the church, which aims to commemorate the children who died in the Industrial school, but has also engaged in decolonizing processes by prioritizing Indigenous cultures.	Interconnected Worldview <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ceremonies that have occurred at the residential school site, have been used to free the spirits of Indigenous children who died while at the school. This is accomplished because, as Charles Wood explains, ‘there is a thin veil between this earthly life and the spiritual life’. • Describes the role of ceremony in building, maintain and strengthening of relationships: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ to remember lost (residential school) children; ○ in reconciling relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples; ○ in reconciling relations between Indigenous peoples and the church, as well as within Indigenous communities. Positive Identity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intergenerational loss of language has impact on youth, even if they don’t acknowledge this loss. Self Determination <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ceremonies provide a mechanism for grieving the loss loved ones in the residential schools. In the freeing of the spirits of deceased children, participants are healing themselves. • Working together is not only a strategy to promote healing, it is viewed as a gift to the Indigenous people of the world.
Pazderka, H., Desjarlais, B., Makokis, L., MacArthur, C., Steinhauer, S., Hapchyn, C. A., Hanson, T., Van Kuppeveld, N., & Bodor, R. (2014). Nitsiyihkâson: The brain science behind Cree teachings of early childhood	Talking circle of Cree Elders from the Saddle Lake First Nation in Alberta.	The purpose of the Nitsiyihkâson project was to develop a resource to promote attachment and development in a culturally-appropriate manner for the Cree people of Alberta. Elders shared their memories and understanding of child-rearing practices that promote	Interconnected Worldview <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identity is formed through kinship connections and spiritual connections. Naming is very important, helping children connect to their spirit and the spirit world. • The Elders put an emphasis on developing good, peaceful peer relationships.

<p>attachment. <i>First Peoples Child & Family Review</i>, 9(1), 53–65.</p>		<p>attachment. This source is closely aligned with child development in its objective of describing Cree understandings of childhood development and comparing to brain science.</p>	<p>Rules for Good Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ceremony is essential pedagogy for the teaching of Indigenous teaching. • Emphasis on the Cree ways of forming bonds with babies; such as special songs, special rituals for the belly button, and being attuned and responsive to babies' cries. <p>Self-Determination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children are encouraged to learn through their own experience, rather than being told. • Children are encouraged to find their own voices and speak up for themselves.
<p>Quinn, A. L. (2016). <i>Coming full circle - the lifelong journey of becoming: An exploration of resilient processes and outcomes among Indigenous crown wards of the Ontario child welfare system</i> (Thesis). University of Toronto, Toronto, ON.</p>	<p>Adults who as children were wards of the Crown.</p>	<p>Each participant in this research study reflected on the influence of their experiences of intergenerational trauma and being a Crown Ward in the development of their cultural identities. Overall findings indicate the importance of spirituality, culture, having purpose and meaning in life and acceptance of multiple identities. Chapter 2 is particularly useful in describing Ojibway spirituality and traditional teachings. She also discusses Western theories of identity development and formation. Several other pieces of traditional Ojibway knowledge include: humans are all interconnected with each other, with nature, and with the spirit world. While spirits and animals can survive without humans, humans can't survive without the others.</p>	<p>Interconnected Worldview</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relational Worldview Model, which understands problems through the balance of a person's relational world. Change in one area of a person's life (e.g., physical), will have an influence on the other areas of life (e.g., emotional, spiritual, mental). • Humans, plants, animals, spirits all interconnected. • The giving of a spirit name essentially connects the individual to the rest of creation (ensures our interconnectedness). • Healing balances the four quadrants of humanity through the interconnecting contexts of nature, community, and the individual (Dion Stout, 2003) • Healing is designed to reaffirm cultural values and to integrate the individual within the context of the community. <p>Rules for Good Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • stages of life in Ojibway culture, which align to the medicine wheel: childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and old age. • The naming ceremony in Ojibway tradition involves 4 men and 4 women committing to supporting and guiding the child in its development. Also ensures the child is always cared for. • Children learn humility and respect for all living beings by acknowledging that that we depend on the plant, animal, and spirit worlds for our survival on Mother Earth. It is only through reverence and respect for all creation that we can

			<p>live in balance and harmony with one another.</p> <p>Positive Identity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The spirit is directly connected to identity. The giving of a spirit name ensures children are recognized by the spirit world. <p>Outlier</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The discussion juxtaposes various theories of resilience to Indigenous ways of knowing, such as ecological models of resilience.
Richard, K. (2004). A commentary against Indigenous to non-Indigenous adoption. <i>First Peoples Child & Family Review</i> , 1(1), 101–109.	Editorial/commentary (uses personal experience as ED of Indigenous agency as well as secondary research)	Writing from his experience as executive director of an Indigenous agency in Toronto, the author discusses the appropriateness of adopting Indigenous children into non-Indigenous settings, focusing on the negative impacts on children, youth and parents. The author frequently draws on Western notions of child development in contrast with Indigenous perspectives on child development and child rearing, making the central case that Indigenous communities view children and child development in relation to the health of the whole community, and that children are best acculturated to Indigenous ways of life when they are immersed in their own cultures. He also provides information about the historical emergence of child welfare and ensuing complications of federal-provincial jurisdictions.	<p>Interconnected Worldview</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indigenous communities view children and child development in relation to health of the whole community. • Indigenous families are child-centered and caring. • A child may be cared for by her natural mother, an aunty, and a cousin at different points in the child’s life. This practice is common and viewed as desirable in order to produce a child who embodies the totality of community’s values, knowledge and behavioural norms. <p>Rules for Good Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All members of a community have responsibility for the good and welfare of the children. • Children are best acculturated to Indigenous ways of life when they are immersed in their own cultures. • “best interests of the child” is rooted in individualist orientation of European culture <p>Positive Identity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The adopted child may experience chronic doubt about their worth, which affects self-esteem. <p>Self-Determination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The creation of happy, well-adjusted productive adults is a culturally-constructed idea. <p>Outlier</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critique of child development psychology for its individualist standpoint.
Ross, A., Dion, J., Cantinotti, M., Collin-Vézina, D., & Paquette, L. (2015). Impact of residential	Interviews with 358 Indigenous	The researchers evaluated the impact of residential schooling and experiences of physical/sexual abuse on alcohol and	<p>Outlier</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of link between residential schools and alcohol abuse

<p>schooling and of child abuse on substance use problem in Indigenous Peoples. <i>Addictive Behaviors</i>, 51, 184–192.</p>	<p>participants in Quebec</p>	<p>drug problems in adulthood. Results of the logistic regression analyses indicated that residential school attendance was linked to alcohol problems, while child abuse was related to drug use problems. The results of this study highlight the importance of considering the consequences of historical traumas related to residential schools to better understand the current situation of Indigenous Peoples in Canada.</p>	
<p>Sasakamoose, J., Scerbe, A., Wenaus, I., & Scandrett, A. (2016). First Nation and Métis youth perspectives of health: An Indigenous qualitative inquiry. <i>Qualitative Inquiry</i>, 22(8), 636–650.</p>	<p>Participatory action research with Indigenous youth in Saskatchewan (Cree, Sauteaux, Dakota, Lakota, Métis).</p>	<p>The article focuses on youth understandings of health (individual and community), and does not therefore focus centrally on childhood development. The article employs the concept of 'neurodecolonization', drawing from Yellowbird (2013), which uses mindfulness research. The discussion includes the conceptualization of the ways in which the brain is shaped by colonization, and how neural pathways might be changed in response to colonization, trauma and oppression.</p>	<p>Interconnected Worldview</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indivisible interdependence of all things; the medicine wheel and seeking balance between emotional, spiritual, mental, and physical domains is used to describe the healing process. • Indigenous people must heal from <i>Historical unresolved grief</i> over losses incurred as a result of physical, emotional, social, and spiritual genocide. • Prayer before eating is an act of mindfulness that honours our interconnectedness, as well as role-models respect for relationships. <p>Self-Determination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategies to build resilience in Indigenous youth must address colonization on families and communities. • Strengths-based approaches that include the reclamation of tradition, language, ceremony, and communal practice are part of the healing process. • Indigenous ceremonies include aspects of self-directed mindfulness and are helpful in healing from colonial oppression. <p>Outlier</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neurodecolonization (Yellowbird) to describe brain in relation to colonization, and mindfulness to change neural pathways. • Provides an overview of definitions of resilience in literature.
<p>Simard, E., & Blight, S. (2011).</p>	<p>Literature</p>	<p>A literature review from two authors</p>	<p>Interconnected Worldview</p>

<p>Developing a culturally restorative approach to Indigenous child and youth development: Transitions to adulthood. <i>First Peoples Child & Family Review</i>, 6(1), 28–55.</p>	<p>review on child development</p>	<p>who are both associated with Weechi-it-te-win Family Services in Fort Frances, Ontario; Simard is from Couchiching First Nation (Aishinaabe Nation). This article focuses on Indigenous child development for youth transitioned into adulthood, highlighting Simard's model of 'cultural attachment theory', which draws from attachment theory, but also distinguishes from it by grounding in Indigenous worldviews.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indigenous ways of knowing as "the traditional knowledge transmitted from one generation to the next" (p. 29) • in many Indigenous languages, 'knowledge' is a verb rather than a noun; knowledge is wholistic, oriented to family and community, and connects to ancestors. • The Cree Medicine Wheel is based on two basic assumptions. The first is that spiritual life force is always present and all human beings require spiritual assistance in some manner. The second assumption denotes that every person has an external and inner self; both require equal attention. • The authors argue that cultural memory, connection to that memory, and its subsequent cultural attachment is every-present in the Indigenous person; it requires awakening. <p>Rules for Good Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special teachings focus on boys and on girls, and responsibility is very important: children learn to view their decisions in terms of the impact on seven generations ahead. • Anishinaabe stages of life: ages 5-8 is learning through Seven Grandfather teachings; 9-12 is specific teachings to prepare for puberty and rites of passage; 13-18 have even more concrete teachings and are expected to demonstrate principles and values. • Elders advise that 12-18 years requires the most support and guidance by adults. • Being mindful of how our actions will affect children for seven generations, promotes a sense of individual responsibility for the collective good. • The entire community is held responsible to raise children, by providing direction, supervision, guidance, and discipline. <p>Positive Identity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The authors suggest that cultural identity is a result of cultural attachment to cultural structures, thereby creating the spiritual essence of an individual. Cultural identity is the foundation from which all other domains of development will grow.
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<p>Stuart, C. (1984). <i>Cree Indian family systems</i>. University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB.</p>	<p>Interviews with 7 Cree people living in Edmonton</p>	<p>In this doctoral thesis, Stuart identifies possible characteristics of Cree family systems, particular in relation to existing scholarship about ‘Native’ families in general. She also uses the McMaster model of a healthy family because of its focus on functions rather than definitions of family. Results are only provisional, given the study size of 7 participants, but she identifies some similarities and some differences between contemporary and traditional family systems, suggesting that traditional ideas can neither be thrown out nor adopted wholesale, but need to be ‘modernized.’</p>	<p>Interconnected Worldview</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants think of family much more broadly than Western nuclear family model. • The Cree family is a unit in which the children are of central importance, and strong bonds and obligations are inherent to all family members. • Cree family system fosters interdependence, and family involvement. <p>Rules for Good Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cree children expected to show more responsibility. <p>Self-Determination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cree children experience large degrees of autonomy. • Contemporary Cree families expressed it was important to raise children with love and caring, to teach them independence, to teach them respect for everyone, to teach them that they are responsible to make choice and be accountable for them. • The Indian Act imposed European standards that were foreign to Cree families: it assumed that heads of households should be male, wives dependent, families nuclear, and inheritance is patrilineal. Marriage became regulated by law instead of the mutual agreement of two kin groups.
<p>Tomasso, L. di, & Finney, S. de. (2015). A discussion paper on Indigenous custom adoption part 2: Honouring our caretaking traditions. <i>First Peoples Child & Family Review</i>, 10(1), 19–38.</p>	<p>Literature review</p>	<p>The authors highlight the complexities of custom adoption, and the need for a focus on customary laws and systems to raise Indigenous children. The authors describe traditional forms of custom adoption and world views on children and child-rearing. They also examine state responses to custom adoption in several countries, with the most detail</p>	<p>Interconnected Worldview</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children are sacred gifts and are made to know they are important. As gifts, they are meant to be shared to build community strength and caring. • Adopted children are gifts to be cherished; adoption is not about possession - children are borrowed from Creator. <p>Self-Determination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The resurgence of Indigenous authority over child welfare within a context of Indigenous self-determination and self-

		on Canada, focusing on specific legal rulings.	<p>governance.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The key to maintaining children in families (and for caring for children) is maintaining custom adoption ceremonial practice. These ceremonies bring communities together under a process of spiritual purpose and ceremonial sacredness to support the community’s children and families. • Custom adoption is “much more than an Indigenous way of doing adoption; it is a complex institution by which a variety of alternative parenting arrangements, permanent or temporary, may be put in place to address the needs of children and families in Indigenous communities”.
Tousignant, M., & Sioui, N. (2009). Resilience and Indigenous communities in crisis: Theory and interventions. <i>Journal of Indigenous Health</i> , 5(1), 43–61.	Secondary research	The authors explore the pathways to resilience among Canadian Indigenous communities. The first part of the article reviews theoretical concepts frequently used in the literature, including: resilience and family resilience, social capital, cultural identity, and spirituality. They assert an Indigenous conceptualization of resilience into the second part of the article. While the authors generalize to 'Indigenous' people rather than any specific nation, the article provides a good overview of scholarship on resilience, noting that Indigenous concepts of resilience are markedly different from linear/individualistic Western definitions of resilience. The article focuses mostly on theories of resilience and some examples. There is some discussion of development in adolescence, particularly framed as a 'rebellious' stage.	<p>Interconnected Worldview</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resilience has to be integrated into holistic worldview including mental, physical, spiritual. Linear epidemiological models based on risk and protection factors cannot capture the interconnected nature of this reality. <p>Positive Identity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indigenous youth described themselves using narrative and story, suggesting identity is connected to cultural continuity. • Challenge to develop pride in history and traditional culture for urban youth identity. <p>Self-Determination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resilient Indigenous youth often ‘rebellious’, as they are actively resisting their reality. • Stories or narratives help children attribute meaning to their tragedies and to anticipate a more positive future. • Culture is a social instrument that can be used to cope with contemporary challenges, as long as it is not reduced or limited to its past. Cultural renewal is the act of applying traditional teachings in current contexts.
Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). Honouring the truth, reconciling	Input of more than 6,000 witnesses	This volume is a summary of the discussion and findings contained in the Commission’s final multi-volume report.	<p>Interconnected Worldview</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describes the attempt to assimilate students by denying them access to, and respect for, their Indigenous language

<p><i>for the future: Summary of the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.</i> Winnipeg, MB: The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.</p>		<p>The report provides important details about processes of colonization and the historical and ongoing devastating impacts of the residential school system to Indigenous communities across Canada. The report details the focus on children to be culturally assimilated, the bans on Indigenous spiritual practices, the disruption of language, and the intergenerational hardships that continue to be experienced in Indigenous communities.</p>	<p>and culture. This caused students to become disconnected from families and communities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Survivors internalized negative stigma associated with language, spirituality and culture; therefore would not teach their children, even if they remembered. • Survivors describe how reclaiming an interconnected worldview through language, cultural and ceremony has been central to their healing. • Reconciliation of Christian and Traditional spirituality has promoted healing for some survivors. <p><i>Rules for Good Relationships</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detailed discussion on how the residential school system introduced pervasive, intergenerational sexual, physical and emotional abuse within some Indigenous families. • Residential schools represented a failure to positively socialize children, and failure to protect children from harm. • Abuse experienced at residential schools led some survivors to turn to addictive substances to cope with trauma. <p><i>Positive Identity</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government and church position that Indigenous people could be civilized, founded on the belief that Indigenous culture and identity was inherently inferior. • Curriculum at residential schools was inherently racist; children taught that their Indigenous identity was inferior. • This caused many challenges to healing: for example, while some Indigenous parents want their children raised in a community environment that provides traditional knowledge, others believe church doctrines that to teach Indigenous cultural beliefs to their children is to propagate evil. • Many survivors spoke of how connecting with traditional knowledge and ceremony was central to their healing. <p><i>Self Determination</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Canada denied Indigenous men the right to participate fully in Canadian political, economic, and social life if they refused to abandon their Indigenous identity. • Children in residential schools powerless to take healing
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			measures. They were denied access to traditional foods and families, traditional healers, and communities who could have helped them, through Indigenous ways, to deal with physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual elements of ill health.
Waldram, J. B. (2014). Healing history? Indigenous healing, historical trauma, and personal responsibility. <i>Transcultural Psychiatry</i> , 51(3), 370–386.	Contemporary Indigenous healing programs	Waldram focuses on contemporary Indigenous healing programs in prisons to explore the importance of history in understanding social and psychological pathology and the concept of historical trauma. He makes three arguments: (1) 'healing' and 'historical trauma' are inter-related; (2) healing programs often focus on personal agency rather than historical trauma; and (3) historical trauma has become a framework to explain contemporary social suffering of Indigenous peoples. Waldram also explains contemporary pathology that focuses on personal healing despite on-going presence of colonial risk factors.	<p><i>Interconnected Worldview</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healing involves the reconciliation of important relationships, whereby individuals make amends and rejoin family, community and nation. • Generalizations and essentialisms about 'Indigenous culture' have come to dominate Indigenous healing. • The idea of historical trauma has emerged not only as a framework to explain contemporary social suffering among Indigenous peoples, but also as an idiom of distress that connects the individual to the social, the cultural, and the historical simultaneously. <p><i>Positive Identity</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indigenous spirituality plays pivotal role in reparation of identity. • Not every Indigenous person suffers from historical trauma; there are many Indigenous people who have not experienced such trauma or whose resilience has ensured a very positive and productive life. <p><i>Self-Determination</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healing involves agency and responsibility. • Individuals are encouraged to determine who their actions have harmed, make amends, and rejoin the family and community. They need to reconnect and learn to be responsible for themselves and to others, and to learn self-control. • Healing is highly individualized: while placed in historic context, the individual alone is responsible for repairing his or her life.
Wenger-Nabigon, A. (2010). The Cree medicine wheel as an organizing paradigm of theories of human development. <i>Native</i>	Cree; focus on children, specifically adolescents	This paper explores the Cree Medicine Wheel as an organizing construct for examining some contemporary theories of human development. Various aspects	<p><i>Interconnected Worldview</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Childhood development appears in the Medicine Wheel: childhood is represented in the East Door, adolescence in the South Door, adulthood in the West Door, and the elderly

<p><i>Social Work Journal</i>, 7, 139–161.</p>		<p>of Medicine Wheel concepts are discussed along with aspects of knowledge about human development from the mainstream Eurocentric paradigm that is dominant in the academy. Perspectives on indigenous wisdom and ways of knowing are presented from an ecological position linking human development concerns to a wholistic view of human development through the Cree Medicine Wheel. The article highlights aspects of the teachings which deepen understandings of parallels in human development theories.</p>	<p>stage in the North Door.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Cree Medicine Wheel emphasizes the role of relationships with humans and all of Creation, the role of spirituality, developmental plasticity, diversity, the interconnectedness of “nested environments”, and the concept of co-creation between self and Creator. <p>Rules for Good Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationships are fundamental to understanding the nature of events, and establishing standards of behavior <p>Positive Identity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identity explored in adolescence, along with confusion, anger. Relationships with people, the natural world, and spiritual world are seen as resources to assist youth in development. <p>Self-Determination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children reared in traditional Indigenous societies learned by observing (Vision) and making their own choices. • Providing space to care about ourselves allows others the space to start caring for themselves without being overly dependent. • Children must be allowed to exert some power of choice as they grow up; if not they are likely to feel they are victims and/or fear people they perceive as having authority over them.
<p>Wiebe, A. D., Barton, S., Auger, L., Pijl-Zieber, E., & Foster-Boucher, C. (2015). Restoring the blessings of the morning star: Childbirth and maternal-Infant Health for First Nations near Edmonton, Alberta. <i>Indigenous Policy Studies</i>, 5(1).</p>	<p>Participatory research collecting narratives of 75 Cree and Stoney women in talking circles</p>	<p>A research study that gathered Indigenous women's narratives about childbirth and the health care system in the Greater Edmonton area. Narratives revealed experiences of loss and separation at moving away from the community to give birth, and hospital experiences had limited cultural safety. The authors recommend the implementation of a culturally integrated healthcare model in Indigenous communities. The study is useful to Indigenous understandings of child development for the focus on</p>	<p>Interconnected Worldview</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional and contemporary knowledge/experience on pregnancy and childbirth exists in contemporary Indigenous communities. • Ceremonies existed to celebrate puberty, pregnancy, childbirth, and the passing of the placenta. These ceremonies reinforced spiritual and cultural understandings of these events and fostered belonging and social harmony within the community. <p>Rules for Good relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mothers isolated from their communities in current model • Throughout pregnancy and during childbirth, women received extensive teachings and support from elders and

		<p>traditional and contemporary knowledge on pregnancy and childbirth.</p>	<p>other community members, particularly their older female relatives.</p> <p>Self-Determination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Indigenous women in the communities in this study practiced a variety of ceremonial activities, including rites of passage to mark progress along the life path and important social and physical milestones. • Communities are re-instating traditions around birthing: they include mothers and grandmothers in the birthing process, have birthing ceremonies, and allow home births. • The attention from older people in the community enhanced the mother’s self-confidence and sense of empowerment, because these relationships constituted a powerful and enduring connection which extended to her unborn child.
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