An Ethnographic Study of Sharing Circles as a Culturally Appropriate Practice Approach with Aboriginal People

By

Michael Anthony Hart

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Social Work

Faculty of Social Work

University of Manitoba

Winnipeg, Manitoba

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MASTER of SOCIAL WORK

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Abstract

First Nations peoples have been utilizing their own approaches and practices to helping for centuries. Instead of the developing its knowledge and understanding of such approaches and practices, the social work profession has contributed to the colonial oppression of Aboriginal people, disrespected Aboriginal cultures, and applied ethnocentric social work practices. Recently, the Canadian Association of Social Workers has recognized the unacceptable oppression and need for developing its understanding of Aboriginal peoples' helping approaches and practices. This study is one contribution to the development of knowledge about Aboriginal approaches and practices as seen in relation to social work.

The purpose of the study was twofold: 1) to outline the similarities and differences between particular social work approaches and an Aboriginal approach to helping, and 2) to study sharing circles as a means to address the lack of culturally appropriate methods of practice when working with Aboriginal peoples. In order to achieve the first purpose literature on Aboriginal and social work approaches to helping was reviewed and compared. Specifically, the person centred and life model approaches were compared to an Aboriginal approach that was developed through this literature review. To met the second purpose, an ethnographic research approach was taken. People who had conducted sharing circles were interviewed about sharing circles processes. As well, my personal experiences in sharing circles were reflected upon.

The literature review found that while the Aboriginal approach outlined had some similarities to both the person centred and life model approaches, it clearly had its own attributes that made it a distinct from the two other approaches. The research findings described the approach and practice of conducting sharing circles as determined by the key informants and my

participation. Discussion on the findings suggested that the Aboriginal approach described in the literature review and research findings on sharing circles are consistent with each other. In light of the discussion, recommendations for future social work research, education, and practice are made, and comments for Aboriginal people to consider are shared.

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Ronn, thank you for being a friend and a brother. You unconditional acceptance and support of me helped me beyond words.

Fjola, I was very fortunate to have you care for me when I was so small that I couldn't even reach to kick you in the behind when I didn't like your direction. As a grown man, I am even more fortunate to have you as my sister. Your guidance, support, and love helped me get to where I am today. My heart is always with you.

Kim, you have always shown me love and gentleness. As the only person in our family that is younger than me, I completed this thesis especially for you and any children that may bless our family. My heart is always with you.

Mom, you have always told me to go to school, to keep learning, and to remember who I am. So far, I think I am doing okay one each of these things. You words, encouragement, and love have helped make me what I am today. I can only pray that I can offer to others a little bit what I have seen you offer to people. You are my supporter, my guide, and my teacher. My heart is always with you.

Kinanaskomitinawaw.

Kahkinaw niwahkomakanak.

Dedication

To the awasisuk.

Akwa,

Gerald Thickfoot—Two Wars.

List of Tables

Table of Contents

Chapter One

Introduction

The Problem

Aboriginal peoples suffer from ethnocentric applications of social work practices. They face issues of internal colonialism, cultural and community disintegration, racism, and disempowerment (Clarkson, Morrissette, and Regallet, 1993; McKenzie and Hudson, 1985; McKenzie and Morrissette, 1993; Wilkinson, 1980; York, 1990). Other issues ranging from a lack of tolerance of traditional health systems to coercive and assimilating practices are also affecting them (Canda, 1983; Duran & Duran, 1995; Good Tracks, 1989; Johnston, 1983; Sullivan, 1991).

These issues have developed from historical processes described by Tobias (1991) as protection, civilization, and assimilation. These processes included such oppressive actions by non-Aboriginal people as forced education through residential schools (Assembly of First Nations, 1994; Cariboo Tribal Council, 1991), outlawed ceremonies (Pettipas, 1994), and the removal of children from their families and communities (Johnston, 1983). Each of these practices were based upon the racist and oppressive beliefs that Aboriginal people were inferior to non-Aboriginal people, particularly those of European descent.

Historically, the social work profession has acted as an extension of non-Aboriginal systems imposing colonial processes of oppression (McKenzie, 1985). In such fields as child welfare (Johnston, 1983; McKenzie & Hudson, 1985; Sullivan, 1991) and mental health (Armstrong, 1986), ethnocentric non-Aboriginal helpers, including social workers, have pressured and coerced Aboriginal people to follow the ways of non-Aboriginal society. Most often this meant assimilation.

The Canadian Association of Social Workers (1994) has stated that the social work profession's previous ethnocentric practices and disrespect of Aboriginal cultures has produced anger, distrust, and a lack of confidence amongst Aboriginal peoples towards the profession. Due to these feelings and practices the Association and several authors (Mawhiney, 1995; Morrissette, McKenzie, & Morrissette, 1993; Schwager, Mawhiney, & Lewko, 1991) recognized the demand and need for fundamental changes to social work practices within Aboriginal cultures. Methods to overcome this anger, distrust, and lack of confidence include supporting Aboriginal peoples' goals of self-determination, autonomy, and self-sufficiency, advocating for the distribution of adequate resources to Aboriginal communities, and offering culturally relevant social work education, services, and resources (Canadian Association of Social Work, 1994).

The call for more culturally relevant practices has been acknowledged in the counselling field as well. Pedersen, Fukuyama, and Heath (1989), Sue, Ivey, and Pedersen (1996), and Sue and Sue (1990) have stated that counsellors need to be aware of the worldview of the persons with whom they are working. In relation to counselling processes with Aboriginal peoples, several authors have outlined that Aboriginal people have a range of worldviews and that helpers must understand and incorporate these various views into their practice (Duran & Duran, 1995; Janzen, Skakum, & Lightning, 1994; Morrissette et al., 1993; Schwager et al., 1991).

There is a strong emphasis by several authors that traditional Aboriginal practices need to be acknowledged and supported as a method of healing for Aboriginal people (Absolon, 1993; Clarkson et al., 1992; Hodgson, 1992; Hudson & Taylor-Henley, 1993; McCormick, 1995; McKenzie & Morrissette, 1994; Morrissette et al., 1993). Aboriginal people have also spoken about the need for Aboriginal healing approaches at Manitoba's Aboriginal Justice Inquiry

(Hamilton & Sinclair, 1991) and the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1992, 1993a, 1993b, 1997).

In light of advances in the social work profession's, particularly the Canadian Association of Social Workers', awareness of such issues as ethnocentric practices, disrespect of Aboriginal cultures, anger and distrust from the Aboriginal community, and need for culturally relevant methods of helping, it is apparent that now is an appropriate time for research which will address these issues. While this thesis could not address all of these issues, it was possible to address specific practice issues within the profession.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was twofold: 1) to outline the similarities and differences between particular social work approaches and an Aboriginal approach to helping, and 2) to study sharing circles as a means to address the lack of culturally appropriate methods of practice when working with Aboriginal peoples. In order to achieve these purposes I reviewed literature on Aboriginal and social work approaches to helping, interviewed people who have conducted sharing circles, and reflected on my own experiences in 12 sharing circles.

This study partially addressed the Canadian Association of Social Workers' (1994) assertion that there is a need for social work education to become culturally relevant. It also met their request for a "continuing dialogue between the profession and Aboriginal peoples to advance a new relationship" (p. 158). Personally, as a Cree man and a professional social worker, this study helped me to develop a greater understanding of my helping practice and the philosophy behind my practice since I utilize both Aboriginal and social work helping practices and

philosophies. It also developed a base for me to conduct further research on Aboriginal helping approaches and practices.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study focused upon a literature review of three approaches to helping utilized by social workers. The first two approaches were the person centred and life model approaches to social work practice. The third was a review of the literature on Aboriginal perspectives of helping. These approaches were reviewed by following the outline developed by Turner (1988). Turner's outline reviewed over 20 approaches used in social work, including the person centred and life model approaches. While not every outline heading developed by Turner was incorporated in this thesis, several were discussed in detail in the Literature Review and Discussion chapters. The seven main headings included were background, general attributes, perception of person, view of functioning, helping qualities, the helper, and limitations. An additional heading incorporated into this outline, which was not included by Turner, was group practices.

Since both purposes of this study included a discussion of an Aboriginal approach to helping, it was important to thoroughly outline an Aboriginal approach to helping. Since no one approach has been clearly and thoroughly outlined in the literature, a variety of sources were included. As examples, Absolon (1993), Bopp, Bopp, Brown, and Lane, (1985), Huber, (1994), Longclaws (1994), McCormick (1995) and Nabigon (1993) have each outlined how the medicine wheel is a suitable approach to use when working with Aboriginal people. Other authors have outlined methods of working with Aboriginal people that are based upon traditional and cultural perspectives of Aboriginal people (Duran & Duran, 1995; Morrissette et al., 1993; Clarkson et al.,

1993; Assembly of First Nations, 1994). In light of this literature and the need to identify an

Aboriginal approach to helping, the medicine wheel and these Aboriginal methods were included

as one focus of the literature review regarding Aboriginal helping approaches and practices.

In addition, this study attempted to draw upon the similarities and differences between

social work and Aboriginal approaches and practices. Therefore, it was important to identify some

particular social work approaches and practices that had some similarities to an Aboriginal

approach in order for some comparisons to be made. The person centred and the life model

approaches appear somewhat similar to Aboriginal helping perspectives and approaches. As such,

these two approaches were also focused upon for this study.

More specifically, Carl Rogers (1961, 1977, 1980) has been a major thrust behind the

development of the person centred approach. This approach has been thoroughly outlined and

researched and literature can be found in his texts as well as other authors (Corey, 1996b; Greene,

1991a; Rowe, 1986). The life model approach has largely been based upon the work of Germain

(1980a, 1980b, 1981, 1991, 1994) and Germain and Gitterman (1980, 1986). However, other

authors such as Devore (1983), Gould (1987), Siporin (1980), and Weick (1981) have critiqued

the approach and added to its development.

Overall, the theoretical approach which this study was based upon included Aboriginal,

life model, and person centred approaches and practices. Considering that the literature provided

few resources related directly to sharing circles (Guidelines for talking circles, 1990; Clarkson et

al., 1992; Hart, 1996; Scott, 1991), I believe inclusion of these various approaches supported the

identification of the similarities and differences between Aboriginal and social work practices and

the investigation of sharing circles.

Design

This study began with an examination of literature addressing person centred, life model, and Aboriginal helping approaches and practices. This literature review gave a framework of how Aboriginal and social work approaches and practices are similar and different. The review also highlighted some points of consideration for the interviews addressing sharing circles.

Since part of the focus of this thesis was the investigation of sharing circles through interviews with people who have conducted sharing circles, the research approach most appropriate to discovering this information was a qualitative approach, specifically critical ethnography. "Ethnography is the art and science of describing a group or culture" (Fetterman, 1989, p. 11). Critical ethnography questions conventional perspectives, includes community ownership and participation, removes credentiality, maintains relevance, and supports structural changes (Gilchrist, 1994). Critical ethnography allows for the research participants to be actively involved in the research process and can begin to address the previously mentioned issues of distrust, oppression, and the lack of confidence through such control.

The interviews with Aboriginal people who have conducted sharing circles began after approval was granted by the ethics committee and continued until enough information had been gathered to give a thorough exploratory description of sharing circles. Individuals interviewed were identified through a judgemental snowball sample selection method (Fetterman, 1989; Monette, Sullivan, & DeJong, 1994).

Johnson (1990) has reviewed previous studies' criteria for selection of research participants. Some factors that should be considered are the person's willingness to communicate, knowledge of the Aboriginal culture, and connection to the Aboriginal network of helpers. The

individuals selected to participate in this study knew about Aboriginal culture, particularly sharing circles. This knowledge was evident by their conducting several sharing circles--more than ten-- over a period extending beyond one year. Further evidence of the informants' knowledge was based upon another Aboriginal individual's acknowledgement of the informants' abilities to conduct sharing circles. In addition, they each have had a role as an Aboriginal helper, either through a formal paid position or in an informal voluntary helper capacity. In either case they have utilized sharing circles as one method of helping. At the time of the interviews,-they had some status within the Aboriginal community which was based upon other Aboriginal people's recognition of their abilities. Finally, they were able and willing to participate in an English speaking interview process which examined their knowledge of sharing circles.

The interviews followed a nonscheduled-standardized interview format (Monette et al., 1994). This exploratory method of gathering information was deemed as the most appropriate method on several accounts. First, a standard set of questions offered guidance in uncovering information in specific areas. Utilizing these questions in an nonscheduled format allowed for the flexibility needed to appropriately connect with each person who shared information (Collins & Colorado, 1987; Gilchrist, 1994). Further, considering this study was at an exploratory level, a nonscheduled format allowed for the inclusion of various flexible interviewing processes such as probing, rephrasing of the questions so that they fit particular interviews, and the freedom for the respondents to answer in whatever manner they desired (Monette et al., 1994). This flexibility was important since the literature directly addressing sharing circles was limited and thus acted as a limited guide for the interview process.

The standard interviews questions were as follows:

1. What are sharing circles?

2. What is the process to conducting sharing circles?

3. Who participates in sharing circles?

4. Are there individuals who are not allowed to participate in sharing circles? Who?

5. What have people experienced when they have conducted sharing circles?

6. What beliefs do Aboriginal people who conduct sharing circles have about sharing

circles?

7. Do people become eligible to conduct sharing circles? How?

8. Where are sharing circles conducted? Are there reasons for particular locations?

9. When are sharing circles conducted? Are there reasons for particular times?

10. Why do people participate in sharing circles?

11. How many people can participate in sharing circles?

12. What do people need to know about sharing circles before they participate?

13. Are sharing circles similar to any other Aboriginal practices? Which ones?

14. Are there other Aboriginal ceremonies that can be included with sharing circles?

Which ones?

These questions guided the interview process. They were not the only questions asked. The

information obtained from the answers to these questions gave a greater understanding of sharing

circles, and, indirectly, Aboriginal helping perspectives and practices.

The interviews were conducted at a place of convenience for the person being interviewed

which included such locations as their homes and restaurants. However, there were geographical

limitations. These limitations were based on my ability to get to where the informants were

available. In the end, all the interviews took place within Manitoba.

The time needed to conduct these interviews varied and depended upon the person being

interviewed. Flexibility in time was coordinated with the flexibility in the interview process.

Important to the interview process were some additional factors related to traditional Aboriginal

practices.

Inclusion of Traditional Practices

Traditional Aboriginal practices often include references to the need for balance in order

to achieve a healthy life. They also often include recognition of the need for connection between

all aspects of life in order to achieve balance (Clarkson et al., 1992; Longclaws, 1994; Malloch,

1989). These connections are often made through oral discussions (Dion Buffalo, 1990). The

circle of life, often referred to as the medicine wheel, has been used as a symbolic method of

teaching the aforementioned and other aspects of Aboriginal philosophies (Bopp et al., 1985).

The medicine wheel teaches that connections must be made in order to foster a balanced

life (Bopp et al., 1985). Similarly, the researcher as a learner must connect with the people

interviewed as teachers. The researcher must be able to connect with the subjective reality of each

teacher in order to develop an understanding as a learner. The chance to connect with the people

sharing their stories is strong if the researcher is able to complement Aboriginal culture

(Colorado, 1988; Jackson, McCaskill, & Hall, 1982; McNab, 1986; Webster & Nabigon, 1992).

Using a research approach that respects the medicine wheel theoretical framework enhances the

chance for a complementary relationship between myself as a research/learner and the people

whom I will be learner from; in other words, the teachers of Aboriginal culture. Critical

ethnography respects the medicine wheel framework since "the behaviour of the trained ethnographer is in some ways congruent with the behaviour expected of learners in many traditional First Nations cultures. Learners are expected to listen and observe" (Haig-Brown, 1995, p. 32).

While utilizing the critical ethnographic approach to the interviews there was still a need for the recognition of appropriate ways to approach traditional Aboriginal people. Tobacco has been used by Aboriginal people for centuries (Vogel, 1970). Amongst its many uses, tobacco is used by Aboriginal people as part of an exchange between two or more people, animals, spirits, and/or the Creator. Usually one individual will offer tobacco when requesting or appreciating something. In regards to when request are made with the use of tobacco, the individual who is offered the tobacco is free not to accept the tobacco. If an individual does not accept the tobacco its means that the individual is not prepared for various reasons to met the request. The inclusion of tobacco emphasizes that the exchange will be, amongst many things, honest, respectful, and kind. This inclusion of tobacco coincides with mainstream ethical concepts such as confidentiality and the rights of individuals to participate or not.

In order to maintain a respectful and balanced relationship with the informants, the use of tobacco was included in this research process. In order to placate to the ethical research practices of academics who conform to Western academic research methods, a consent form was also signed by each individual interviewed. This consent form outlined that confidentiality will be maintained and that individuals interviewed have the freedom to participate in the interviews to any degree that they desire, including not at all (see Appendix C).

Sources of Data and Limitations

This study was based upon primary and secondary sources of data. The primary sources were Aboriginal individuals who had conducted sharing circles. The secondary source was the literature review on Aboriginal methods of helping. The literature review was also the source of information for the outline of the life model and person centred approaches used in social work. There were some limitations affecting access to both sources of data.

While there were a significant number of literature sources addressing Aboriginal approaches to helping, there were relatively few sources related to sharing circles. However, information gained through the interview process offset this limitation by providing additional information on sharing circles. Literature about Aboriginal and social work helping approaches also indirectly addressed this issue by providing additional information. This additional information took the form of a comparisons of the literature on Aboriginal approaches and practices, particularly sharing circles, to the literature on life model and person centred approaches.

In relation to the interviews, one limitation was the unknown number of individuals who had conducted sharing circles and could be interviewed. However, the network of Aboriginal helpers is relatively well connected in that many helpers seemed to know of one another. Since I had access to some of these helpers already, I was able to connect with several people who had conducted sharing circles. By utilizing these connections and a snowball sampling method I was able to find enough individuals to be interviewed. The final deciding factor about the actual size of the sample was the amount and quality of information gained.

Another limitation related to language. I have a rudimentary understanding of Cree and no understanding of other Aboriginal languages. There are individuals who conduct sharing circles who prefer to converse in their Aboriginal language. I would have been unable to interview these individuals without an interpreter. Therefore, I had limited the people to be interviewed to those who were willing to converse in English.

Finally, as previously stated, social workers generally do not have good relationships with Aboriginal peoples. Issues of Aboriginal peoples' distrust, anger, and a lack of confidence in social workers may affect whether individuals share their knowledge about and experiences with sharing circles. By acting in an appropriate and respectful manner, and focusing upon meeting the needs of the person being interviewed I was able to overcome this limitation. Further, as an Aboriginal helper, I was able to connect with other Aboriginal helpers with some credibility.

<div align="center">Summary</div>

Over the centuries, in spite of the forces of colonialism, Aboriginal peoples have maintained their own methods of helping one another. Many of these helping approaches and practices still remain. Historically, the social work profession has not recognized these methods and has continued to work with Aboriginal peoples in an ethnocentric manner. The social work profession has limited itself in not considering alternative methods of helping. As a result, the relationship between Aboriginal peoples and the social work profession is tenuous. The gap between Aboriginal and social work approaches and practices to helping is wider than it should be.

In order to address these concerns I examined one particular helping practice used by Aboriginal peoples, namely the sharing circle. Through this study I also addressed the lack of

culturally relevant social work approaches practices and highlight the similarities and differences

between Aboriginal and social work helping approaches and practices. The Canadian Association

of Social Workers (1994) asserts that "social work practice which honours Aboriginal traditions

and values is best developed and delivered by Aboriginal peoples themselves" (p. 158). As an

Aboriginal helper, a social work educator, and a member of the Aboriginal community, I believe

that I was able to conduct this study in a manner which was respectful and supportive of

Aboriginal practices generally and this culturally relevant practice specifically.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

<u>Introduction</u>

The following literature review addresses three approaches to helping: the person centred, the life model approaches, and an Aboriginal approach. Instead of addressing the three approaches together in an enmeshed manner, the approaches are outlined individually in order to give a complete picture of each approach. In addition to outlining an Aboriginal approach to helping, the purpose of this review is to identify the similarities and differences between an Aboriginal approach to helping and the two other approaches utilized in social work practice, the person centred and life model approaches. Such an outline and comparison emphasizes the need and lays the ground work for further research on what an Aboriginal approach may entail.

It is important to note that while the Aboriginal approach outlined in this literature review is based upon philosophies and practices that are centuries old, it is not an already developed and written theoretical approach for utilization in social work. Instead, it is an approach that has evolved from this review. Further, Aboriginal people vary extensively in theif worldviews, thus it is possible to determine a variety of Aboriginal approaches to helping. Therefore, this literature review of Aboriginal approaches to helping mainly focuses upon the literature addressing the perspectives of Aboriginal peoples in Canada, particularly those in the prairie provinces. With these points in mind, this is *an* Aboriginal approach, not *the* approach.

The literature review is divided into five sections. The first section reviews the person centred approach to helping. The second section reviews the life model approach to helping. The third section reviews an Aboriginal approach to helping. Each review follows parts of Turner's

(1988) outline used to review 21 different theories. This outline has seven main headings and several sub-headings. Added to this outline is a main heading of group practices which also has several sub-headings. The outline and its headings are summarized in Table 1. The fourth section of this chapter makes the comparisons between an Aboriginal and the person centred approaches, and an Aboriginal and the life model approaches. The final section is a summary of the literature review.

Table 1:   Summary of the outline used in this thesis to review the person centred, life
             model, and an Aboriginal approach to helping.

Background
General Attributes
Key concepts.
Concepts related to people being helped.
Additional concepts.
Perception of Person
View of human nature and activity orientation.
View of individuals, time orientation, and relationships.
View on Functioning
Role of history and individual development.
Importance of consciousness-unconsciousness.
Nature of change and the role of motivation.
Helping Process Qualities
Focus of Helping
The helping relationship and specific techniques.
The Helper
Specific knowledge and skills, and goal setting.
Group Practices
Background.
Key attributes.
Member's and Helper's roles.
Processes.
Limitations

The Person Centred Approach

<u>Introduction</u>

The following section reviews the person centred approach to helping. The review is based on an outline used by Turner (1988) to review 21 different theories. The outline's topic headings utilized here include the background of the person centred approach, general attributes, perception of the person, views on functioning, helping process qualities, and the helper. This sections also includes an overview of the person centred approach in relation to group work. The overview focuses on encounter groups. Encounter groups and the person centred approach are both heavily based upon the work of Carl Rogers and the humanistic perspective, thus they have much in common. The section includes a review of some of the approach's limitations and ends with a summary of the person centred approach.

<u>Background</u>

The person-centred approach is rooted in the humanistic perspective, which in turn has been considered as a branch of the existential perspective (Corey, 1996a). Both the humanistic and existential perspectives are ways of looking at life (Payne, 1991b). They reject the deterministic view of human nature, emphasizing that people are free and therefore responsible for their choices and actions (Corey, 1996a, 1996b). However, while humanism and existentialism hold these basic ideas in common, the humanistic perspective "take the somewhat less anxiety-evoking position that each of us has within us by nature a potential that we can actualize and through which we can find meaning" (Corey, 1996b, p. 200).

According to Payne (1991b) "Carl Rogers is probably the most important humanist writer on therapy to have an influence on social work" (pp. 169-170). Zimring and Raskin (1992, cited

in Corey, 1996b) outlined four key periods of the development of Rogers's work. During the 1940s Rogers developed an approach referred to as non-directive counselling which emphasized the counsellor's role to create an environment of permissiveness and non-directiveness by accepting all feelings expressed by the client. In the 1950s Rogers continued to develop his approach and had renamed it client-centred therapy. During this period Rogers emphasized that the focus of therapy should be on people's internal frames of reference and that the actualizing tendencies of people are the main motivating factors for change. He also suggested that there are particular conditions that a therapist has to espouse in order to make the best chance for progress available. In the 1960s Rogers focused on helping people to become the true reflection of themselves and the characteristics needed for this process. In the 1970s and 1980s, his approach became known as the person-centred approach and had evolved to a wider focus. It included how people come to exercise power and control over themselves and others. Thus, Rogers has significantly added to the humanistic perspective for several decades and has been utilized as the main source for outlining the approach throughout the literature. Following suit, while other authors' works are included, Rogers' work is focused upon in this section of the literature review.

General Attributes

Key concepts. The person-centred approach is a general theory that emphasizes the developing self, as well as interpersonal relationships (Greene, 1991a; Turner, 1988). While there are several basic concepts or propositions of the approach, there are three key concepts (Rogers, 1961, 1980, 1982). The first key concept is being genuine and transparent. Rogers (1961) stated that:

> This means that I need to be aware of my own feelings, in so far as possible, rather that presenting an outward facade of one attitude, while actually holding another attitude at a deeper or unconscious level. Being genuine also involves the willingness to be and to express, in my words and my behavior, the various feelings and attitudes which exist in me. (p. 33)

This genuineness and transparency is referred to as being congruent (Corey, 1996b; Rogers, 1980). Rogers (1961) stated further that congruence indicates an accurate matching of experience, awareness, and communication (p. 339). The second key concept is unconditional positive regard (Corey, 1996b) or. in other words, the acceptance of and prizing of another individual. The third key concept is accurate empathic understanding. Rogers (1961, 1980) described this as the sensitive ability to see another person's world as well as the person in the same way as that person perceives them. If these three conditions, congruence, unconditional positive regard, and empathy are demonstrated by the therapist then positive growth would occur naturally.

Concepts related to people being helped. According to Raskin and Rogers (1989) the "basic concepts on the client side of the process include self-concept, locus-of-evaluation, and experiencing" (p. 157). Central to what is important to individuals is their perceptions and feelings about themselves. When individuals are successful in the helping process, their attitudes about themselves became more positive. This is significant since individuals receiving help often express that their concept of themselves is wanting or in conflict. When individuals are able to address this wanting or conflict and are able to be successful in the helping process, the locus of evaluation changes from being dependent upon other people's standards and values to their own. They also become more positive towards themselves and others. Finally, the ways people experience life become less rigid, and more open and flexible with successful support.

Additional concepts. While these concepts, particularly the first three, are the basic core to

the person-centred approach several other concepts have been outlined. Rowe (1989), in a review

Rogers' 1959 work, identified several of these additional concepts. First, "all individuals find

themselves in a continually changing world of experience of which they are the centre" (p. 414).

While the 'phenomena field' is made up of all peoples' experiences, only the individuals

themselves can perceive their own experiences in the field. Second, based upon their own

experience and perceptions, individuals react as an organized whole to the field, thus the reaction

is personal (Raskin & Rogers, 1989; Rowe, 1989). It is their perceptions that make the field real,

not some objectively defined reality. Third, "the organism has one basic tendency and striving--to

actualize, maintain and enhance the experiencing organism" (Rowe, 1989, p. 414). All further

needs, whether organic or psychological, stem from this core need.

Fourth, people's behaviours are basically their attempt to satisfy their perceived needs as

experienced in the phenomena field. Their perceptions take precedent over any other defined

reality, regardless if their perceptions have been confirmed or not. Fifth, it is people's internal

frames of reference which is the best position to understand their behaviours. Therefore, total

empathy is required to be able to reach these frames of reference. Sixth, people's behaviours are

usually consistent with their concepts of self. Self-concept is central to the person-centred

approach. It is defined as "an organized internal view consisting of the individual's perceptions of

himself [or herself] alone, himself [or herself] in relation to others, himself [or herself] in relation

to his [or her] environment and the values attached to these perceptions. Self-concept is seen as

an ever-evolving entity" (p. 415).

Seventh, when there is incongruence between people's conscious wishes and their

behaviours, it is often the result of a split between their self-concepts and their experiences.

Eighth, anxiety results from the incongruence between people's self-concepts and their

experiences with others, or from incongruence between people's ideal and real selves. The anxiety

can be reduced by reducing the incongruence. Finally, people who are fully functioning are open

to all experiences and exhibit no defence. Their self-concept is congruent with their experiences,

thus they are fully accepting of themselves and can fully accept others with unconditional positive

regard.

Greene (1991a) noted that freedom is another important concept. In relation to this

approach, freedom is something within individuals as opposed to outside choices. It is "the idea

and feeling that one has the ability to make choices and determine events" (p. 108).

Perception of Person

View of human nature and activity orientation. In the person-centred approach, human

nature is seen as good and innately motivated to grow (Rowe, 1986; Turner, 1988). More

specifically, Hjelle and Ziegler (1981) noted Rogers' respect of individuals: "the human organism

has a natural tendency to move in the direction of differentiation, self-responsibility, cooperation,

and maturity" (p. 403). This perspective guides the view of people's activity orientation. They are

orientated in being really who they are—being congruent—and becoming who they are—becoming

self-actualized (Rogers, 1980). Self-actualization refers to "the desire to become more and more

what one idiosyncratically is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming" (Maslow,

1970, p. 46).

View of individuals, time orientation, and relationships. Since individuals are orientated to being and being in becoming, they have the ability to move towards self-actualization (Hjelle & Ziegler, 1981). Therefore, they are seen as purposeful and capable of making choices (Greene, 1991a). According to Rogers (1980), people who are moving towards self-actualization are open to what exists at this moment in this situation. In turn, the helper strives to connect with and understand people's subjective experiences, "particularly in the here and now" (Corey, 1996b, p. 207).

Relationships can help or hinder people's ability to make choices and become self-actualized. Greene (1991a) noted that in some instances external evaluation by others, such as parents, teachers, or employers, can stifle the person's ability to grow or self-actualize. On the other hand, when relationships are characterized by acceptance, genuine caring, respect, and understanding, people are more apt to experience positive growth. Rogers (1967, cited in Corey, 1996b) carried this idea further and hypothesized that "significant positive change does not occur except in a relationship" (p. 204). When positive changes do occur, "a greater awareness of reality as it exists outside oneself emerges" (Greene, 1991a, p. 110). This leads to a heightened sense of social responsibility (Turner, 1988).

Views on Functioning

The role of history and individual development. According to Turner (1988) while people's histories are recognized as influencing them, the influence is considered minimal. Stemming from this point, Greene (1991a) noted that "for the most part, Rogers did not believe in extensive history-taking in the form of a psychosocial history" (p. 106).

23

Helping focuses on the present in order to support people's growth, since growth is

emphasized more than developmental stages (Hjelle & Ziegler, 1981; Raskin & Rogers, 1989).

However, it has also been noted that "people are born with a tendency to self-actualize. The belief

in the individual's capacity to self-actualize rests on the assumption that all individuals have a

healthy drive to attain full development of their potentials, capacities, and talents" (Greene, 1991a,

pp. 112-113). Thus, individual development is a recognized, albeit limited, part of the approach.

Importance of consciousness and unconsciousness. While the person-centred approach

does not focus on the unconscious (Hjelle & Ziegler, 1981; Turner, 1988), the helping process

does attempt to bring out hidden aspects of the individual. With the support of the helper, people

"increasingly discover aspects within themselves that had been kept hidden" (Corey, 1996b, p.

204). Thus, the focus is on people's conscious thought and developing greater awareness of their

subjective realities (Greene, 1991a).

The nature of change, and the role of motivation. According to Raskin and Rogers (1989),

change is characterized as "shifting from a rigid mode of experiencing self and world to a mode

characterized by openness and flexibility" (p. 157). The process that guides change is referred to

as experiencing. In this process individuals come into touch with their experiential selves through

receiving and expressing feelings, and trusting themselves (Greene, 1991a; Turner, 1988).

Further, as people continue to change and grow they become progressively freer and more

rational in directing their change and growth. Therefore, to a certain extent individuals can decide

what they are to become in the future (Hjelle & Ziegler, 1981).

The chief motivation for this change process is the innate drive towards self-actualization

(Raskin & Rogers, 1989). Rogers (1977) suggested that within each individual there is a central

source of energy that is concerned with life enhancement as well as maintenance. Furthermore, "individuals have within themselves vast resources for understanding themselves and for altering their self-concept, basic attitudes, and self-directed behavior" (Rogers, 1980, p. 115).

Helping Process Qualities

Focus of helping. Several authors (Corey, 1996b; Greene, 1991a; Rowe, 1986) have stated that the focus of the person-centred approach is on the person, not the person's presenting problems. Hjelle and Ziegler (1981) have noted that people working from the person-centred approach "must *always look within the person* and attempt to see the world from his or her perspective" (p. 421). This orientation has been taken further in that it has come to be applied in groups, families, organizations, and communities (Corey, 1996b; Greene, 1991a; Rogers, 1980; Turner, 1988).

The helping relationship and specific techniques. Relationships are significantly important in the person-centred approach. Rogers (1961) suggested that "if I can provide a certain type of relationship, the other person will discover within himself the capacity to use that relationship for growth, and personal development will occur" (p. 33). This relationship is non-directive in that the person being helped takes the lead in the helping process (Greene, 1991a). It is characterized by equality where helpers do not hide their knowledge or mystify the therapeutic process (Corey, 1996b). Most importantly, it is characterized by nonpossessive warmth, empathetic understanding, and genuineness (Greene, 1991a; Hjelle & Ziegler, 1981; Raskin & Rogers, 1989).

While their are no specific techniques, there are some general ones that are important. According to Corey (1996b) "the 'techniques' are listening, accepting, respecting, understanding, and responding" (p. 208). Rowe (1986) suggested the helpers should focus on their attitudes

rather than their techniques. Indeed, by over focusing on techniques the helping relationship

becomes depersonalized and the helper becomes an extension of the methodology as opposed to

be genuine (Corey, 1996b).

The Helper

Specific knowledge and skills, and goal setting. The helper does not utilize specific

interventions (Green, 1991a). Further "the therapist need not have any specialized knowledge"

(Corey, 1996b, p. 205). Specific methods of diagnosis or analysis may actually hinder effective

client-centred therapy. Instead, the helper has a significant amount of freedom to more actively

participate in the relationship and to build on its quality. They may act as a guide for the people on

their growth experiences (Corey, 1996b). Rogers (1980) broadly outlined the concept of active

participation in, and quality of the helping relationship:

> When I am at my best, as a group facilitator or as a therapist, I discover another
> characteristic. I find that when I am closest to my inner, intuitive self, when I am somehow
> in touch with the unknown me, when perhaps I in a slightly altered state of consciousness,
> then whatever I do seems to be full of healing. Then simply my *presence* is releasing and
> helpful to the other....It seems my inner spirit has reached out and touched the inner spirit
> of the other. Our relationship transcends itself and becomes a part of something larger.
> Profound growth and healing and energy are present. (p. 129)

He suggests further that the skills involved include the indescribable and spiritual, and that he "like

many others, have underestimated the importance of this mystical, spiritual dimension" (p. 130).

Thus, if helpers are to have a role, it is to have no role at all. Instead, they are to focus their

consciousness to an heightened level of awareness (Corey, 1996b; Rogers, 1980).

Finally, in following this orientation, goal setting is completed by the individual receiving

help (Corey, 1996b; Turner, 1988). If there is an overall goal, then it is to support individuals in

their growth process towards a higher regard of self-worth (Corey, 1996b; Turner, 1988).

The Person-Centred Approach and Encounter Groups

Background. According to Rowe (1986) the major application of client-centred principles

in group work has been through the encounter group as developed by Rogers. The development

of the encounter group was initiated in the 1960s. It has been stated that there is considerable

variation among encounter group approaches (Alissi, 1990). However, Yalom (1985) suggested

that the encounter group movement has been disassembled and that only aspects of it can be

found in such places as communication workshops, social skills training groups,

psycho-educational groups, religious growth experiences, and self-help groups. Thus, encounter

groups are most readily identified with remedial social work practice (Rowe, 1986).

Key attributes. Encounter groups range in size from eight to 20 members, are generally

time limited, focus on growth in the here-and-now rather than therapy, and support the removal of

social facades (Alissi, 1990; Yalom, 1985). The group is characterized by limited structure and

extensive freedom for individuals (Rogers, 1972, 1973). According to Alissi (1990) "the aim is to

provide unprogrammed, spontaneous contact without 'countering' or maneuvering, filtering, or

distorting" (p. 361). While the group could facilitate change and benefit anyone, including people

in therapy (Panman & Panman, 1994), it is not considered a therapy group (Yalom, 1985).

Rogers (1970) stated that there are several attributes of encounter groups that are central to this

change process. These attributes are a climate of safety, expression of immediate feelings, mutual

trust, understanding and openness, feedback, innovation, change, risk, and a transference of

learning to other situations.

According to Greene (1991a) encounter groups generally follow the same principles that

Rogers espoused in the person-centred approach. As such encounter groups have humanistic

roots. Glassman and Kates (1990) have outlined values that comprise the nature of humanistic

group work which relate to encounter groups. These values are:

> Humanistic value 1: People have inherent worth and capacity regardless of race, class, status, age, and gender, as well as physical and psychological condition.
> Humanistic value 2: People are responsible for and to one another because social life is a natural and necessary human characteristic.
> Humanistic value 3: People have a right to belong and to be included.
> Humanistic value 4: People, having emotional and intellectual voices that are essential to their experience, have a right to take part and to be heard.
> Humanistic value 5: People have the right to freedom of speech, and freedom of expression.
> Humanistic value 6: Differences among members are enriching to one another.
> Humanistic value 7: People have a right to freedom of choice, to determine their own destiny.
> Humanistic value 8: People have the right to question and challenge those professionals who have sanction to guide and direct their lives. (pp. 23-24)

These values support the general nature of the group, particularly the attributes of honesty,

exploration, confrontation, and self-disclosure (Rogers, 1972; Yalom, 1985).

Members' and helpers' roles. Members of encounter groups vary as much as the type of

encounter group. Individuals may utilize the group in a helping manner, such as when

participating in a self-help group (Yalom, 1985). However, Yalom (1985) has noted that the

group's members are more likely well-functioning individuals who seek growth, greater

competence, and learning. Indeed, encounter groups are based upon some assumptions that

members are able to send and receive communication, open to feedback, have some degree of

self-esteem and self-acceptance, and open to interpersonal change. Further, they are well-

intentioned, willing to be questioned, constructive in their relationships, and willing to experiment

with new behaviours.

The helper's responsibility and goal is to bring into the open the participants' here and now

feelings and thoughts about themselves and one another, and to effect permanent changes within

the individual through the group experience (Panman & Panman, 1994; Rogers, 1972). Alissi

(1990) stated that "through his [or her] actions, the counsellor serves as a catalyst who conveys a

quality of congruence, a sense of confidence and acceptance of the ability of the client with the

help of the group to resolve his [or her] own problems" (pp. 356-357). While helpers have these

responsibilities, Rogers (1970) suggested that they should act, at most, as facilitators in the

process and that the eventual hope for each helper is to become as much as a participant as a

facilitator.

A study outlined by Yalom (1985) found four basic leadership functions in encounter

groups. These functions are:

1. Emotional stimulation (challenging, confronting, activity; intrusive modelling by personal risk taking and high self-disclosure).
2. Caring (offering support, affection, praise, protection, warmth, acceptance, genuineness, concern).
3. Meaning attribution (explaining, clarifying, interpreting, providing a cognitive framework for change; translating feelings and experiences into ideas).
4. Executive function (setting limits, rules, norms, goals; managing time; pacing, stopping, interceding, suggesting procedures). (p. 501)

He suggested that "what seems important is the *process* of explanation which, in several ways,

enabled a participant to integrate his or her experience to generalize from it, and to transport it

into other life situations" (p. 502). Rogers (1970) was more specific as he outlined several specific

functions of the helper. Helpers should not be caught up in roles, but should honestly be

themselves. They have to set the climate by listening to and validating each individual in a

worthwhile manner. Helpers should try to develop empathetic understanding and acceptance of

each individual as well as the group as a whole. They should be aware of and trust their own feelings and persistent feelings should be expressed, regardless if they are positive and loving, or negative, frustrating, and angry. Helpers should be able to express their own problems, but in a manner which does not take away from the group's process. A significant function is to confront individuals and give feedback on the specifics of their behaviours, but only with feelings that helpers claim as their own. Rogers notes that helpers should avoid planning *for* groups, but they could share a plan and let each group decide whether to follow the plan. He also suggests that interpretative or process comments should be avoided.

Overall, Rogers (1970) stated that "I learned to rely on the members of the group to be as therapeutic or more therapeutic than I am myself" (p. 62). Members, albeit naive about helping processes, tends to relate to a person as a person. From this point he realized that an "incredible potential for helping resides in the ordinary untrained person, if only he [or she] has the freedom to use it" (p. 62).

Processes. According to Raskin and Rogers (1989) "changes in self-acceptance, immediacy of experiencing, directness of relating, and movement towards an internal locus-of-evaluation may occur in short term intensive workshops" such as encounter groups (p. 170). Rogers (1972) outlined the details of these change processes. Initially the group, unfamiliar with such freedom and limited direction, may politely engage in surface interactions with some degree of confusion and frustration.

After some time, some individuals may reveal some attitudes and reflection of their public self, since they are feeling ambivalent to reveal any inner being of themselves. Some individuals may move further and disclose some feelings, which come to be a greater portion of the

discussions. These feelings are more likely to reflect negative attitudes towards other group members, particularly the leader for the lack of guidance. These expressions are usually the first here-and-now feelings to be expressed.

Once individuals see that feelings can be expressed without any catastrophes, and that the group is in part theirs, they move to expressing and exploring personally meaningful aspects of themselves. Immediate interpersonal feelings, positive and negative, are expressed more frequently and deeply. It is at this point the healing capacity of the group is noteworthy. Rogers stated "one of the most fascinating aspects of any intensive group experience is the manner in which a number of the group members show a natural and spontaneous capacity for dealing in a helpful, facilitative, and therapeutic fashion with the pain and suffering of others" (p. 194). This point is characterized by people feeling a sense of self-acceptance and it is recognized as "the *beginning* of change" (p. 195). Rogers further emphasized that "it would appear that the individual is learning to accept and to *be* himself [or herself], and in this laying the foundation for change. He [or she] is closer to his [or her] feelings, and hence they are no longer so rigidly organized and are more open to change" (p. 197).

The group, becoming impatient with defence, begins to challenge individual facades held by members. The challenge comes through feedback and reflection. However, "there are times when the term 'feedback' is far too mild to describe the interactions which take place, when it is better said that one individual *confronts* another, directly 'levelling' with him [or her]. Such confrontation can be positive, but frequently they are decidedly negative" (p. 200).

Overall, Rogers suggested that the encounter supports individuals to come together in a closer and more direct manner which is not characteristic of ordinary life. This appears to be one

of the most central, intense, and change-producing aspect of the group's experience. It helps

people find authenticity in the way they relate to others and themselves through a trusting and

cohesive group environment.

Limitations

Several limitations about the person-centred approach have been noted. Rogers (1980)

outlined a significant criticism of the person-centred approach, specifically that it is "too

optimistic, not dealing adequately with the negative element, the evil, the dark side in human

beings" (p. 124). This view may be alright in a controlled university setting, but after dealing with

intense issues faced by social workers, the enthusiasm for such a perspective diminishes (Rowe,

1986). Further, by focusing solely on the positive helpers may not be doing any harm, but they

may not be affecting the client in any significant manner (Corey, 1996b).

Corey (1996b) noted another concern that there is a tendency to be very supportive of

people without being challenging. Indeed, some helpers may become so person centred that they

have diminished the value of their own abilities to help, as well as their power as a person thus

losing the impact of their personality. This also relates to the use of authority. Rogers (1977)

talked against the use of authority since it is seen as a destructive component of relationships. As

such, the approach ignores positive ways of utilizing power.

Other criticisms relate to limiting the helping process to focus on the key concepts of

congruence, empathy, and unconditional positive regard. Corey (1996b) and Payne (1991b) stated

that while the key concepts are necessary for change, they are not sufficient for change for all

people at all times. They may help establish a relationship, but what should be done at that point

in order to intervene effectively is not outlined. Thus, skills of intervention are still required.

In relation to encounter groups, these key concepts may be useful for supporting growth in some individuals, but they are lacking in supporting individuals who are in high need and have lower self-esteem and self-awareness. Further, Yalom (1985) stated "therapy group members cannot easy follow the simple encounter group mandate to be open. honest. and trusting when they are experiencing profound feelings of suspicion. fear. distrust. and self-hatred" (p. 512).

Summary of the Person Centred Approach

In summary, the person-centred approach's background is rooted in the humanistic perspective. It has several attributes with the key concepts being congruence. empathy. and unconditional positive regard. It has a positive perception of people as conscious and motivated to growing towards self-actualization when given the right conditions. A necessary condition to support this growth is supportive relationships. Helpers provides this positive relationship by focusing on the person and the quality of the relationship with the person. This approach has been applied to groups. In following the person-centred approach, encounters groups have the attributes of honesty, exploration, confrontation, and self-disclosure. The helper's responsibility and goal is to facilitate the growth of these attributes in each member in order to bring permanent changes within the individuals of the group. In the process, members come to be helpers with one another while being truly themselves. Finally, several limitations have been highlighted, including being too optimistic, limitedly challenging, and focusing on the key concepts without recognizing the need for intervention.

With this review of the person centred approach completed, the next approach can be reviewed in order to later make comparisons between an Aboriginal approach and the person centred and life model approaches. The next section reviews the life model approach.

The Life Model Approach

Introduction

The following section reviews the life model approach to helping. It also follows parts of

Turner's (1988) outline used to review 21 different theories. The main areas reviewed in this

section include the background of the life model approach, general attributes, perception of

person, views on functioning, helping process qualities, the helper, and helping applications. This

section also includes an overview of the approach in relation to groups. This overview focuses

upon mutual aid group work. Both the life model approach and mutual aid group work are based

upon the ecological perspective, thus they have much in common. The section ends with a review

of the approach's limitations.

Background

The life model approach is based upon the ecological perspective. This perspective draws

from a diversity of sources including systems theory, ecology, anthropology, and organizational

theory (Germain, 1991; Greene, 1991b; Maluccio, Washitz, & Libassi, 1992). It is defined as "the

science concerned with the relations between living organisms—in this case, human beings—and all

elements of their environments" (Germain & Gitterman, 1986, p. 619).

It is acknowledge that the ecological perspective has ties to the roots of systems theory,

particularly the social Darwinism of Herbert Spencer (Payne, 1991a). In 1958, Hearn made some

of the earliest applications of systems theory to social work (Payne, 1991a; Peterson, 1979).

Later, in the 1970s Germain made a conscious attempt to apply systems theory in a manner

beyond sheer terminology. Her collaborative work with Gitterman continued this application to

the point where they developed the life model of social work practice (Germain & Gitterman,

1980). Payne (1991a) suggested that the "'life model' of social work practice is the major

formulation of ecological systems theory" (p. 138). In light of this background, while not

excluding contributions by other authors, this review of the life model approach focuses upon the

work of Germain, and Germain and Gitterman.

General Attributes

Key concepts. The life model is a general theory that views the purpose of the social

work profession as maximizing people's growth and development while improving environments

through the matching of people's adaptive capacities and the environment's properties. It focuses

upon people's strengths, pushing for their growth, and influencing social structures so that they

are more responsive to people's needs (Germain & Gitterman, 1980).

A primary concept of the model is the relationships between people and their

environments. These relationships are characterized by continuous and constant transactions

where people and their environments are both influencing, shaping, and at times changing one

another (Germain, 1991). Greene (1991b) stated "this principle of mutual influence is referred to

as reciprocal causality" (p. 271). These transactions and their effects are circular with

consequences for both people and their environments physiologically, biologically, emotionally,

psychologically, socially, and culturally (Germain & Gitterman, 1986).

Three other primary concepts of the approach are stress, adaptation, and goodness of fit

(Greene, 1991b). According to Germain and Gitterman (1986) "when an imbalance exists

between a perceived demand and a perceived capability to meet the demand through the use of

available internal and external resources, people experience stress" (p. 620). Stress is a psycho-

social condition, thus it varies across cultures, age, gender, physical and emotional states, and

environments. It may be, or perceived to be, positive or negative. Positive stress is associated with

feelings of growth, anticipated mastery, increased self-esteem, zest, and even desirability. It is

seen as a challenge by individuals experiencing it. Negative stress is associated with such feelings

as lowered self-esteem, anxiety, guilt, and despair. In situations with negative stress the

person/environment relationship is so demanding or harmful that it exceeds the capacities of the

person to deal with it. The individual does not feel challenged, but feels a sense of jeopardy.

Stress arises from three sources: life transitions, environmental pressures, and maladaptive

interpersonal processes (Germain & Gitterman, 1980, 1986). "Life transitions include

developmental changes across the life span, changes in status that present new or conflicting role

demands, and crisis events--all with reciprocal tasks for individual, family, group, or community,

and the environment" (Germain & Gitterman, 1986, p. 628). Environmental pressures include

such factors as limited or unavailable organizational and network resources, and overcrowding.

Maladaptive interpersonal processes occur when families and/or groups experience obstacles that

evolve from their own communication and relationship patterns.

Adaptations are usually required when the environment and people are experiencing stress.

Adaptations are a continuous reciprocal process where people actively change themselves and/or

their environments. These changes are made in order for people to develop and maintain a

goodness of fit, or adaptive balance, between their needs, rights, aspirations, and/or capacities,

and the qualities of the physical and social environments (Germain, 1981, 1991; Germain &

Gitterman, 1980, 1986). Thus, the changes individuals experience can be internal, such as

physiological or psychological changes, or external, such as cultural or social changes.

Concepts related to people being helped. Some key factors that affect adaptation and coping with stressors are human relatedness, competence, self-direction, and self-esteem (Germain, 1991; Greene, 1991b). Germain (1991) has suggested that while relatedness appears first and is central, all of these concepts are outcomes of the person/environment relationships, appear to be interdependent, and are relatively free of cultural bias.

Human relatedness is the biological and social needs necessary for optimal functioning and stems throughout the life span. It "refers to the hypothesized innate capacity of the human being at birth to form attachments to other human beings, beginning with the relationship of infants and primary caregiver (perhaps this attachment is present at a biological level even before birth)" (Germain, 1991, p. 25). While it is associated with both dependence and independence, relatedness is reflected in the interdependence of people demonstrated through actions of respect, caring, and mutuality.

Competence is "in Robert White's view...the sum of the person's successful experiences in the environment" (Germain & Gitterman, 1986, p. 622). As infants experience their ability to influence the environment in an ongoing manner, the individual develops the ability to control, explore, and learn about the environment. This experience and ability leads to the ongoing development of competence through one's lifetime. When opportunities are not available to individuals to experience and develop their abilities, then their sense of competence is hindered. Thus, competence is influenced by personal and environmental factors (Greene, 1991b).

Self-direction is the ability of individuals to act independently of external forces and their own internal forces, such as aggression, so that they take responsibility for managing their own lives (Germain, 1991). This management is based upon using their own personal power in a way

that respects the rights and needs of others. Since this ability is dependent upon the degree of

freedom individuals have, it is significantly influenced by the distribution of power throughout

society and how society uses this power.

Self-esteem is the positive feeling individuals have of themselves. It is acquired through

human relatedness, competence, and self-direction (Germain & Gitterman, 1986; Greene, 1991b).

Processes, events, and conditions such as positive or negative self-evaluations, name-calling,

receiving affection, and oppression can either build or tear down a person's self-esteem (Germain,

1991).Thus, both internal processes and external conditions and events can influence the

development of self-esteem throughout one's life span.

Additional concepts. As stated, these factors--human relatedness, competence, self-

direction, and self-esteem--are influenced by the environment. More specifically, Gitterman and

Germain (1981) suggested that these factors are "enhanced not only by [people] taking action to

increase environmental responsiveness to their needs and goals, but also by their actively using

their environments for pleasure, learning, and meeting adaptive needs" (p. 47). The environment

comprises of layers and textures (Germain & Gitterman, 1986). The layers consist of the physical

and social environment, and the textures are time and space (Germain, 1976, 1978; Greene,

1991b).

Perception of Person

View of human nature and activity orientation. The life model approach views basic

human nature as positive and industrialistic. "Human beings are viewed as striving, active

organisms with strengths and potential for growth and development throughout their lives, as long

as the proper environmental supports are available to them" (Maluccio et al., 1992). Since

individuals actively strive towards a goodness of fit with the environment, they are viewed as

doers (Turner, 1988).

View of individuals, time orientation, and relationships. In view of the life model, people

are rational, purposeful beings striving to learn, grow and develop in order to best fit with their

environments (Turner, 1988). In viewing people as striving to change. the approach primarily has

a present time orientation. However, it recognizes that time is a significant, multidimensional

variable. Individuals are recognized as interpreting time differently from one another along

cultural, social, psychological, and biological dimensions. Germain (1991) suggests that "human

beings have certain biological rhythms, or what are often called biological clocks" (p. 35).

Socially, time relates to human constructs, such as hours and work schedules. Psychologically,

time refers to how individuals experience time. Culturally, time may have different focuses

between cultures, such as a focus on the past, present, or future.

Relationships are central to people's development and survival (Turner, 1988). People

need to develop their relatedness in order to achieve an adaptive fit with one another. Thus,

people are in dynamic transactions trying to achieve a dynamic equilibrium with one another

(Germain, 1991).

Views on Functioning

Role of history and individual development. According to Greene (1991b) this approach

"assumes that a human is shaped by his or her species' biology, including the processes of

mutation and selection as well as genetic change over evolutionary time" (p. 272). More

importantly, the view is held that "people are born with genetic potentialities that are either

supported or inhibited by transactions with the environment" (Greene, 1991b, p. 272). However,

this approach also hold the perspective that human development is nonstage orientated and that

people's histories can affect their present functioning (Turner, 1988). Thus, change focuses on

people's present transactions and abilities to adapt and alter past patterns.

Importance of consciousness-unconsciousness. The life model minimally considers factors

associated with the unconscious and conscious (Turner, 1988).

Nature of change and the role of motivation. According to Maluccio et al. (1992), the life

model's perspective suggests that human beings are self-motivated to achieve competence in their

ability to cope with environmental challenges. When individuals experience stress from life

transitions, environmental pressures, and/or maladaptive interpersonal processes, they are

motivated to alleviate the stress in a way that enhances or strengthens the capacities of the

individuals (Pardeck, 1988a). Thus, "it is the individual who largely decides in what system he or

she will participate, and to what extent and in what manner" (Willi, 1987, p. 429).

Helping Process Qualities

Focus of helping. The focus of helping is on the interface between people and their

environments (Turner, 1988). Peterson (1979) had sharpened this focus further: "The unit of

attention is defined as the 'whole,' as the person in transaction with the environment" (p. 589).

Therefore, therapy can include work with individuals, families, groups, and communities. It can

also include social interactions aimed at improving environments (Turner, 1988).

The helping relationship and specific techniques. Helpers need to work in a manner where

their relationships with the people they are helping are characterized by mutuality, openness and

authenticity (Germain & Gitterman, 1986). There is also an emphasis on shifting away from

professional stances which may inhibit the relationship by imposing unnecessary barriers. These

barriers often result from distorted communication and maladaptive relationship processes within the helper-person being helped relationship. Helpers utilizing the life model are required to be aware of how these barriers develop and actively work towards mutuality and reciprocity. Thus, while helpers are responsible for providing the conditions for people's success, the people being helped are responsible for working to achieve their goals throughout the helping process.

There are not any specific techniques required since the life model approach utilizes generic social work skills (Turner, 1988). Instead, helpers are required to have an extensive repertoire of techniques and skills that are used to increase adaptive capacities of peoples and the environmental properties (Germain & Gitterman, 1980). Thus, the primary role of the helper is to support individuals to act on their own behalf, to determine with the helper their readiness and motivation to address concerns, and to implement their own action.

The Helper

Specific knowledge and skills, and goal setting. The practice method of the life model includes the components of problem definition, assessment, and phases of the helping process. Problem definition is considered as the most significant element in the helping process. "All else hinges on the way problems and needs are defined. In the ecological perspective, needs and problems confronting the client are conceptualized as problems in living, that is outcomes of the transactions between people and their environments" (Germain, 1980a, p. 5). Therefore, in order to properly define problems and needs helpers have to have the knowledge about, and skill in assessments (Hartman & Laird, 1983).

Assessment is a process where helpers and the people being helped develop an understanding of objective facts and subjective reality. Germain and Gitterman (1980) stated that

assessment is the process where the helper, in utilizing the objective and subjective facts, "makes tentative inferences and entertains hypotheses to be tested against client feedback, outcomes of worker-client actions, and their mutual interaction" (p. 18). This ongoing process occurs from moment to moment of each session as well as during the times of reflection outside the session. Thus, the worker remains open to new facts that may arise at any moment and utilizes them logically to connect empirical data and theory. The intent is to bind together the scientific approach to learning and acting with artistic/humanistic capabilities.

This process can be formal or informal and may involve examination of arising themes. Particular formats of assessing and examining themes include diagrammatic methods, namely the eco-map and genogram. (Gitterman & Germain, 1981; Hartman, 1992; Hartman & Laird, 1983). Eco-maps give overviews of a people's situations by drawing out the boundaries of their life space, identifying those major systems that are part of their lives, and identifying the relationships the people have with each of their systems. Utilizing the eco-map is useful for planning and supporting intervention processes in that it allows the helper and person being helped to see the resources available, areas of conflict, and bridges to be built. Genograms focus upon families' systems through time. It allows individuals to step outside of their family system to view the family dynamics, including generational patterns, and how they are affected by them. These assessment processes are ongoing throughout the various phases of the helping process.

There are three phases to the helping process: the initial, ongoing, and ending phases (Germain & Gitterman, 1986; Payne, 1991a). The initial phase includes activities of engagement, exploration, and contracting. In this phase the helper prepares for the forthcoming interactions between the helper and the person being helped by considering both the objective and subjective

realities of the person. Preparation also includes researching the theoretical understanding of, and

thinking over, the problem. Once the helper and individual meet, the helper is to make emotional

contact with the person's feelings and responses, develop an empathic understanding of the

person's view through such skills as listening and reverberation—"remembering similar

experiences in the worker's life" (Payne, 1991a, p. 143), present professional functions and

agency's services clearly, and elicit a response from the person regarding the functions and

services. By being responsive, welcoming, courteous, and supportive the helper encourages

people to tell their story. The goal for the initial phase is for the helper and person being helped to

develop a mutual understanding of the problem and what each should do to address it. In

addition, "concerns should be divided into problems, priorities, and commitments" (Payne, 1991a,

p. 143) and the timescale and structure of the process to address the concerns should be discussed

(Germain, 1976).

In the ongoing phase the helper supports the person to make changes in one or more of

the three areas of focus. In addressing life transitions the helper has three primary roles: enabling

through such practices as validation and supporting, teaching by offering appropriate information

and modelling, and facilitating by defining tasks and mobilizing supports (Pardeck, 1988a; Payne,

1991a). As previously stated, when working to address environmental problems and needs focus

includes the physical and social environments. Included in these environments are political and

economic structures, and the natural and built worlds. Thus, when focusing upon environmental

problems the helper's roles includes coordinating, mediating, advocating, organizing, and

innovating (Pardeck, 1988a; Payne, 1991a). When helpers are addressing maladaptive patterns of

interpersonal processes they are often working with families and formed groups. They are often

addressing basic survival needs, communication processes, and family and/or group dynamics.

Therefore, helpers require skills in individual, family, and group practices, addressing

organizational, social, and physical structures, and temporal arrangements.

In the ending phase helpers and the people being helped are faced with separation and are

required to prepare in order for successful termination of services. Factors influencing this phase

include time limitations and schedules, types of service, relationship factors, and previous

experiences with endings. A successful ending includes a review of the objectives achieved and

any work still required.

Throughout this process helpers support individuals by utilizing skills, techniques, and

modes of helping that are integrated with their own personal style and abilities. Further, a helper's

values, knowledge, and self-awareness, both personally and professionally, are incorporated in

order to work with creativity, responsiveness and humanness.

In addition:

> The ecological perspective suggests that the social worker's professional
> competence.....must also encompass a breadth of knowledge about the interacting forces
> impinging on that field of practice, including fiscal and political forces, demographic
> trends. issues of social policy. changing needs, research findings and technological
> developments, and changing cultural values, all of which affect the nature of practice in
> that field. (Germain & Gitterman, 1986, p. 635)

Thus, in the life model of practice, the helper is not only a competent professional with a strong

sense of professional identity, but an artist with personal style and self-direction.

The Life Model Approach and Mutual Aid Groups

Background. According to Garvin and Ephross (1991) there is no unifying approach to

small group theory. However, it has been suggested that the ecological approach is the root of

most group work practice (Greene, 1991b). One of the more recent group work approaches

stemming from the ecological approach is a life model mutual aid approach to group work

(Greene, 1991b).

> This approach has roots to work by William Schwartz. According to Schwartz (1961):

> First, the group is an enterprise in mutual aid, an alliance of individuals who need each other, in varying degrees, to work on certain common problems....Second, the group is a system of relationships which, in its own unique way, represents a special case of the general relationships between individuals and their society....Finally, the group is...an organic whole.... (p. 158)

He has later emphasized that a key point of group work is that there is a "multiplicity of helping

relationships" as opposed to a single helper (Schwartz, 1980, p. 278). It is these basic principles

that have guided further developers of the mutual aid approach.

Key attributes. Two of these individuals, Lawrence Shulman and Alex Gitterman (1986),

have suggested that the purpose of the mutual aid approach is to support individuals to help one

another in the three interrelated problems of living as described in the life model—life transitions,

environmental pressures, and maladaptive interpersonal processes. Shulman (1992) has given

further details about the mutual aid approach and has identified three essential ideas. These ideas

are as follows:

> The first is the belief in the essential symbiotic relationship between people and their social surroundings. The second is the assumption that this mutual need is systematically blocked by obstacles—some raised by the client and others by the systems the client must negotiate. The third basic assumption is that the social worker must always assume and reach for the client's (and system's) strength for change. (p. 9)

> Member's and helper's roles. The group is a source of aid to its members. In well

functioning groups, individuals have their needs met as well as offer help to other group members.

The helper's role is to support this process through mediation between any particular individual

and the group (Greene, 1991b; Shulman, 1992). More specifically, the helper's responsibilities are to help "the individual and group relate effectively to each other, and helping the organism called the group become more sophisticated about its way of working so that it releases the potential for mutual aid" (Shulman, 1992, p. 285).

Processes. There are a number of mutual aid processes which can be undertaken in groups (Shulman & Gitterman, 1986; Shulman, 1992). First, group members help each other by sharing data, such as their knowledge, views, values, and experiences. Second, individuals can participate in a dialectic process where they can share ideas under discussion and use one another as sounding boards where their perspectives can be safely challenged. Third, areas which could not be otherwise discussed because they are perceived as being taboo can be brought forward in a safe environment--the group. Fourth, individuals can experience the all-in-the-same-boat phenomena where they discover that they are not alone in their experiences and feelings. Fifth, group members could develop a universal perspective of the source of their problems, which often lives external to them. Sixth, individuals may feel a sense of group empathy where each member provides mutual support to one another. Seventh, individuals may be able to make mutual demands upon one another so that individuals are confronted to work on their concerns. Eighth, individuals can work to solve their individual problems and add to the general learning of the group. Ninth, a mutual aid group can provide new ways for individuals to rehearse solutions to their concerns. Finally, these groups can offer a sense of strength which may not be present for individuals when addressing concerns on their own. This is referred to as the strength-in-numbers phenomena.

In reviewing these processes it is apparent that the ecological perspective and life model are dominant factors in the mutual aid approach and that many fundamental components of the life model are incorporated in mutual aid practices with groups.

Limitations

According to Payne (1991a), the life model is subject to the many criticism of systems theory. The systems approach is descriptive, not prescriptive, thus it does not tell the helper what to do, when to do it, or where to do it (Mancoske, 1981). In regards to interventions, Pardeck (1988b), Payne (1991a), and Siporin (1980) have expressed that the effects of interventions are not always clear. More specifically, when helpers are intervening they "...do not know how to control the consequences so that they consistently follow predictions and have positive, constructive results, in the immediate, as well as in the long term, future" (Siporin, 1980, p. 520). Siporin (1980) has also outlined that the assumption that affecting one part of the system will affect other parts appears not to be true in practice.

The basis of the life model approach has been noted to be over-inclusive (Leighninger, 1978, Pardeck, 1988b, and Siporin, 1980). By focusing on such large scale issues, the small scale and personal issues may be neglected. Further, by needing to focus on such a large scale, practitioners "feel they must be experts not only in psychotherapy, but also in family therapy, community practice, etc.," and as a result " the practitioner attempts to think and plan in such a comprehensive fashion that practice effectiveness is jeopardized" (Pardeck, 1988b, p. 102). In relating this concern to groups, Shulman (1992) noted that a group can be a complex system that must deal with numerous tasks and that it is up to the helper to deal with these tasks if the group is to function effectively.

Payne (1991a) noted that the life model emphasizes that individuals should adapt to their

environments even though these environments are generally dysfunctional. It also "tends to accede

to social pressures on unwilling clients" (p. 151). Related to this criticism is that systems should

be conserved and that equilibrium should be maintained. Thus, maintenance and integration are

more desirable than conflict, even though conflict can be beneficial. If there is to be change, then

slow change is preferred, and radical change is generally ignored (Leighninger, 1978).

According to Gould (1987) "one of the most important limitations of the life model,

especially from the viewpoint of practice with women, is its overestimation of the role of purpose

and its underestimation of the role of power in human change" (p. 348). She also criticized the

model in that it ignores the stratification of society and assumes that with a goodness of fit, both

the individual and the needs of society can be met at the same time. Since some people receive

benefits at the expense of others, this mutual gratification seems less likely.

Devore (1983) on the other hand, stated that social class, and ethnic and cultural

differences are recognized in the life model to a greater extent than other theories, but she also

noted that it is still not specific enough for ethnic groups, particularly black families. In relation to

groups, Shulman (1992) reflected this concern and suggested that one of the obstacles of mutual

aid groups is the divergent interests of group members. He also suggested that "..the group

culture, in early phases of work, resembles the culture of the social surroundings [where honest

communication is hard to achieve]. This situation often makes it difficult for group members to

talk to and listen to each other in areas of central concern" (p. 283).

Summary of the Life Model Approach

In summary, the life model approach is rooted in the ecological perspective. It has several attributes with the key concepts being the relationships between people and their environments, stress, adaptation, and goodness of fit. It views human nature as positive and industrialistic, thus people are doers. Therefore, the focus of helping is on problems that stem from the interface between people and their environments. While there are not any specific techniques associated with the approach, helpers utilize generic skills and work in a manner where their relationship with the people they are helping is characterized by mutuality, openness, and authenticity. Practice methodology includes the components of problem definition, assessment, and a helping process with phases. The life model approach has been associated with the mutual aid group work. This form of group work is based upon the symbiotic relationship between people and their surroundings, the idea that mutual needs are block systematically by obstacles, and that people and their systems have strength for change. In the group process, members come to mutually receive and give help with the support of the helper. Finally, several limitations have been noted, including that the approach is descriptive and not prescriptive, that the effects of interventions are not always clear, and the emphasis that individuals should adapt to their environments.

With this review of the life model completed, the next approach can be reviewed in order to be able to make comparisons between an Aboriginal and the life model and person centered approaches. The next section reviews an Aboriginal approach to helping.

An Aboriginal Approach

Introduction

The following section reviews an Aboriginal approach to helping. It is the third approach to follow parts of Turner's (1988) outline. The main areas reviewed in this section include the background of this Aboriginal approach, general attributes, perception of person, views on functioning, helping qualities, the helper, and helping applications. This section also includes an overview of the approach in relation to groups. This overview focuses upon the sharing circle approach to helping in groups. Both the Aboriginal and the sharing circle approach are based upon the medicine wheel, thus they have much in common. The section ends with review of the approach's limitations.

It is important to note that this approach has been determined by a review of literature on Aboriginal people. The literature sources included both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal authors. Aboriginal people vary extensively in their worldviews, thus it is possible to determine a variety of approaches. Therefore, this review attempted to focus upon the literature addressing Aboriginal peoples in Canada, particularly those in the prairie provinces. While it is not an already existing social work theoretical perspective, the concepts reviewed have been longstanding. With these points in mind, this is *an* Aboriginal approach, not *the* approach.

Background

One of the models that guides this outline of an Aboriginal approach and which is frequently mentioned in the literature is the medicine wheel (Absolon, 1993; Bopp et al., 1985; Garrett & Myers, 1996; Regnier, 1994, Rutledge & Robinson, 1992; Young, Ingram, & Swartz., 1989). As a model, the medicine wheel has been utilized to explain and address several issues.

50

These include racism (Calliou, 1995), the impact of residential school (Assembly of First Nations,

1994), healing (Coggins, 1990; Regnier, 1994), sexual abuse (Hollow Water Community Holistic

Healing Circle, 1993), education (Odjig White, 1996; Supernault, 1993), and research (Young,

1996). Thus, its application is general and far reaching.

The medicine wheel is an ancient symbol of the universe used to help people understand

things or ideas we often cannot physically see (Bopp et al., 1985; Four Worlds Development

Project. 1985; Hart, 1992). It reflects the cosmic order and the unity of all things in the universe

(Regnier, 1994). Storm (1972) stated that "the Medicine Wheel, can be best understood if you

think of it as a mirror in which everything is reflected" (pp. 4-5). It can be expressed in many

different ways as there is no absolute version of the wheel (Bopp et al., 1985; Calliou, 1995).

Indeed many Aboriginal peoples, such as the Anishinabe, Cree, and Dakota, have utilized the

medicine wheel and given it their interpretations (Regnier, 1994). However, it often holds a

common appearance in that it has been generally constructed as a circle with four equal pie

shaped sections, four equidistant points, connected by two perpendicular lines crossing in the

middle of the circle. Thus, as a central symbol used for understanding various issues and

perspectives, the medicine wheel reflects several key and interrelated concepts that are common

to many Aboriginal approaches to helping. These concepts include wholeness, balance,

connectedness or relationships, harmony, and growth.

General Attributes

Key concepts. In order to understand the concept of wholeness it is important to

recognize that the medicine wheel has been used to express many relationships that can be

expressed in sets of four and represented in the four cardinal directions, east, south, west, and

north (Bopp et al., 1985; Calliou, 1995). Wholeness is directly related to these relationships.

Regnier (1994) stated:

> Wherever one stands in the world, there are always four equal directions. Without all the directions, the world is incomplete and cannot be. It is the unity of these directions that makes the whole a reality. Each direction relies on the existence of the other directions for its own identity as a direction. Each direction reflects differences in the world (plenitude) and sets out the possibility for interconnectedness. (p. 132)

There are many relationships that have been associated with the medicine wheel, including the

four: grandfathers, dimensions of true learning, races (red yellow, black, and white), aspects of

humanness (emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual) cycles of life (birth/infancy, youth,

adulthood, and elder/death), elements (fire, water, wind, and earth), and seasons (spring, summer,

fall, and winter) (Bopp et al., 1985; Harper, 1994; Hart, 1992; Regnier, 1994). Each of these

relationships are part of a single whole, therefore we can only come to understand one part of the

medicine wheel if we can understand how it is connected to all other parts (Bopp et al., 1985).

Further, Regnier (1994) stated:

> Wholeness in the cycle of the year requires movement through all sessions, wholeness in life requires movement through the phases of a human life, and wholeness in human growth requires the development of all aspects. The year life and human growth can come to completion through this movement to wholeness. This movement is natural and fundamental to all living things. (pp. 132-133)

Thus, wholeness is the incorporation of all aspects of life. In order to focus upon the whole it

becomes necessary give attention to each part. This attention is reflected in the next key concept,

balance.

The concept of balance implies that each part of the whole requires attention in a manner

where one part is not focused upon to the detriment of the other parts (Clarkson et al., 1992;

Young et al., 1989). Balance occurs when a person is at peace and harmony within and with all

other living things, including the earth and natural world (Longclaws, 1994; Malloch, 1989; Zieba,

1990). Balance also includes paying attention to both positive and negatives aspects of people

(Absolon, 1993; Briks, 1983; Nabigon, nd.). While balance is periodically achieved, it is never

truly achieved for an indefinite extended period of time. Therefore it is constantly pursued (Ross,

1996, p. 139). When there is an unequal focus on one part of the medicine wheel there is an

imbalance. Such imbalance is considered the source of a person's disease or problems (Canda,

1983; Guay, 1994; Malloch, 1989; Ross, 1996). Further, a person who does not achieve balance

will not be able to develop their full potential (Bopp et al., 1985). In order to restore balance,

each part of the medicine wheel must be addressed in relation to one another. Peat (1994)

explained this balancing of the four directions in relation to a four-legged chair. He stated:

> So it is with our four-legged chair. Any three of the legs will define a perfectly flat plane
> where the chair is in balance; the fourth leg will either be too long or too short. And this
> means that there will be different orientations for the chair in which three of the tips touch
> the floor while the fourth remains in the air. When you sit on the chair you wobble
> between these different balance points.
>   This example demonstrates that the very sensitive and difficult process of
> achieving balance is a fundamental property of space, the universe, and the number
> four....Achieving a final balance involves a dynamic process of constant adjustment. (p.
> 167)

This process that leads to balancing is very closely related to the next key concept, connectedness

or sometimes referred to as relationships.

Balance involves more than just paying attention to each and every part of the medicine

wheel. If it did, one could take a reductionist view and attempt to give equal time each part to

achieve balance. Balance includes giving attention to what connects each part of the medicine

wheel; in other words, the relationships between all the parts. Ross (1996) noted the extent to

which connections are emphasized. He stated that "everything the healers explore seems to boil

down to one issue: connection and disconnection. It's as if *some state of disconnection* (or

unhealthy connection leading to a desire to be disconnected) *is assumed to be the cause of the*

problem" (p. 135). Several authors have stated that people are imbedded in interconnections

where they are not only relating to one another, but more accurately they are in relationship with

all the other people at once (Janzen et al., 1994; Nelson, Kelly, & McPherson, 1985; Pepper and

Henry, 1991; Supernault, 1993; Wilkinson, 1980). Ross (1996) has described this concept in a

larger view and related it to how Aboriginal children are raised in a traditional way:

> Children had to be shown that they were involved in ongoing relationships, not just with
> each other but also with all other things around them. They had to learn to see themselves
> not as separate, individual beings but as active participants in webs of complex
> interdependencies with animals, plants, the earth and the waters....At its most basic, life
> was taught to be a process of *connecting* yourself, in accommodating ways, to everything
> and everyone around you. (p. 66)

On another level, Aiken (1990), Hallowell (1992), and Zieba (1990) stated that relationships are

also made with "other than human beings" and that these interpersonal relationships are essential

to their well-being. Other authors have emphasized that there is just as much concern and

attention given to looking at connections within individuals (Ermine, 1995; Guay, 1994; Nabigon,

nd., 1993) . Dion Buffalo (1990) has stated that "the traditional Cree approach is also holistic,

concerned with and giving equal consideration to an individual's mental, physical, emotional, and

spiritual well-being within the Sacred Circle of the universe" (pp. 118-119).Thus, in order to

achieve balance people need to constantly foster the relationships between entities outside of, as

well as within themselves. It is this fostering of relationships that is central to the next key

concept, harmony.

Harmony is frequently mentioned as a key concept to be achieved, whether it is with others (Brant, 1990; Ellison Williams & Ellison, 1996; Herring, 1996), in the world (Attneave, 1982; Canda, 1983), in the universe (Regnier, 1994; Johnston, 1976), for a good life (Dion Buffalo, 1990; Longclaws, 1994), or within one's self (Odjig White, 1996; Supernault, 1993). Nabigon (nd.) shared a personal life story outlining how harmony was defined for him. He stated:

> A long time ago, my grandmother told me that the earth is our garden. The Creator made this garden for us and it was up to us to live in harmony with our garden. When we take from Mother Earth to feed ourselves, we should always thank Mother Earth and the animals and put something back. The principle "Whenever you take, you must also give", was what my grandmother was teaching. Grandfather, a trapper, never wasted anything that he killed. He used everything for his livelihood. He had tremendous respect for all the four-legged creatures. My father was the same way. He was very close to nature. Through his way of living, he taught me the value of respect for nature, although I never paid attention to his teachings for many, many years. I am glad my grandfather and my father taught me the value of respecting nature. (p. 49)

Thus, Nabigon suggested that harmony includes respect for our relationships with others and within oneself and the give and take between entities. According to Longclaws, Rosebush, and Barkwell (1993) "when one is in harmony with nature, one is in harmony with the Creator, at peace with oneself and with the whole tribal group" (p. 16). Peat (1994) gave an expanded outlined of harmony: It involves the relationships of all the various powers, energies, and beings of the cosmos and that when everyone, human, animal, plant, and planet, fulfills their obligations and go about their proper business then they are in harmony. Aiken (1990) focussed on the metaphysical level and suggested that to be in harmony with the spirits, in other words the life around, people have to live within the cycles that move life. Pobihushchy (1986) has suggested harmony is finding a fit between the components of life through collaboration, sharing of what is available, cooperation, and respect for all elements of life. Overall, harmony involves peace,

respect, finding how connections can be best made, and sharing. This concept of harmony is

connected to the next key concept, growth.

Supernault (1993) suggested that growth and learning involves developing the body, mind,

heart, and spirit in a harmonious manner. Bopp et al. (1985) have outlined a view on growth and

change which suggested that all people have the capacity to grow and change and that their

growth is dependent upon using their volition to develop their physical, emotional, spiritual, and

mental aspects. Further, all of creation is constantly growing and changing, with the exception of

the ongoing cycles that are ever present. Using the metaphor of the *Sacred Tree* they stated:

> The *Sacred Tree* symbolizes the importance of pursuing life experiences which provide
> positive growth and development....In another sense the growth of the tree represents
> cycles of time and of life. The changes in the *Sacred Tree* during the changing seasons of
> the year represent the many changes in our life as we grow and develop our relationship to
> creation, a life-long process of becoming our true self. (p. 23)

In this view growth is a process which leads people to their true selves. Regnier (1994) and

Longclaws (1994) have viewed growth as movement through life cycles towards wholeness,

balance, interdependence or connectedness, and harmony with oneself and other living things.

They further noted that growth and these cycles are reflected in the first key concept noted, the

medicine wheel or the sacred circle. More specifically, growth is represented as the movement

towards the centre of the medicine wheel. Longclaws (1994) refers to the centre of the wheel as

oda aki, which is an Anishinabe term he has interpreted as meaning centredness. Absolon (1993)

referred to the centre of the wheel as the sacred fire. For both Absolon and Longclaws, when one

is centred that person is balanced, in harmony with creation, connected, and whole: They are at a

place for optimum growth and healing.

Concepts related to people being helped. One concept which is significant to many, if not

all, social work approaches is healing. Within an Aboriginal perspective, healing is not defined as

something that is done when an illness or problem is present. Instead healing is viewed as a

journey: it is something that is practiced daily throughout our lives (Absolon, 1993; Ross 1996).

Illness and problems are viewed as disconnections, imbalances, and disharmony (Canda, 1983;

Malloch, 1989; Pepper & Henry, 1991; Richardson, 1981; Ross, 1996). Thus, "healing is the

transition that restores the person, community, and nation to wholeness, connectedness, and

balance" (Regnier, 1994, p.135). In other words, healing is developing centredness (Longclaws,

1994). This view of healing has been noted by several authors (Absolon, 1993; Baker and

Kirkness, 1994; Clarkson et al., 1992; Ellison Williams & Ellison, 1996; McCormick, 1995).

From this perspective, an individual's healing is not only necessary for that individual, but

it is also important for all people around that person since they are all interconnected (Longclaws,

1994, p. 32). However, healing for an individual begins with that individual (Healing the

Caregiver, 1990). According to Aiken (1990) "the old Indian way of healing was first to know the

illness and to know one's self. And because the individual participates in the healing process it is

essential that a person needed to know themselves, their innermost core, their innermost spirit and

soul, their inner most strength" (p. 24). As such, healing is about people taking responsibility for

their own learning and growth (Ross, 1996).

It is through the taking of responsibility for their own personal healing and growth that

individuals will be able to attain *pimatasiwin*, or *minopimatasiwin* (Cree)--the good life. Rose

Auger (1994), a Cree Elder, has reflected on this concept and stated:

> When you choose to make your life good, it will be good....The Creator gave you a sound
> mind and a incredible spirit and a way of being so that you can do anything right now
> [sic]! You can change that attitude same as you wake up in the morning and it's a new
> day. Your mind and everything else can be new. I've lived through hardship and horror,
> and I'm a loving, caring, and giving person because I choose to be that way. I choose to
> listen to the other side to guide me. (p.138)

Several authors noted that the good life is the goal of healing, learning, and life in general (Aiken,

1990; Bopp et al., 1985; Cajete.1994; Longclaws, 1994; Longclaws et al., 1993; Hallowell, 1992;

Ross, 1996). For example, Overholt and Callicott (1982) recognized that "'the central goal of

life,' which the Ojibwa designated by the term *pimadaziwin*, is to have 'life in the fullest sense, life

in the sense of longevity, health and freedom from misfortune'" (p. 151).

This growth and attempt to reach the good life is not just an individual focus. It also

involves the family and community. Herring (1996) spoke of self-actualization in a manner which

reflected the idea of reaching *pimatasiwin*. He suggested that "Native cultures emphasize

cooperation, harmony, interdependence, the achievement of socially oriented and group goals,

and collective responsibility. Thus the goal [of self actualization] is more akin to family and tribal

self-actualization" (p. 74).

Since the terms *pimatasiwin*, *minopimatasiwin*, and *pimadaziwin*, all refer to the good life,

the term *pimatasiwin* will be used throughout the remainder of this thesis when referring to this

concept.

Additional concepts. To reach *pimatasiwin*, particular values have been emphasized.

Benton-Banai (1988) noted that the values that were to be cherished by the Anishinabe people

included the values of wisdom, love, respect, bravery, honesty, humility, and truth. Nabigon (nd.),

and Briks (1983) have outlined several values emphasized by a Cree Elder. These include respect,

caring, faith, honesty, kindness, and sharing. On the other hand, there are some opposing

conditions that stem from an individual's fears and which affect a person's ability to reach a good

life. These conditions include envy, resentment, uncaringness, jealousy, a negative attitude, and

feeling inferior (Absolon, 1993; Briks, 1983; Nabigon, nd., 1993). Joe Cardinal, a Cree Elder

(cited in Meili, 1991) suggested how these opposing forces are addressed: "If the positive aspects

of the self are taken care of, the negative side will die a natural death" (p. 253).

In light of all the values emphasized, sharing is one of the values extensively mentioned

(Auger, 1994; Boldt & Long, 1984; Brant, 1990; Hamilton & Sinclair, 1991; Nabigon, nd.;

O'Meara, 1996; Sue & Sue, 1990). O'Meara (1996) noted that practical and sacred knowledge,

life experiences, and food were some of the many things shared between people. She further

noted that sharing was the most natural way of developing human relations. Smith Attimoyoo, a

Cree/Saulteaux Elder, shared his thoughts on sharing at the Plains Cree Conference in 1975. He

stated:

> We may have a little piece of bannock, the only piece in the cupboard. We don't say,
> "Well I'm going to save this for tomorrow, I may want this tomorrow." But instead my
> mother or my wife, makes that tea and serves this little piece of bannock that she has.
> That's the kind of sharing that we have to take to our young people so that once again
> they may be able to tell the values that we have, to maintain this sharing and this living
> together. (cited in Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1979, p. 52)

According to Brant (1990) sharing is tied to equality and democracy in that everyone is

considered as valuable as any other person and treated accordingly. It also reduces such

conditions as greed, envy and arrogance that may cause conflict within the group. Zieba (1990)

suggested that sharing is so fundamentally important that any breach would result in sickness.

Another value extensively emphasized is respect (Aiken, 1990; Briks, 1983; Clarkson et al., 1992; Guay, 1994; Nabigon, nd, 1993.; Nelson et al., 1985; Niezen, 1993). In conversation with a Cree Elder, Briks (1983) was informed that one of the foundations of the Elder's culture was respect. According to Calliou (1995) "a premise of the First Nations world is that we unconditionally respect all beings because we all begin as seeds from the same materials of this Mother Earth. In the circle no one individual (two-legged, four-legged, mineral, plant, etc.) is deemed 'more than' or 'less than' another, so that treatment which elevates or denigrates one or the other is ruled out" (p. 67). Respect has been defined as meaning to show honour, esteem, or to treat someone or something with deference and courtesy (Bopp et al., 1985). It is a central responsibility in all relationships, including spiritual relationships (Hampton, Hampton, Kinunwa, & Kinunwa, 1995; Zieba, 1990).

Spirituality is another concept that is frequently raised and merits particular attention (Aitken, 1990; Bopp et al. 1985; Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1979; Clarkson et al., 1993; Ermine, 1995; Hampton et al., 1995; Longclaws, 1994; Longclaws et al., 1993; Nabigon, 1993; Peat, 1994). According to Ermine (1995) Aboriginal epistemology is grounded in the spirit. Aiken (1990) stated that Aboriginal, particularly Ojibway, philosophy is spiritual. Cajete (1994) has said that "all things and all thoughts are related through spirit" (p. 44). On another note, Ellison Williams and Ellison (1996) suggested that healing involves the spiritual aspect of people. Zieba (1990) noted that spirituality is a key aspect to Aboriginal healers who were either herbalist, ritualist, or charismatic Pentecostal healer. Overall, "the aboriginal worldview emphasizes the spirituality of all aspects of life and being" (Pobihushchy, 1986, p. 119).

Perception of Person

View of human nature and activity orientation. Human nature in an Aboriginal approach is

seen as good, although the existence and expression of bad attributes by people are recognized

(Absolon, 1993; Attneave, 1982; Waldram, 1994). According to Longclaws (1994) "it was

believed that people were born good but that throughout life the teachings of the medicine wheel

provided guidance and therefore protection from evil forces present in the universe that could lead

people astray and off the good, or red, road" (p. 26). Further, while everyone has a direction and

purpose in life, they have to actively strive to develop themselves positively towards *pimatasiwin*

(Bopp et al., 1985; Dugan, 1985; Longclaws, 1994, Regnier, 1994). On another point, Hampton

et al. (1995) have stated that "while people develop to come to know their true nature, the

traditional Native also nurtures the experience of being alive" (p. 259). Thus, an Aboriginal

approach mainly views people as in the state of being (Nelson et al., 1985; Sue & Sue, 1990) but

also includes them in a state of being-in-becoming (Regnier, 1994). Both of these orientations are

implied by Aiken (1990): "I have learned that in the Indian world a really happy and full life is

gained by living within each moment and taking it in your life's journey. And thus each moment

does not have an end, but it may continue to live within us and to enrich us" (p. 34).

View of individuals, time orientation, and relationships. As previously noted, all people

have a purpose and are active as they strive to grow towards *pimatasiwin*. This growth and their

development takes place through people's active use of their volition (Bopp et al., 1985).

However, this does mean that they are only future time orientated. Brant (1990) stated that "the

Native person has an intuitive, personal and flexible concept of time" (p. 536). Indeed, past

personal and generational experiences are important, as well as how present events will affect

future generations (Benton-Banai, 1988; Clarkson et al., 1992; Ridington, 1982). According to

Nelson et al. (1990) "life is experienced as a series of circles. in which change is not a irreversible

line, but a curve bending backwards toward its beginning. Time extends from far in the past to far

into the future" (p. 237).

In regards to relationships, Johnston (1976) and Ross (1996) outlined that relationships

are highly significant to each person's well being and purpose since people influence, and are

influenced by, relationships. Ross emphasized that the "determination to place the primary

emphasis on studying the relationship between things--and to try to accommodate those

relationships instead of dominating the things within them--seems to lie at the heart of a great

many Aboriginal approaches to life" (p. 63). Further, these relationships are guided by good

conduct, since good conduct leads to *pimatasiwin* (Hallowell, 1992; Ross, 1996). Good conduct

in relationships also involves not interfering in and not judging the affairs of others since

interference and judgements limit a person's self-determination (Janzen et al., 1994; Good Tracks,

1989; Ross, 1996). Non interference also promotes positive interrelationships since any form of

coercion is discouraged (Brant, 1990). Jim Canipitatao, speaking in Cree, addressed the

importance of relationships and how they are to be maintained. In the English interpretation he

stated "We must help each other. We must help each other and ask for God's help to understand

each other, love each other and help each other. It is useless to confront each other, my relatives.

It is better to ask for unity, to work together, to think of our grandchildren. This is the Cree way"

(cited in Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1975, p. 43). Overall, positive relationships are central

to an Aboriginal approach.

Views on Functioning

Role of history and individual development. According to Duran and Duran (1995),

Janzen et al. (1994), LaDue (1994), and Morrissette et al. (1993) Aboriginal peoples' histories

have greatly affected them. Specifically, the process and effects of colonization have to be

understood, not only as a structured relationship, but as a personal experience (Morrissette et al.,

1993). McKenzie and Morrissette (1993) have suggested that the spiritual aspect of Aboriginal

people have suffered the greatest stress due to colonization and that this aspect requires special

attention. Duran and Duran (1995) discussed colonization in relation to psychology. Their

statement applies equally to social work. They stated:

> The past five hundred years have been devastating to our communities; the effects of this
> systematic genocide are currently being felt by our people. The effects of the genocide are
> quite personalized and pathologized by our profession via the diagnosing and labelling
> tools designed for this purpose. If the labelling and diagnosing process is to have any
> historical truth, it should incorporate a diagnostic category that reflects the effects of
> genocide. Such a diagnosis would be "acute and/or chronic reaction to colonialism." (p. 6)

Thus, an Aboriginal approach incorporates historical factors such as the effects of colonization on

the person.

Equally important as the effects of colonization on people's functioning is the cyclic nature

of life. This cycle has been viewed in relation to the medicine wheel where life is seen as having

four key phases (Bopp et al., 1985; Guay, 1994; Calliou, 1995). Within each phase there are tasks

that can be developed. However, these tasks are not limited to particular phases in life, but are

ever present for people to address throughout their life time. This is reflected in comments made

by Bopp et al. (1985):

> Certainly, the fundamental value of this tool (the medicine wheel) is a way of measuring
> our own progress and development, and a means for assessing what we must work on

next in our journey through life. One final warning is needed. It is dangerous to categorize yourself as a "northern person" or a "eastern person". In order to use the wheel correctly, you must visualize yourself in the centre of the wheel, connected equally to all points by the power of your will....What we are really doing is using the patterns found in nature...to understand our own selves. (p. 40)

Thus, while it is possible to describe particular developments and achievements on relation to particular life stages (Longclaws et al., 1993; Longclaws, 1994), these phases are primarily significant to people individually so that they may be able to better understand their own development.

Importance of consciousness and unconsciousness. Dion Buffalo (1990) recognized the importance of the unconscious for the Plains Cree. She stated that they heal individuals by bringing the unconscious conflict and resistance to a conscious level where they can work with the issues. Often this process incorporates spiritual dimensions that are reached through dreams and visions. There is great attention given to the unconscious via spirits, altered states, dreams, and visions (Dugan, 1985; Dusenberry, 1962; Hallowell, 1992; Irwin, 1994; McPherson & Rabb, 1993; Niezen, 1993; Peat, 1994; Tofoya, 1989; Waldram, 1994). Irwin (1994) noted that among the traditional Plains peoples, dreams are given a strong ontological priority and are a source of knowledge and power. Hallowell (1992) discussed the importance of other than human persons, in others words, spiritual beings who offer guidance or *pawaganuk* in Cree (Dunsenberry, 1962). He suggested that other than human persons are contacted through dreams and that these contacts enhance a person's ability to reach *pimatasiwin.*

In discussion of the vision quest, Dugan (1985) has suggested that it was initiated for two reasons: As people approached a significant moment or undertaking in their lives and when they felt need for help beyond human power in order to cope with what was to come. Dugan (1985)

also suggested that "one of the principle motives for a person to undertake a vision quest was to discover direction and meaning for his life. This search had always included the communal dimension, for it was especially true in Indian society that the individual was defined in the context of the Tribe" (p. 156). Ermine (1995) reviewed this process of learning, securing power, enhancement, and help through such events as dreams and visions. He stated:

> In their quest to find meaning in the outer space. Aboriginal people turned to the inner space. This inner space is the universe of being within each person that is synonymous with the soul, the spirit, the self, or the being. The priceless core within each of us and the process of touching that essence is what Kierkegaard called inwardness ([1846] 1965, 24). Aboriginal people found a wholeness that permeated inwardness and that also extended into the outer space. Their fundamental insight was that all existence was connected and that the whole enmeshed the being in its inclusiveness. In the Aboriginal mind, therefore, an immanence is present that gives meaning to existence and forms the starting point for Aboriginal epistemology. (p. 103)

Ermine continued and noted that Cree people refer to this process as *mamatowisowin*. It is also important to note that this inward looking process is not only important for individuals, but for the community. Overall, Aboriginal philosophy is a spiritual philosophy that strongly incorporates the unconscious and conscious (Aiken, 1990).

Nature of change and the role of motivation. Change in an Aboriginal approach is tied to balance, relationships, and harmony. According to Peat (1994) Aboriginal peoples see the universe in a constant of flux that has an order of alliances, compacts, and relationships between the energies and spirits of the world. This order, being in flux, is always in a state of transition between order and chaos. As such balance lies in flux, transition, and change. In parallel with this transitional view, Chief Simon Baker (Baker & Kirkness, 1994) suggested that change occurs in cycles. In relation to people, they are always involved in transitional processes either directly or indirectly, internally or externally. When individuals are not balanced within, disconnected in their

relationships, or in disharmony with their environment, then change is required. At other times,

when an individual attempts to remain in a "stuck" balanced state their growth is hindered since

the world around them continues to change. Therefore, the nature of change is that it is an

ongoing transitional process of balancing and connecting relationships within the individual and

between individuals (Longclaws, 1994; Regnier, 1994; Ross, 1996). This process is not limited to

the individual, but also involves relationships on a familial, communal, and tribe or nation level

(Briks, 1983; LaDue, 1994; Longclaws et al., 1993).

The primary motivation for change lies in the desire to reach *pimatasiwin* (Aiken 1990;

Hallowell, 1992; Overholt & Callicott, 1982). Therefore, the motivation to change rests upon the

individual (Bopp et al., 1985; Ross, 1996). Ross (1996) emphasized this personal responsibility

for change:

> Only you can find the will to take those first steps towards trusting others, towards taking
> hold of the hands that reach down to help you. The healers can show you how they trust
> each other, how they don't let go of each other, but they can't force you to reach out
> yourself. They can only demonstrate, teach, encourage and receive. Everything else must
> come from the individual who needs the healing. (p. 190)

Helping Process Qualities

Focus of helping. While a few authors (Nelson et al., 1985; Niezen, 1993) have suggested

that an Aboriginal approach is person centred, passive, and supportive, it is evident that their

suggestion reflects many other authors views that the focus is upon the relationships of the people

being helped (Canda, 1983; Ellison Williams & Ellison, 1996; Longclaws et al., 1993; Longclaws,

1994; Malloch, 1989; McKenzie & Morrissette, 1993; Ross, 1994, 1996). Emphasizing

relationships as the focus of the change process, Duran and Duran (1995) have stated that:

Any psychology [or social work practice] of Native American people must have a direct impact on the way that any type of relationship is experienced. The experience of therapy or healing is no exception to the experience of being in the world. The need for healing can be explained by the fact that the client/community has lost the ability to be in harmony with the life process of which the client/community is a part. (p. 15)

Ross (1996) and Malloch (1989) have also expressed this view by suggesting that the focus of the helping process is restoring relationships that have become out of balance. Ellison Williams and Ellison (1996) included a spiritual aspect to the focus and stated "an intervention will need to restore physical well-being to the body and harmony to the damaged social and spiritual relationships" (p. 148). LaDue (1994) and Supernault (1993) noted the social aspect and that the focus can be on an individual, familial, community, or nation level of relationships. Clarkson et al. (1992) and McKenzie and Morrissette (1993) outlined that the relationship focus has parameters that extend to include people's relationships with the Creator and Mother Earth. In recognition that the persons offering help are in a relationship with the people receiving help, Canda (1983) and Nelson et al. (1985) emphasized that the people offering help are required to focus on maintaining their own balance, connectedness, and harmony, in other words, centredness. Antone and Hill (1990) noted a traditional teaching that directly speaks on this point: "Before you can reach out to help the people around you, you must first understand how to help yourself" (p. 7). Overall, the focus of therapy is upon relationships that occur between and within people, and people and other entities.

The helping relationship and specific techniques. The helping relationship is one where the helper and the person receiving the support are involved in a shared experience of learning and growing (Hampton et al., 1995). In this shared experience the helper is fundamentally a supporter involved in an interdependent relationship with the person receiving the support (Nelson et al.,

1985). Aiken (1990) described this as being helpful rather than being a helper. Miller (1996) and

Longclaws (1994) noted that people offering help have to be non-coercive and indirect in their

helping practices in order to respect individual autonomy. This reflects Boldt and Long (1984)

who noted that no human being has control over another's life, and Sue and Sue's (1990) and

Good Tracks (1989) discussion around Aboriginal people's value of non-interference. This

personal autonomy and interdependence emphasizes the point previously made that people have a

personal responsibility for their own growth as well as what they bring to the relationships they

are involved in (Ross, 1996). On the other hand, some healers have been noted to be very direct

and have used direct interventions to address such concerns as diabetes (Garro, 1990; Malloch,

1989; Tofoya, 1989; Young et al., 1989). Some healers who have been approached for support

have been directive and authoritarian in their interventions (Tofoya, 1989). However, most

interventions that are parallel with social work practice involve a relationship of interdependence

and support, and remain fairly indirect.

There are specific techniques that reflect this relationship. Storytelling is a technique

frequently mentioned method of addressing issues directly and indirectly (Bruchac, 1992; Dion

Buffalo, 1990; Longclaws et al., 1993; O'Meara, 1996; Peat, 1994; Ridington, 1982; Ross, 1996).

Another technique is the use of humour (Bruchac, 1992; Peat, 1994; Supernault, 1993; Tofoya,

1989). According to Aiken (1990) "humor to our people is probably one of the greatest medicinal

strengths" (p. 29). He considered it as an indirect nurturing approach that is non-confrontational

and non-interfering. Role modelling is another technique that can be indirect, non-confrontational,

and supportive (Brant, 1990; Hamilton & Sinclair, 1991; McCormick, 1995; Pepper & Henry,

1991; Ross, 1996). Katz and St Denis (1991) referred to the role modelling process as 'teacher as

healer' where a person lives the life that is to be taught and waits for the student to come seeking

knowledge. This person is referred to as *okiskinohamakew* in Cree, which translates to "'a person

who teaches what he has learned from life and people', 'one who serves as a guide'" (p. 31).

Related to role modelling is another helping process, although it is not specifically a

technique. This process is the referral to or support of Elders. Significantly, Elders are often seen

as people who have learned from life and are able to transmit the culture (Baker & Kirkness,

1994; Clarkson et al., 1992; Medicine, 1987; Malloch, 1989). Transmitting the culture is

considered a key aspect of the healing process for Aboriginal people (LaDue, 1994; Listening to

the Elders: 2, 1992; McKenzie & Morrissette, 1993; Morrissette et al., 1993). Elders are also

utilized as counsellors (Niezen, 1993; Stiegelbauer, 1996; Waldram, 1994) and are key figures in

unifying families (Red Horse, 1980). They offer spiritual guidance (Red Horse, 1980;

Stiegelbauer, 1994) and conduct ceremonies (Stiegelbauer, 1994; Canadian Plains Research

Centre, 1979).

Conducting ceremonies and following rituals are other significant techniques utilized in an

Aboriginal approach (Aiken, 1990; Benton-Banai, 1988; Longclaws et al., 1993; McCormick,

1995; Peat, 1994; Regnier, 1994; Ross, 1996). According to Longclaws (1994) "ceremonies

assist individuals in centring themselves and give them strength to participate in a lifelong learning

process" (p. 26). A few of the ceremonies include smudging and prayer (Ermine, 1995; Regnier,

1994), naming ceremonies (Johnston, 1976; Longclaws, 1994), pipe ceremonies (Paper, 1987,

1989; Zieba, 1990), sweat lodges (Bruchac, 1993; Ross 1996; Young et al., 1989),

nipakwesimowin (Cree) or thirst dances (O'Brodovich, 1969; Dusenberry, 1962), *wikkowin*

(Cree) or feasts for the dead (Nanooch cited in Meili, 1991; Johnston, 1987), and vision quests

(Dugan, 1985; McPherson & Rabb, 1993). Peat (1994) suggested that ceremonies are not rights to be exercised, but obligations to be fulfilled in order for renewal in the life cycle. Ceremonies are ways to facilitate healing and to discharge emotions through crying, yelling, talking, swearing, singing, dancing, and praying (Ross, 1996). The discharge of emotion in-and-of-itself is seen as healing method (McCormick, 1995). Overall, ceremonies are significant and are to be regularly used, even by the healthiest people (Ross, 1996).

The Helper

Specific knowledge and skills, and goal setting. Part of the reason Elders are respected as sources of help is because of their experiences and how they have learned from those experiences (Stiegelbauer, 1996). Teachers as healers need to live the life they wish to teach (Katz & St. Denis, 1991). People who conduct healing ceremonies go through a learning process that incorporates years of intense study (LaDue, 1994). In light of these points, the knowledge required to fully work as an Aboriginal healer is exhaustive. To utilize an Aboriginal approach in the helping process requires the ability to appropriately use at least some basic knowledge and skills that reflect and respect Aboriginal worldviews and the life styles that stem from these views. These include: expunging the expert role, maintaining humility, demonstrating centredness, acknowledging the spiritual, listening, being patient, using silence, and speaking from the heart.

People offering help need to recognize that they are not experts in the healing process (Ross, 1996). According to Nelson et al. (1985) "there is no inherent distinction between the helper and the helped" (p. 241). Humility, not judgement, should be emphasized (Ross, 1994, 1996). Helpers should incorporate personal experience to demonstrate alternatives for healing and therefore should be active in developing their own centredness (Nelson et al., 1985; Ross, 1996).

Since centredness involves the spiritual aspect of people, and since the helper role includes acting

as a mediator between the physical and spiritual aspects of creation, helpers need to acknowledge

the spiritual (Absolon, 1993; Malloch, 1989). Bruchac (1992), Peat (1994), and Miller (1996)

have emphasized the importance of listening and patience. Broken Nose (1992) related these

virtues to helpers: "The professional may need to alter his or her communication style, learning to

sit patiently through long pauses and to listen rather than to be directive or to interrupt the

speaker" (p. 384). Related to listening and patience is the use of silence. Peat (1994) reflected on

the role of silence and Aboriginal people. He said "coming-to-know arises out of silence. It is this

same quality of silence that strikes so forcefully when you meet with a Native person. Native

people love to gossip and will talk right through the night. Yet, at the same time, each person has

a quality of silence" (p. 75). Attneave (1982) related silence to helpers and suggested that they

should be prepared for periods of silence. Silence is related to another skill that should be

developed. According to Peat (1994):

> Out of this power of silence great oratory is born. When Native people speak they are not
> talking from the head, relating some theory, mentioning what they have read in some
> book, or what someone else has told them. Rather, they are speaking from the heart, from
> the traditions of their people, and from the knowledge of their land; they speak of what
> they have seen and heard and touched, and of what has been passed on to them by the
> traditions of their people. (p. 75).

Ross (1996) noted that speaking from the heart also includes the attempt to reach and touch the

listener's heart. This process is important because such actions honour the listener by having the

speaker sharing something that is truly meaningful, and not just information. Thus, it is by

reaching inward and speaking from their own heart that people are able to reach others.

71

Since the Aboriginal approach outlined here espouses personal responsibility, goal setting

would be determined by the person being helped (Aiken, 1990; Nelson et al., 1986). Unless the

person has approached a traditional healer asking for a particular problem to be cured, the

assessment of what goals are to be sought is determined by the person being helped as well

(Nelson et al., 1985). It is significant to recognize that some authors have suggested that all

Aboriginal people have a central goal. According to Cajete (1994) "the ultimate goal of

Indigenous education [and healing] was to be fully knowledgeable about one's innate spirituality"

(p. 42). As previously noted, this ultimate goal is also referred to as *pimatasiwin*, the good life.

Ceremonies, such as the vision quest, are methods that may be utilized to seek direction and

develop goals (Dugan, 1985; Storm, 1972). Through the vision quest individuals may be able to

dream. According to Cajete (1994) "dreams were deemed important avenues for glimpsing the

future, finding that which had been lost, understanding the causes of psychological disharmony,

and the origin of needs and wishes that must be honoured" (p. 143). Overall, goal setting is a

personal responsibility. Helpers utilizing an Aboriginal approach can only act to support the

person being helped to develop their goals.

Group Practices

Background. An Aboriginal approach is reflected in a particular group practice utilized by

many Aboriginal peoples, namely circles. Circles have been a part of Aboriginal cultures for

centuries. Hart (1996) suggested that historically ceremonies and council meetings of Aboriginal

peoples reflected their worldviews, including the circle format. Storm (1994) noted an example of

the Circle of Law that was implemented by the Blue Sky Cree in the 1860s. According to Regnier

(1995):

> Sacred Circle accounts are passed from generation to generation through ceremonies, legends, and storytelling. Sacred Circle symbolism is enacted in meetings, sun dances, sweat lodges, sweet grass ceremonies, pipe ceremonies, and feasts where participants confer, celebrate, and pray. This symbol represents unity, interdependence, and harmony among all beings in the universe, and time as the continual recurrence of natural patterns. (p. 316)

Longclaws (1994) noted that this passing down of circle symbolism and the enactment of the

circle in ceremonies, including sharing circles, continues. Thus, utilizing circles as a guiding

principle has been, and continues to be, a significant part of Aboriginal approaches in group

practices.

Key attributes. It has been suggested that healing requires people and that it is not

something people can do alone (Antone & Hill, 1990; Ross 1996). With this in mind, Antone and

Hill (1990) have noted that the circle is both a helping technique and process which sets the stage

for people's ongoing healing, growth, and self development. They identified four levels of circles

which all can be viewed as having healing properties. Level one is the talking circle where people

become aware of original hurts. Level two is the sharing circle where a high degree of trust is

formed and individuals begin to express painful emotions. Level three is the healing circle where

people work through memories of painful experiences and develop trust in the intuitive or

spiritual messages that they receive. Level four is the spiritual circle where people use their

intuition to tap into unconscious memories, integrate cultural teachings and practices, and begin

to reclaim their spiritual gifts that surface. Overall, they stated that the main focus of each of these

circles "is on the feelings that are conveyed by its members" (p. 6). With this last point in mind,

and unless stated otherwise, the terms talking, sharing, healing, and spiritual circles will be used

interchangeably since the general focus will be the primary topic of discussion.

The focus given by Antone and Hill (1990) is reflected in the article "Guidelines for Talking Circles" (1990). It outlined the purpose of circles, specifically to create a safe environment for people to share their views with one another. The article also identified a basic rule: "the group sits in a circle and each person gets a chance to say whatever is on their [*sic*] mind without being criticized or judged by others" (p. 12). Stemming from the purpose and basic rule, several characteristics define sharing circles. They include dignity, unity, acceptance, respect, and harmony (Hart, 1996; Regnier, 1995; Scott, 1990). Given these characteristics Regnier (1994) noted that participating in circles is often the first step to overcoming isolation, self denial, exclusion, being disenfranchised, alienation, and a loss of identity.

Circles vary in size (Hart, 1996; Guidelines for talking circles, 1990), but are generally small (Scott, 1990). It as been suggested that group sizes of 10 to 15 are often better (Guidelines for talking circles, 1990). Circles usually include an experienced facilitator, in other words a helper, who leads the group (Hart, 1996; Guidelines for talking circles, 1990). Participation by the participants is voluntary, including whether they speak in the circle (Hart, 1996; Scott, 1991). However, if they enter the circle, all attempts are to be made by the participants to remain until everyone has had a chance to express themselves (Hart, 1996; Scott, 1991). Time pressure for participants to contribute is limited since people are allowed to speak freely without interruption (Guidelines for talking circles, 1990). The discussions can focus on a predetermined topic, or on whatever the participants desire to share (Hart, 1996). In her discussions with Scott (1991) Alice Modig suggested that the spiritual realm is unavoidable because so many symbols are present in the circle. However, the degree to which traditional Aboriginal spirituality is included can vary,

since circles can include sacred items and other ceremonies (Clarkson et al., 1992; Hart, 1996; Scott, 1991).

Members' and helpers' roles. According to several authors, everyone is mutually a teacher *and* learner, even while in a sharing circle (Hart, 1996; Katz & St. Denis, 1991). In order to teach and learn from others in the circle, participants, which includes the members and the helper, are required to have humility, strength, and courage. Ross (1996) related these three attributes to the circle:

> This is my understanding of strength, the strength to acknowledge that while all the relationships that surround us do not *need* us, we have a responsibility to contribute to them positively as long as we remain within them....Sometimes it takes sitting in a circle with people who have, despite horrible beginnings in their lives, found the courage to move farther up that healing mountain than you ever imagined anyone could go. Whatever it takes, this combination of humility, strength and courage seems to be the only way to open you up enough to start learning who and what you might become. (p. 191)

In addition to these three attributes, several other practices to be exercised by participants have been emphasized.

One practice to be exercised is respect. According to Peat (1994) "healing begins when we reach down into ourselves and understand the narrowness of our own perspectives and lives, show respect for another way of life, and are willing to learn from it" (p. 152). In light of Peat's comments, participants have to respect what has been said (Regnier, 1995), other peoples views (Katz & St. Denis, 1991), the privacy of others (Bopp et al., 1985; Supernault, 1995), and the wisdom of the council or circle as a whole (Bopp et al., 1985). They also have to utilize silent respect (Hart, 1996; Supernault, 1995).

Sharing oneself is also a practice to be exercised. People should feel free to express themselves in any manner that is comfortable, including through personal stories, examples,

metaphors, or by making analytical statements (Guidelines for talking circles, 1991). Modig stated

that her sharing involves speaking about her inner most feelings (cited in Scott, 1991). Sharing

may involve speaking, but people are not required to speak if they wish to remain silent

(Guidelines for talking circles, 1995; Hart, 1996). Antone and Hill (1990) stated that "while

everyone is encouraged to participate in the sharing or personal experiences within the circle, all

individuals make the personal choice as to the depth and level of sharing with which they feel

most comfortable" (p. 8). Further, Supernault (1995) suggested that people are expected to have

already put some thought into what they are presenting and not waste other participants' time

with endless speculation. Thus, sharing also involves being present in the circle as well as

contributing attentive support (Guidelines for talking circles, 1990).

Another practice is patient listening. People have to listen in order to understand the world

through the speaker's eyes (Supernault, 1995), and contribute to solutions (Morrissette et al.,

1993). Bopp et al. (1985) suggested that people should "listen with courtesy to what others say,

even if you feel that what they are saying is worthless. Listen with your heart" (p. 76). Listening

also means that people are not to interrupt the speaker with their own thoughts or ideas (Clarkson

et al., 1992; Janzen et al., 1994; Morrissette et al., 1993). They are required to exercise patience

and listen in ways that are nonjudgemental, and without condemnation or ridicule (Guidelines for

talking circles, 1990; Regnier, 1994).

If there is to be any judging, it should be the self-judgement that is used to develop self-

determination (Regnier, 1994). However, people should try to focus their thoughts and comments

positively and avoid putting anyone down, including themselves (Hart, 1996). Participants should

not be focussing their thoughts on what they are going to say when their turn comes, but are

encouraged to pray silently for the one who is speaking (Guidelines for talking circles, 1990).

Antone and Hill (1990) suggested that participants should be prepared to be co-counsellors. They

define co-counselling as listening, paying attention, and supporting individuals with kindness and

warmth while they release any kind of distress. Overall, participants provide one another with

mutual support for the healing and growth processes (Antone and Hill, 1990; Regnier, 1995).

According to Hart (1996) the helper, sometimes referred to as the conductor or facilitator,

outlines and facilitates the process to be followed in the circle. Facilitators are to be

nonjudgemental, acknowledge contributions, and when necessary clarify comments (Guidelines

for talking circles, 1990). Antone and Hill (1990) suggested that while the facilitator should have

knowledge of healing, the participants can still help one another "even if the leader does not

possess a healing gift" (p. 7). They went on to suggest that the facilitator should be prepared to

implement some basic counselling techniques.

At times, Elders or traditional healers may be involved in sharing circles (Hart, 1996). In

these circumstances, they may have been asked to facilitate or make specific contributions to the

process. They may open and close (begin and end) the circle with a prayer, include sacred objects

to guide the process, and/or conduct other ceremonies, such as a pipe ceremony, within the circle

(Hart, 1996: Regnier, 1995). They may also contribute to the circle by providing teachings and

answers to specific questions (Stiegelbauer, 1996).

Processes. Hart (1996) has outlined a process for sharing circles:

Participants are seated in a circle facing towards the centre. There should be no gaps as all
are seated side by side. Once the process begins, the circle should not be broken by
individuals leaving during the process. There is usually a facilitator who leads the sharing
circle. This individual outlines the process to the group. Upon completing this task, the
facilitator has the individual on the immediate left begin the discussion. The format allows

individuals to focus on a predetermined topic, or to be free to share their thoughts on any topic they wish.

The first person may speak for any length of time, or not at all. Others in the group cannot interrupt the individual who is sharing....Once the individual has spoken, the person to the immediate left takes the role of speaker. This individual is given the same opportunities as the first person....The process continues until all people within the circle have shared. (p. 67)

Other process have been outlined and used for such activities as sentencing circles (Hollow Water Community Holistic Circle Healing, 1993), story circles (Regnier, 1995), and check-ins prior to meetings (Ross, 1996). They may include more than one go around in the circle (Scott, 1991) or in many instances include an opening and closing prayer and smudging (Hart, 1996; Hollow Water Community Holistic Circle Healing, 1993; Scott, 1991). An alternative to going around in the circle has been given (Guidelines for talking circles, 1990; Hart, 1996; Regnier, 1994; Scott, 1991). It requires the use of an object, such as a rock, feather, or talking stick. In this process, when an individual wishes to speak, they are required to be holding the object, otherwise they are to be listening to the speaker. When the speaker has finished they put the object down and allow someone else a chance to pick up and hold the object so that they may speak. Overall, the processes followed are similar.

There are often guidelines to support sharing circles. Antone and Hill (1990) had given some guidelines for the healing circle process:

1. For each person. You belong here just because you are here and for no other reason.
2. For each person. What is true for you will be determined by what is within you, by what you directly feel and by what you find making sense within you. The way in which you live inside yourself is important.
3. Our first purpose is to make contact with each other.
4. We will try to be as honest as possible in expressing who we really are and what we really feel. We will attempt to express as much as we can.

5.	We will listen to the person inside of each of us, and we will take ownership of our feelings.
6.	We will respect and listen to everyone.
7.	Everything discussed in the circle is real, and we do not pretend that it isn't.
8.	Any decisions made within the circle needs everyone to take part in some way.
9.	For circle leaders: I am responsible for protecting each member's place within the circle.
10.	For circle leaders: I will ensure that everyone in the circle is provided with the opportunity to speak and will ensure that you are heard. (p. 9)

They suggest that these guidelines are a way of building trust within the circle.

These process can lead to various results. Regnier (1994) suggested that "through the circle, students [participants] can visualize themselves as whole persons, see connections between different aspects of their lives, and determine how to balance their development" (p. 140). Through this reflection and interpretation, they may participate in a healing process. Antone and Hill (1990) suggested that healing occurs in the circle through the participant's expression of their feelings that stem from particularly painful experiences and through the attention given by all the participants to the speaker. Ross (1996) noted how sharing may result in normalizing peoples feelings: "When they come into the circles, however, they listen as team members tell their own stories, revealing the rage they felt. Each of those stories then serves to validate all of those feelings, in the sense of saying, 'yes, we know those feelings, they are *normal* feelings in this situation, there is nothing wrong or disturbing about you'" (pp. 152-153). Morrissette et al. (1993) noted that often these shared painful experiences can lead to collective action.

Katz and St. Denis (1991) suggested circles have been used by Cree communities to develop greater community understanding. They would gather in a circle, or as if in a circle, and place a topic metaphorically in the middle of the circle. Each person present would have an opportunity to present their view on the topic. The views are blended into a shared experience

until there is consensus on their shared insight. This process draws on the transpersonal

knowledge of community, as well respects each person's contributions. As a result, there are no

winners or losers in the process. They also suggested that there is an exponentially greater

understanding of the topic that can be accessed by all members. Storm (1972) also discussed this

circular learning process as well as the possible ramifications. He stated:

> If you and I were sitting in a circle of people on the prairie, and if I were then to place a
> painted drum or an eagle feather in the middle of this circle, each of us would perceive
> these objects differently....If the thing I were to place within our circle should be an
> abstraction, such as an idea, a feeling, or a philosophy, our perceptions of it would then be
> even more complicated than if the object had been a tangible thing. And further, the
> number of different perceptions of it would become greater as more and more people were
> added to our circle. The perception of any object, either tangible or abstract, is ultimately
> made a thousand times more complicated whenever it is viewed within the circle of *an*
> *entire People as a whole*. The understanding of this truth is the first lesson of the
> Medicine Wheel, and it is a vital part of Sun Dance teaching. (p. 4)

Overall, sharing circles are holistic in that everyone contributes to the degree they

personally choose. Since everyone has a chance to participate and not have their views judged,

there is a balanced approached taken in the process. Circles also involve respect, sharing, and

relationships between members which are expressed through listening, silence, patience, and

cooperation. The opportunity exists for participants to grow and develop individually and as a

circle member. In light of these points, it is apparent that sharing circles are derived from the

Medicine Wheel (Hart, 1996; Regnier, 1994).

Limitations

This Aboriginal approach has not been previously developed and written as an approach to

social work practice. Therefore, there has not been any direct critique of the approach. Indirectly,

Canda (1983) has critiqued the practice of shamanism in relation to social work practice. His

critique indirectly applies to this outline. He stated that "traditional shamans are often just as ethnocentric as many Western helping professionals" (p. 20). Thus, the approach may not be applicable to other than people who are part of traditionally orientated Aboriginal cultures.

He added that certain methods of treatment may be inadequate or even harmful. For example, some ceremonies involve significant degrees of sacrifice. This sacrifice may not be appropriate for some people. He also noted that shamans include elements of deception and manipulation of symbols to reinforce the confidence of the people being helped. Social work generally disapproves of deception. Finally, the shaman methodology emphasizes suggestibility and is unverifiable. Since social work is greatly based in empiricism, other ways of practice are not considered adequate or appropriate.

Summary of the Aboriginal Approach

The Aboriginal approach outlined is based upon an ancient symbol, the medicine wheel. The key concepts stemming from this approach include wholeness, balance, connectedness, harmony, and growth. Other important concepts include healing, *pimatasiwin*, spirituality and certain values, particularly sharing and respect. Human nature is viewed as being good, although existence of bad attributes are acknowledged. People are orientated towards being, and being-in-becoming, thus they are self-motivated to grow towards *pimatasiwin*. The focus of helping is on relationships within and between beings. The specific helping techniques reflect an indirect approach and include storytelling, role modelling, and ceremonies. The knowledge and skills required by helpers should reflect Aboriginal worldviews and personal experiences. The Aboriginal approach outlined is reflected in sharing circles, a format for working in groups that has been historically used by Aboriginal people. A sharing circle is a particular process of

facilitating groups that emphasizes safety, equality, sharing, and respect of and by the members. Finally, since the approach has not been formally developed within the realms of social work, the limitations have not been directly documented. However, indirectly it has been suggested that an Aboriginal approach is ethnocentric, deceptive, and possibly inadequate or harmful.

In following this section on an Aboriginal approach, the next section outlines the person centred, life model, and Aboriginal approaches together in order to make comparison between them.

Comparing the Approaches

Introduction

This section of the literature review ties the three previous sections together. The person centred, life model, and Aboriginal approaches to helping are summarized in eight tables in order make initial comparisons of the approaches. Following Tables two to nine, specific comparisons are made between the Aboriginal and person centred approaches, and the Aboriginal and the life model approach. The specific comparisons identify the similarities and differences between the approaches. The section ends with a summary.

Comparing the Three Approaches

The following eight tables, numbered 2 to 9, give an initial summary of the previous three sections that outlined the person centred, life model, and Aboriginal approaches to helping. The tables utilized the same topic headings found in each section so that the approaches can be compared one part at a time. The headings are: background, general attributes, perception of person, view on functioning, helping process qualities, the helper, group practices, and limitations.

82

Table 2:   Comparison of the backgrounds of the person centred, an Aboriginal, and life model approaches.

The Person Centred Approach	An Aboriginal Approach	Life Model Approach
Background		
Stems from a positivist view of human beings that emphasizes free will. Based on the work of Carl Rogers.	Based upon the medicine wheel, an ancient symbol of the universe. It has been generally applied to explain issues and abstract ideas.	Tied to systems theory and the Darwinian perspective of Herbert Spencer. Based on the work of Germain and Gitterman.

Table 3:   Comparison of the general attributes of the person centred, an Aboriginal, and life
model approaches.

The Person Centred Approach	An Aboriginal Approach	Life Model Approach
General Attributes		
Key concepts.		
A general theory focusing on developing self and interpersonal relationships through congruence, unconditional positive regard, and empathetic understanding.	A general theory which focuses on developing centredness and growth through the concepts of wholeness, balance, connectedness/relationships, and harmony.	A general theory focusing on maximizing growth and development through people's transactions with the environment. Mutual causality, stress, adaptation, and goodness of fit are emphasized.
Concepts related to people being helped.		
Focuses on people developing positive self-concepts, their own locus of evaluation, and a more open and flexible way of experiencing life.	Healing is a daily, lifelong journey to *pimatasiwin*—a good life—which is achieved through maintaining centredness.	People form attachments to others for optimal functioning, and to develop competence, self-direction, and positive self-esteem.
Additional concepts.		
People react to personal perceptions of their experiences as they strive towards self-actualization. Thus, the internal frame of reference is the best position to understand behaviours. Behaviours are generally consistent with people's self-concepts, otherwise incongruence and anxiety occurs. Well functioning people are accepting and congruent. Freedom is stressed.	In order to reach *pimatasiwin* certain values are emphasized, particularly sharing and respect, while others are avoided. Spirituality is vitally important as the basis of all connections and beings. As such, healing involves the spiritual aspect of people.	All previous concepts are influenced by the environment. People use the environment to meet their needs, thus reciprocal relationships exist between people and their environments.

Table 4:   Comparison of the perception of person as viewed by the person centred, an Aboriginal, and life model approaches.

The Person Centred Approach	An Aboriginal Approach	Life Model Approach
Perception of Person		
View of human nature and activity orientation.		
People are viewed as good and innately motivated to grow. They are orientated towards being, and being-in-becoming.	People are inherently good, but bad/evil/negativeness is acknowledged to exist. They are orientated towards being, and being-in-becoming.	People are viewed as positive and industrialistic, thus they are orientated towards doing.
View of individuals, time orientation, and relationships.		
People are purposeful and capable of making choices. Present time is emphasized. Significant changes do not occur except in relationships.	People are purposeful as they are attempting to reach *pimatasiwin*. They are past, present, and future time orientated. Relationships are highly significant to well-being and reaching *pimatasiwin*.	People are purposeful as they are striving to learn, grow, and develop. They are present time orientated. Relationships are central to people's development and survival.

Table 5: Comparison of the person centred, an Aboriginal, and life model approaches' views on functioning.

The Person Centred Approach	An Aboriginal Approach	Life Model Approach
View on Functioning		
Role of history and individual development.		
History is a minimal influence on people. Growth is emphasized rather than developmental stages.	History has influenced people individually and as groups. All life is based upon a cyclic nature, thus people go through developmental stages, but on a personal level.	History influences people on a generic level as well as personal functioning in that they develop patterns of interactions. Human development is nonstage orientated.
Importance of consciousness-unconsciousness.		
The unconscious is not focussed upon, but it is acknowledged. The helping process includes bringing the unconscious to conscious.	Unconsciousness and consciousness are important and both are incorporated in the helping process.	Factors associated with unconsciousness and consciousness are minimally considered.
Nature of change and the role of motivation.		
Change is characterized as a shift from a rigid mode experiencing self to one of openness and flexibility. Motivation is an innate drive towards self-actualization.	Change is tied to balancing, maintaining relationships, and harmony of the whole. The whole, the universe, is in a constant state of flux and cyclic transitions, thus change is ongoing. Motivation stems from within individuals and their desire to reach *pimatasiwin*.	Change stems from individuals enhancing their capacity to cope with the challenges in the environment, namely life transitions, environmental pressures, and maladaptive interpersonal processes. Motivation stems from the desire to alleviate stress.

Table 6:   Comparison of the Person Centred, an Aboriginal, and life model approaches'
                helping process qualities.

The Person Centred Approach	An Aboriginal Approach	Life Model Approach
Helping Process Qualities		
Focus of helping.		
The focus is on the person, not the problem the person presents.	The focus is on relationships that exist on various levels.	The focus is on the interface between people and their environments.
The helping relationship and specific techniques.		
The helping relationship is very important and is used by individuals for growth and development. It is non-directive, and characterized by equality, nonpossessive warmth, empathetic understanding, and genuineness. The focus is placed upon attitude. Thus, techniques are general and include listening, accepting, respecting, understanding, and responding.	The helping relationship is an interdependent one where experiences of learning and growing are shared. It is to be supportive, helpful, non-coercive, respectful of individual autonomy, and generally indirect. Techniques are general and include storytelling, use of humour, role modelling, ceremonies, and participation of Elders.	The helping relationship is characterized by mutuality, openness, and authenticity. The helper moves away from a professional stance and is responsible for providing conditions for the persons' success. The person being helped is responsible for the work to change. Techniques are generic.

Table 7:   Comparison of the helper in the person centred, an Aboriginal, and life model approaches.

The Person Centred Approach	An Aboriginal Approach	Life Model Approach
The Helper		
Specific knowledge and skills, and goal setting.		
Specific knowledge is seen as possibly hindering the helping process. Helpers have significant freedom and act only as a guide in the helping process. The helper's role is to have no role. The skills include the spiritual and indescribable. The overall goal is to support the growth process towards higher self-worth. Other goals are set by the person being helped.	Helpers are required to have experiential knowledge of centredness and the issues. Knowledge and skills also include humility, use of silence, listening, and speaking from the heart. While the ultimate goal is to reach *pimatasiwin*, other goals are determined by the person being helped.	Specific knowledge focuses on problem definition, assessment, and the phases of the helping process. Skills focus on assessment and include completing ecomaps and genograms, and individual, family, group, and organizational practices. Goals are based upon understanding the problem mutually.

Table 8:   Comparison of the group practices guided by the person centred, an Aboriginal, and life model approaches.

The Person Centred Approach	An Aboriginal Approach	Life Model Approach
Group Practices		
Background.		
Beginning in the 1960s, encounter groups have taken on considerable variation. Aspects of them can be found in social skills training groups, communication workshops, psycho-educational groups, religious growth groups, and self-help groups.	Circles have been a part of Aboriginal cultures historically and are based upon the medicine wheel perspective. They have been used for ceremonies and meetings and continue to be exercised as a group format.	Mutual aid groups are rooted in the ecological approach and the work of Schwartz who has written on groups during the past several decades. More recently, they have been developed further by Shulman and Gitterman.
Key attributes.		
Ranging in size from 8 to 20 members, these groups are time limited, focus on the here-and-now, support the removal of social facades, and have extensive freedom for individuals. Attributes include a climate of safety, expression of immediate feelings, mutual trust, understanding, openness, feedback, change, risk, and transference of learning to their situations. Overall, they follow the same principles of the person centred approach and are guided by humanistic values.	Circles vary in size, but generally range from 10 to 15 people. All members participate voluntarily. The focus is determined by the members and there is a lack of emphasis on time limits. The spiritual realm is included, although the degree which traditional Aboriginal spirituality is included may vary. Characteristics include dignity, unity, acceptance, respect, and harmony, thus they reflect an Aboriginal approach.	The focus of the group is to support members to help one another address the interrelated problems of living described in the life model—life transitions, environmental pressures, and maladaptive interpersonal processes. Three essential ideas detail the mutual aid process: people are in a symbiotic relationship with their environment; the relationship faces a block; and the helper reaches for the strengths of the people.

Table 8 continued: Comparison of the group practices guided by the person centred, life model, and Aboriginal approaches.

The Person Centred Approach	An Aboriginal Approach	Life Model Approach
Group Practices		
Member's and helper's roles.		
Members are open to communication, feedback and interpersonal exchange, well-intentioned, willing to be questioned, and experiment with new behaviours. Helpers are responsible to bring here-and-now feelings into the open, and to effect permanent change.	All people in the circle are learners and teachers. They are required to share, listen, not judge, and have humility, strength, courage, and respect. Helpers outline and facilitate circle processes and utilize some basic counselling techniques.	Members seek to have their needs met and offer help to one another. Helpers support members to relate to and help one another.
Processes.		.
Individuals are to come together through open discussions in a manner which is not characterized in ordinary life. Individuals develop authenticity in the way they relate to others through this process, thus producing personal changes.	Individuals share without interruption and judgement and contribute to a group understanding. Individuals develop a sense of wholistic connection.	Processes include sharing knowledge, views, values, experiences and strengths; bringing up taboo-issues; recognizing commonalities; developing universal perspectives and group empathy; making mutual demands; and solving individual problems.

Table 9:   Comparison of the limitations of the person centred, an Aboriginal, and life model approaches.

The Person Centred Approach	An Aboriginal Approach	Life Model Approach
Limitations		
The person centred approach is seen as too optimistic. It focuses on the positive only which may not affect the person being helped in any significant way. It tends not to be challenging and avoids the positive use of power by the helper. The key concepts are not sufficient for change for all clients at all times: Skills of intervention are still required. The key concepts do not support individuals in groups who may be in high need and have low self-esteem and awareness.	Since this Aboriginal approach has not been written upon as an approach to social work, it has not been critiqued. Indirectly it has been suggested that the approach is enthocentric, and that certain interventions may be inadequate or harmful.	The life model approach is seen as over-inclusive. It is descriptive and not prescriptive. The effects of interventions are not always clear. The assumption that affecting one part of the system will affect other parts appears not to be true. There is emphasis that individuals should accede to social pressures. It under estimates the role of power in human change. In groups, divergent interests make it hard for people to talk and listen each other.

Comparisons Between an Aboriginal and the Person Centred Approaches

Similarities. In review of the Aboriginal and person centred approaches several similarities are apparent. Both the Aboriginal and person centred approaches are general theories. They both consider the developing self and note the importance of interpersonal relationships. Each approach recognizes that development is a long term process towards a better way of life. Considering their developmental focus, each approach views human nature as good and suggests that people are orientated towards being and being-in-becoming. People are also seen as being able to make their own choices, thus they are purposeful. The approaches emphasize individual growth and that motivation for growth stems from within individuals. In the helping process, both

approaches state that relationships are very important, include a focus on providing an appropriate attitude, and utilize general techniques. The influence of spirituality in the helping process is also noted by each approach. There is a recognition by the approaches of an overall goal, as well as specific goals that are set by the person being helped.

In regards to group work practices, encounter groups and sharing circles can both be used in a wide variety of situations. They recognize the importance of providing a safe and trusting atmosphere for group members so that they can participate in providing and receiving support. Members are encouraged to participate, while helpers facilitate the processes.

Differences. The person centred approach and the Aboriginal approach outlined also have significant differences. Each approach comes from very different histories. In general, the person centred approach focuses primarily on developing the self, while an Aboriginal approach not only focuses upon the developing self, but also developing positive relationships between all beings. In turn, others beings are also focused upon since an individual is only one part of many relationships. Further, while both approaches focus within individuals, an Aboriginal approach expands this focus to include other levels, including families, communities, nations, and the spiritual. In the person centred approach, emphasis is placed upon people's behaviours which are a reflection of their attempts to self-actualize. An Aboriginal approach emphasizes the importance of values that build relationships as well as the spiritual aspect of life. In regards to their views of human nature, an Aboriginal approach holds a wider view than just viewing it as good in that it recognizes the existence of bad or negative forces. The approaches also hold different time orientations. The person centred approach is orientated to the present time while an Aboriginal approach recognizes the significance of the past, present, and future. As such, an Aboriginal

approach also recognizes the role of history and developmental stages on people while the person centred approach minimally recognizes these factors. Further, the unconscious is very important to an Aboriginal approach, whereas it is only acknowledged in the person centred approach. Change in a person centred approach focuses upon self. Change in an Aboriginal approach includes a focus on maintaining harmony and connections in a wholistic manner.

While both approaches view helping relationships as being equal and very important for growth, an Aboriginal approach expands this view and sees these relationships as interdependent ones where helpers also grow, learn, and share their lives in the process. Helpers in an Aboriginal approach require some specific knowledge that stems from experience, and particular skills that support the values espoused. Helpers utilizing a person centred approach are hinded by utilizing specific knowledge, and utilize basic communication skills and skills that are indescribable.

In regards to group practices, encounter groups utilize very flexible processes while sharing circles processes are more structured. There is an inclusion of the spiritual realm in sharing circles that is minimally, if at all, noted in encounter groups. Encounter group focus on helping people develop their true selves, while sharing circles also include emphasis on developing relationships and the whole group. Encounter group helpers are primarily facilitators, while sharing circle helpers participate fully as members in addition to facilitating.

Overall, while the Aboriginal approach outlined has many similarities to the person centred approach, there are many significant differences.

Comparisons Between an Aboriginal and the Life Model Approaches.

Similarities. Several similarities are evident upon review of the Aboriginal and life model approaches. Both approaches are general theories. They recognize the importance of relationships

to the helping process and individual growth. As such, each approach considers the connections between beings and the role of the environment. Human nature is viewed as being good and individuals are seen as purposeful. Each approach's focus of helping is placed upon relationships. Both approaches also state that the helping relationship is important to the person being helped and utilize general helping techniques. In regards to group practices, both mutual aid and sharing circle groups support the respect of the members and their helping contributions. The helpers in each method of group work facilitate the processes and encourages the members to participate.

Differences. The life model and Aboriginal approaches also have several differences. While they both see relationships as being important, they hold different views of relationships. The Aboriginal approach outlined considers relationships within and outsides of people, as well as between beings. Key to these relationships is the spiritual aspect. The life model approach primarily considers relationships between individuals and their environments. It does not consider to any significant degree relationships within individuals, between other than human beings, nor the spiritual aspect of relationships. Perhaps more significantly, the Aboriginal approaches view relationships as being of primary importance in-and-of-themselves, while the life model approach views relationships as factors in processes where individuals are working to overcome their problems and meet their needs. In other words, an Aboriginal approach is relationship orientated while the life model is problem orientated. Therefore, an Aboriginal approach emphasizes the importance of values that can build positive relationships to a far greater degree.

The life model approach views people as orientated to doing and the present time, while this Aboriginal approach views people as orientated to being and being in becoming, as well as having a past, present, and future time orientation. An Aboriginal approach views history,

developmental stages, and the unconscious as significant factors is in people's functioning, whereas the life model approach limitedly, if at all, considers these factors. The life model approach suggests that people primarily change to fit their environment and that this motivation for change stems from being under stress. An Aboriginal model sees change as a natural process occurring constantly throughout all of the universe. People's motivation for change lies in the desire to reach *pimatasiwin*.

In regards to the helping process, the focus of helping from this Aboriginal approach perspective is on the various levels of relationship, while the life model focuses on the problems that stem from the interface between people and their environments. While both approaches see the helping relationships as being important and mutual, this Aboriginal approach carries this view further in that the relationship is one where the helper and the person being helped are in an interdependent relationship where they can both learn and grow. A helper utilizing an Aboriginal approach is to have experiential knowledge of centeredness and the issues they are addressing, while a helper utilizing a life model has to be knowledgeable of problem definitions, assessments, and the phases of helping. Goals are determined by the person being helped in this Aboriginal approach and connect to life long processes. In the life model approach goals are specific to the problem and are determined mutually between the helper and the person being helped.

In regards to group processes, the sharing circle and mutual aid approaches have very different historical backgrounds. Mutual aid groups focus on having people help one another overcome problems of living. Sharing circles not only address problems, if they are directly addressed at all, but also focus on building and maintaining respectful, harmonious, and supportive relationships. While helpers offer some basic counselling techniques in sharing circles,

they also significantly participate in the learning and growing process. In mutual aid groups,

helpers concentrate on facilitating, and generally do not participate for growth or learning. In

order to support the building of equal, respectful, and harmonious relationships, sharing circles

have very structured processes. Mutual aid groups allow for a greater variety of processes.

Overall, while the Aboriginal and life model approaches have several similarities, there are

significant differences.

Summary of the Comparisons

This section has made some basic comparisons between an Aboriginal approach and the

person centred and life model approaches. The comparison demonstrated that the Aboriginal

approach outlined in this literature review has many similarities to both approaches. However,

there are many differences noted between this Aboriginal approach and the other two approaches.

Summary of the Literature Review

The first section of this literature review outlined the person centred approach to helping.

It followed parts of the outline used by Turner (1988) to review a variety of theories used to

guide social work practice. The person centred approach is rooted in the humanistic perspective,

has the key concepts of congruence, empathy, and unconditional positive regard guiding it, and

places emphasis on people growing towards self-actualization when given the right conditions.

The approach has been applied to groups in the form of encounter groups.

The second section outlined the life model approach. This section also followed Turner's

(1988) outline. The life model is rooted in the ecological perspective, has key concepts that focus

on the relationship between people and their environments, stress, adaptation, and goodness of fit.

It also focuses on problem solving. This approach has been applied to groups and is associated with mutual aid group work.

The third section outlined an Aboriginal approach to helping. In following Turner's (1988) outline, the approach's key concepts were noted. These concepts related to the medicine wheel and were identified as being wholeness, balance, connectedness, harmony, and growth. It focuses on supporting holistic relationships, maintaining values that positively support these relationships, and reaching for *pimatasiwin*—the good life. The Aboriginal approach outlined was noted to be reflected in the sharing circle group format.

The fourth section drew the three approaches together in eight tables which corresponded to seven of the headings of Turner's (1988) outline and the additional heading of group practices. The tables summarized the approaches and allowed for comparison between the three approaches one topic at a time. This section also outlined specific similarities and difference between the Aboriginal approach outlined and the person centred approach, and the Aboriginal and the life model approaches.

Based on the noted similarities, it appears that both the person centred and life model approaches can be utilized when working with Aboriginal peoples. However, the comparison of the two approaches with an Aboriginal approach also highlighted several differences. This suggests that while the person centred and life model approaches can be utilized when working with Aboriginal peoples, they may have several limitations that an Aboriginal approach may not face.

Considering that the Aboriginal approach outlined in this literature review is not a

developed social work approach, even though it has extensive historical roots, it is apparent that

research is needed to explore the attributes of an Aboriginal approach.

In light of these points, the following chapter outlines the research methodology and

design utilized to further explore a particular Aboriginal approach application addressed in this

literature review, namely sharing circles.

Chapter 3

Research Methodology and Design

Introduction

The methodology and design used for this study are described in this chapter. In order to

give the study a context, an overview of issues related to Aboriginal people and research is given

first. From this starting point, the study design is outlined. The participants and informants and

how I accessed the informants are described next. The data collection and analysis methods are

provided, followed by a discussion about the trustworthiness, ethical concerns, and limitations of

the study. The chapter closes with a summary.

Aboriginal Peoples and Research

It has been suggested by Webster and Nabigon (1992) that "it has not always been

understood, nor accepted, in behavioral sciences that cultural values, attitudes, and beliefs can

influence research results and can lead to unanticipated conflicts if research design and

methodology fail to reflect the strengths of community culture" (p. 160). Indeed, Collins and

Colorado (1987) outlined that the direction of much research since the early 1800s has acted to

oppress Aboriginal peoples. Presently scientific empiricism, which is based upon the positivist

paradigm, remains as the key basis of knowledge development in Western systems. McDonald and

Brownlee (1995) stated that the empiricism movement is also reflected in research involving

Aboriginal people. Unfortunately, this system "tends to discount as irrelevant intuitive wisdom,

mythology, and indigenous knowledge" (Hoare, Levy, and Robinson, 1993, p. 46, italics added).

Several authors have emphasized that Aboriginal peoples have a system of knowledge that

is a legitimate process of historical and scientific inquiry (Peat, 1994; Ross, 1996; Waldram,

1986). They also recognized that this process has different emphasis than Western positivist science. While Western positivist systems are generally based upon a mechanistic, reductionist view of the universe, where all living and non-living phenomena are considered as separate parts, Aboriginal knowledge systems are generally grounded in the natural world, focus on interconnectedness, and promote holism and balance (Hoare et al., 1993; Ross, 1996).

Ermine (1995) outlined that Aboriginal peoples traditionally try to gain understanding of many of the great mysteries of the universe by exploring existence subjectively. Subjectively exploring reality is achieved by individuals placing themselves in the stream of consciousness. He further stated that the Cree concept *Mamatowisowin*, "a capacity to tap the creative force of the inner space by use of all the faculties that constitute our being--it is to exercise inwardness," is an example of this process Aboriginal peoples have used to gain knowledge (p. 104). Peat (1994) also noted this inward nature of the experimentation process and referred to it as "experimentation of the mind" (p. 251).

Overall, Aboriginal science has its own preferential perspectives, goals, and processes to acquiring knowledge. In order to overcome the historical oppression of Aboriginal peoples in relation to research and to bring to the forefront Aboriginal knowledge, research approaches need to respect the worldviews of Aboriginal peoples. In attempts to develop this respect, some authors have supported the idea of utilizing a collaborative approach that integrates both Western and Aboriginal methods (Colorado, 1988; Hoare et al., 1993; McDonald & Brownlee, 1995).

Considering these noted differences between a positivist paradigm and Aboriginal science, an alternative to the Western positivist paradigm needed to be considered for such collaboration. The Western methods that are better suited to working collaboratively with Aboriginal science are

qualitative methods that are based upon phenomenologically orientated paradigms. These methods have several basic stances that are parallel to Aboriginal science, thus making them more appropriate for this study.

Study Design

In trying to establish integration of Western and Aboriginal methods in this study of sharing circles, two of several key points made by Colorado (1988) stood out and aided the development of the research design. First, she stated that "the nature of Native science is that it is qualitative and subjective rather than quantitative and objective. Feelings tell us whether we are prepared for the task, whether the situation is right, whether location is correct and whether there is balance" (p. 53). In order to respect the worldviews of the Aboriginal people I talked with, as well as my own worldview as a Cree man, it seemed appropriate to utilize a research approach that included a subjective stance. The second point was that "unlike Western science, Native science relies on total involvement of the person with his or her environment. Coming to truth in an Indian way involves spirit, body, mind and relationships" (p. 58). Any research design that was to be implemented for this study needed to allow myself to become involved in the process.

Points made by Hoare et al. (1993) were also considered. They suggested that Indigenous knowledge is based upon insight and reflection, as well as observation and experience. In light of these points, my personal insight, reflection, and experiences also needed to be significant components of the design.

In searching for an appropriate research approach I considered the paradigm bases of various research approaches. Patton (1975, cited in Maguire, 1987) defined the term paradigm as

"a worldview, a general perspective, a way of breaking down the complexity of the real world" (p. 10). Since paradigms can be considered as parallel to worldviews, the most appropriate paradigms would have some basic assumptions that would match those found within Aboriginal worldviews.

Phenomenologically orientated paradigms, such as idealism, state that people influence their environment by acting upon their individual perceptions (Bruyn, 1970; Fetterman, 1989). Each person's reality is just as significant as an objectively defined reality. Since their subjective realities are real and significant, then to set prior explicit assumptions about that reality is inappropriate. Thus, phenomenologically orientated approaches are generally inductive (Thorton & Garret, 1995). These basic points of phenomenologically orientated paradigms are parallel to several previously noted points found within Aboriginal worldviews. Based upon these commonalities, it appeared that research approaches that follow phenomenologically orientated paradigms should be considered for this study.

Ethnography typically follows an phenomenologically orientated paradigm and is defined as an art and science of describing a group or culture (Bruyn, 1970; Fetterman, 1989; Thorton, & Garret, 1995). While this background made ethnography initially appear as an appropriate research approach, additional factors deemed it to be suitable for studying sharing circles. Specifically, ethnography attempts to be holistic, embraces a multicultural reality, and "attempts to avoid inappropriate and unnecessary value judgements" (Fetterman, 1989, p. 33). Perhaps the most significant factor that made it suitable was the participatory nature of ethnography.

Ethnography is frequently characterized by participatory observation (Fetterman, 1989). It combines the participation of the researcher in the daily events under study and the maintenance of personal distance by the researcher in order to make observation. Its aim is for the researcher

"to take part in the socialization process just as the other participants do, to the point where his own inner experience can reflect the unity and structure of the whole" (Bruyn, 1970, p. 308; Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). The degree to which a researcher participates and observes has been noted to vary (Ellen. 1984; Neuman, 1997). Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) outlined one perspective of this variability. They suggested that the social roles for ethnographic field work include the following: complete observer, participant as observer, comparative involvement: subjective and sympathy. comparative detachment: objective and sympathy, observer as participant. and complete observer. They also suggested that the utilization of more than one role during the course of a study is considered appropriate, and at times needed.

Two of these participatory observation roles dominated this study, namely complete participant and participant as observer. As a member of the Aboriginal community, who has participated in sharing circles for numerous years, and who shares a similar fate as those individuals who have participated in this study, I am considered to be total immersed in the Aboriginal world. These dynamics made me a complete participant (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983; Reinharz, 1992). However. since the implementation of the study I was able to include an observation role. Therefore, I have also fulfilled the role of participant as observer. In this role, I relied on self-observations (Williams, Tutty, & Grinnell, 1995). Usually, this concept is defined in relation to the research participants. However, I have expanded self-observations to include myself as a participant.

In light of the participatory nature of ethnography, utilizing this approach also supported me in meeting the previously highlighted points. First, I was able to include my own, as well as the

participants', subjective views. Second, I was able to fully involve myself as a participant. Third, I was able to incorporate reflection, insight, and personal experiences.

Ethnography also involves gathering data from informants in the field (Fetterman, 1989). In light of this fact, interviewing is the second major characteristic of ethnography (Pearsall, 1970; Spradley, 1979). During the participatory observation component of this study I interviewed several individuals in order to discover their views and understandings of sharing circles. Again, in light of Colorado's (1988) point that Aboriginal science includes the subjective experience, not only were common themes important, but each individual's views were also significantly important. Therefore, I have included their personal "voices" in the presentation of the material.

Participants and Informants

In relation to my role of complete participant, and in light of the importance of a subjective stance and personal experience, the information obtained during this component of the study rested primarily upon *my participation* in sharing circles conducted in Northern Manitoba. The other people taking part in these sharing circles were mostly Aboriginal peoples from Northern Manitoba. There were a few non-Aboriginal people and Aboriginal people from other parts of Canada who also took part in these circles. While these individuals participated in the circles, they were not the focus of this study since I had not received their written consent that I could include them in this study.

In relation to the interviews, purposive or judgemental sampling procedures were followed (Monette et al., 1994; Neuman, 1997). Several criteria to select informants were developed on the basis of Trembley's (1957, cited in Johnson, 1990) work on selecting ethnographic informants. Trembley established five general criteria for picking informants. These five criteria were the

informant's formal and informal role in the community, the knowledge the informant held, the

informant's willingness to communicate, the informant's abilities to communicate, and the

informant's impartiality. In association with this work, the criteria established for selecting people

to be interviewed were that the individuals had to:

1.   self-identify themselves as Aboriginal;

2.   have conducted at least 10 sharing circle—an arbitrary picked limit;

3.   be able to communicate in English; and

4.   be eighteen years of age or older.

In regards to the first criterion, Aboriginal people were targeted since the study is focused

upon Aboriginal practices. The second criterion was identified under the assumption that

individuals who have conducted several sharing circles have learned and thought about sharing

circle processes to a greater degree than individuals who participated in only one or a few sharing

circles. These individuals who have a larger base of experience were deemed more likely to

provide a wider range of, and more in-depth, information. Fetterman's (1989) point that some

individuals are more culturally sensitive than others and thus "make excellent key actors or

informants" (p. 58) supported this criterion. The third criterion was set since I am not functionally

fluent in Cree or any other Aboriginal language and since I was not able to afford an interpreter.

The final criterion was established in order for the participants to make a personal decision to

participate in the study without having to seek permission elsewhere, such as from a legal

guardian.

Access to Key Informants

Since I am a member of the Aboriginal community, and since I am actively involved in such traditional Aboriginal activities as sharing circles, I am in contact with several individuals who conduct sharing circles. Utilizing aforementioned criteria, several individuals were identified as possible informants. I approached these individuals either in person or via the telephone on several occasions and informed them of this study.

Upon noting their interest in the study, I approached each individual in person to ask them if they would be willing to contribute to the study by participating in a reflective interview. In following Aboriginal protocol, this request was accompanied with the offering of tobacco to the participant. Acceptance of the tobacco, as well as verbal and written acceptance, acknowledged that they were willing to be interviewed for the study.

Data Collection

Data was collected through two methods, namely my participation in sharing circles and interviews with key informants.

Participation in Sharing Circles

During the period of the study I participated in numerous sharing circles. These sharing circles took place in various locations, including outside, people's homes and community meeting rooms. During these sharing circles I participated fully. No recording was completed during these processes. Peat (1994) shared his experience of recording through writing, which reflected my perspective on recording:

> I remember meeting with a Blackfoot Elder who, quite naturally, viewed me with considerable suspicion. "White men come to talk to me," she said. "They write things down on pieces of paper....And they always get them wrong."

Luckily I did not have a notebook with me at the time. Pretty early on I realized that if I was going to have any hope of understanding even the smallest aspect of this other world then I had to stop acting like a Western scientist. I had to trust my own observations, intuitions, and memory. Curiously enough, after I had left my notebook behind things did seem to work. Later on, when I made the decision to write this book I was astounded at how much I could remember of what people had said to me and how they had said it. I realized that by listening, and by not trying to record things or deliberately remember them, my mind had been moving in different ways. The person with the notebook and camera has chosen to maintain a critical distance, to act as an observer and resist the invitation, or the threat, of becoming too intimate with what lies outside the self. (p. 77)

By not recording during the events, I was able to become totally involved in the environment. My focus was on my experiences, physically, emotionally, spiritually, and mentally. Not recording events as they happened also respected the view of many Aboriginal peoples who participate in traditional ceremonies that recording should not take place. However, the sharing circles that I participated in occurred through a significant span of time. In order maintain my memory of the circles, I did make some reflective notes after the circles occurred.

Retrospective Interviews with Key Informants

My personal experience as a Cree man who participates in traditional activities including sharing circles has influenced the amount of knowledge available to me prior to the implementation of the study. As a result I was able to structure particular questions for a non-scheduled-standardized interview format. Monette et al. (1994) stated that this format consists of specific questions that are asked of all participants in a relaxed, conversational manner. It allows the researcher to review the topic under study with a more narrow focus while retaining the freedom to probe and rephrase questions. The interviewees are given the freedom to reply to the open-ended questions in any manner they desire and to utilize their own language and concepts in their responses (Emerson et al., 1995). This format, which is also identified as the semi-structured

interview, serves the purpose of making comparisons and representations to identify common

group beliefs and themes (Fetterman, 1989). It is used when the researcher understands the

fundamentals from the community's perspectives. In addition, "semi-structured interviews are

particularly appropriate when you want to compare information between and among people while

at the same time you wish to more fully understand each person's experience" (Tutty, Rothery, &

Grinnell, 1996).

Utilizing a non-scheduled-standardized format, a general question guideline was

developed. This guideline took the form of particular open ended questions that could be asked of

the key informants. Open ended questions allow the individual being interviewed to interpret the

question and are most useful during the discovery phase of research (Fetterman, 1989). The basic

questions utilized in this study were as follows.

1. What are sharing circles?

2. What is the process to conducting sharing circles?

3. Who participates in sharing circles?

4. Are there individuals who are not allowed to participate in sharing circles? Who?

5. What have people experienced when they have conducted sharing circles?

6. What beliefs do Aboriginal people who conduct sharing circles have about sharing

circles?

7. Do people become eligible to conduct sharing circles? How?

8. Where are sharing circles conducted? Are there reasons for particular locations?

9. When are sharing circles conducted? Are there reasons for particular times?

10. Why do people participate in sharing circles?

11. How many people can participate in sharing circles?

12. What do people need to know about sharing circles before they participate?

13. Are sharing circles similar to any other Aboriginal practices? Which ones?

14. Are there other Aboriginal ceremonies that can be included with sharing circles?

Which ones?

Deciding When to Stop Data Collection

Tutty et al. (1996) stated that the decision of identifying when enough data has been

collected to support a study is based upon on a researcher's ongoing reflections and analyses as

well as some practical parameters. Some guidelines in making the decision to stop data gathering

have been suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985, cited in Tutty et al., 1996). These include:

- All of your resources have been exhausted (e.g., time budget, limitations on access)
- All categories in which you hoped to collect data have been covered.
- Emergence of regularities, overlap, possible patterns, and duplication of data collected are now occurring with more and more frequency.
- Information divergent from your study's central focus is beginning to be collected. (p. 82)

Preferably, a researcher would go over the information already collected to see if it makes sense

and to see if there are any gaps to be filled prior to making the final decision to stop gathering

data.

The decision to stop gathering data was primarily based upon two factors. The first factors

was that enough information had been gathered to give a exploratory overview of the topic. The

second factor was that I was running out of resources and time to complete my thesis. While I

took a year of from my employment to complete my thesis, my financial income was limited. If I

was to interview other people, I would need to consider travelling more since access to

individuals which I knew and judged to be able to meet the purpose of this study were a

significant distance away. These two factors—enough information was gathered and limited time

and finances—helped me to determine that I had to stop gathering data.

<div align="center">Data Analysis</div>

Seeking Out Themes and Crystallization

Analysis of ethnographic material can take differing forms, involves many levels, and is

ongoing throughout the research process (Fetterman, 1989). Two methods dominated this study's

data analysis: Seeking out themes and crystallization. The process of seeking out themes has ties

to Glasser and Strauss's (1967) grounded theory and the process of comparative analysis. In brief,

comparative analysis involves the researcher shifting through, comparing, contrasting, and sorting

a mass of information from various sources until themes emerge. These themes are compared with

further observations of the phenomena to seek clarification of the themes. This process can be

ongoing where "the level of understanding increases geometrically as the ethnographer moves up

the conceptual ladder—mixing and matching patterns and building theory from the ground up"

(Fetterman, 1989, pp. 92-93).

In addition to seeking out themes I also remained aware of the crystallization of my

thoughts about a certain aspect of an event. Crystallization is "the result of a convergence of

similarities that spontaneously strike the ethnographer as relevant or important to the study"

(Fetterman, 1989, p. 101).

Process

Transcription and previewing. The analysis process for this study primarily followed the

outline given by Tutty et al. (1996). Upon completion of my interviews, the audiotapes were

transcribed verbatim by a paid assistant. I reviewed the audio tapes prior and after transcription in order to check for clarity and to confirm if the transcriptions were accurate.

First level coding. Once I previewed the data, I identified meaningful units. Tutty et al. (1996) stated that "units are the segments (or chunks) of information that are the building blocks of a classification scheme. A unit can consist of a single word, a partial or complete sentence, a paragraph, or more. It is a piece of transcript that you consider to be meaningful by itself" (p. 101). The units were then organized by identifying units of similar qualities and placing them together in a category. Each unit was placed in a category or fell into the miscellaneous category. This resulted in the development of several distinct categories. Each category was given a name, coded, and reviewed to see if it was logically constructed.

Second level coding. At this level, analysis shifted from the context of the interviewee and created categories to the context of the categories and interpreting what they meant (Tutty et al., 1996). At this point, categories were reviewed in relation to one another by comparing and contrasting them. Through this review, themes were identified and named.

Interpretations. Once the themes were identified, they were reviewed to look for any emerging relationships and/or meanings. These relationships and meanings were the grounds for final interpretations of the data. Verbatim quotations and thick descriptions of my participation in sharing circles were used to support the interpretations. Thick description entails a rich, detailed description of the study, including such factors as the description of the research participants, their circumstances, and the cultural meaning of events. Differences were also highlighted through verbatim quotations and thick description. Finally, points of crystallization were noted.

Establishing Trustworthiness

In the positivist paradigm, methods for establishing the rigour or adequacy of a study have been based upon the conventional criteria of internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity. However, Guba and Lincoln (1989) emphasized that such methods are fundamentally inappropriate when utilizing research approaches that do not follow the positivist paradigm. Alternate paradigms require alternate methods for judging adequacy. As an alternative they outlined criteria for judging adequacy that are based upon a constructivist paradigm and which are suitable for an ethnographic research approach.

They refer to this criteria as parallel criteria or trustworthiness. It runs conceptually parallel to the four criteria of the positivist framework, but they are adjusted for substituting a constructivist framework. The four criteria are credibility (truth value), transferability (applicability), dependability (consistency), and conformability (neutrality) (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Tutty, et al., 1996)

Credibility

Credibility is established when there is a match between the researcher's representative realities of the informants and the constructed realities of the informants (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). In other words, the research informants should be able to interpret the realities outlined by the researcher as reflecting their own experiences. It is viewed as being parallel to internal validity. I utilized four techniques to ensure that my views reflected the activities I participated in, as well as the realities of the informants. These techniques included prolonged engagement, peer debriefing, member checks, and verbatim quotations (Fetterman, 1989; Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

Prolonged engagement. This technique requires prolonged involvement with the informants in order to overcome misinformation, distortions, or presented "fronts." It involves immersing oneself in the informants context and establishing rapport and building trust with them so that they are encouraged to share their understanding and experiences of sharing circles (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

As a complete participant, my involvement with traditional ceremonies, including sharing circles, is extensive. I often participated in these ceremonies with the key informants. Further, my relationship with the informants was (is) also extensive. The shortest relationship extended a period of one and half years at the time of the interview. Most the relationships were established for approximately three years on average, with one being extensively longer. As a result of these prolonged engagements with the informants, it appeared to me that I had built a trusting relationship with each of the informants. For example, some of the key informants and I have shared intimate experiences in order to seek and give support to one another. In other instances we shared intimate details about ceremonies that would usually be held in confidence.

Peer debriefing. This technique involves engaging disinterested peers in extensive discussions about the findings, conclusions, analyses, and field stresses in order to help the researcher understand the posture, role, and values the researcher has taken. In addition a peer could help the researcher critically review the findings, conclusions, and analysis (Guba and Lincoln, 1989).

During the course of this study I engaged in in-depth and brief conversations with several peers. These peers included social work educators, directors of university programs, social workers, and Aboriginal helpers. These peers helped me to consider methodological steps in the

research design, alternative interpretations of the results, and influences of my personal values and biases. They provided me with substantial support emotionally and spiritually as well.

Member checks. This third technique, deemed to be the most crucial technique for establishing credibility, is where the participants provide feedback on the information collected and the conclusions drawn (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Tutty et al., 1996).

During the collection of data phase and analysis stage of this study, I regularly sought out the views of the research informants regarding the data and my interpretations. In the vast majority of situations, the informants agreed with the data and analysis. Indeed, there was a time when an informant stated that I "knew what sharing circles are about" and they questioned why I would be coming to ask them to confirm what was already stated. In the few instances where they viewed things differently, they stated such. However, they also stated that my reflections were not wrong, just different.

Verbatim quotations. Fetterman (1989) stated that "verbatim quotations are extremely useful in presenting a credible report of the research. Quotations allow the reader to judge the quality of the work--how close the ethnographer is to the thoughts of natives in the field--and to assess whether the ethnographer used such data appropriately to support the conclusions" (p. 22).

During the writing of the research findings I included verbatim quotations stemming from the interviews with the key informants. Further, I utilized language that reflected the realities of participants in sharing circles as opposed to relying solely on academic or social work jargon.

Transferability

Transferability, or the process for checking the degree of similarity between sending and receiving contexts, has been identified as being parallel to external validity or generalizability

(Guba & Lincoln, 1989). However, it is noted to differ in that while proof of generalizability rests on the inquirer and is absolute, the proof transferability rests on the receiver and is relative to contexts. In other words, it is up to the readers of a research study to decide whether or not the study is applicable to their situations. Thick description, stated to be equivalent to face validity, is the major method for establishing the degree of transferability (Fetterman, 1989; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Tutty et al., 1996).

The incorporation of the transferability criterion in this study was accomplished by including detailed accounts of particular events I encountered in sharing circles. The details included the physical settings, the times, and conditions surrounding particular events.

Dependability

Dependability is parallel to reliability in that it is concerned with the stability of data over time. However, it "excludes changes that occur because of overt methodological decisions by the evaluator or because of maturing reconstructions" since such changes are often expected in studies of ongoing development (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 242).

One way the dependability of a study is enhanced is by outlining changes and shifts in methodology and constructions of the research design. The first of two major changes and shifts that occurred during this study was the change in the number of informants that were to be interviewed. While I was initially intending to interview approximately 10 informants, which I estimated would be a saturation point, five informants were interviewed. The decision to stop at five informants was based upon that fact that information they provided gave a thorough overview of sharing circles. It was also based upon financial and time limitations I encountered. The second major change indirectly affected the study. This was the change in my thesis advisor

-5

that occurred late in the study. While some stress was associated with this change, the overall

effect was minimized. My original advisor was replaced by another committee member who was

already informed of my study since he was an original member of my thesis committee. A third

member joined the committee upon my request. She was also already informed of my study since

she was already providing me with personal and literary support.

Additional techniques for improving the dependability of a study are those techniques

described in the credibility criterion (Tutty, et al., 1996). Therefore, my prolonged engagement

with the informants and participants of the sharing circles, peer debriefing, member checks, and

verbatim quotations also supported this study's dependability.

Conformability

Conformability is parallel to objectivity. It is concerned with the integrity of the study and

whether the data, interpretations, and outcomes are rooted in the informants and the informants'

contexts studied (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). To increase conformability researchers should disclose

their degree of impartiality brought to the research process (Tutty et al., 1996). Verbatim

quotations also increase the conformability of a study. Fetterman (1989) stated that they "help

convey a sense of immediacy to the reader. In addition, judicious use of such raw data in reports

and ethnographies can provide the reader with sufficient data to determine whether the

ethnographer's interpretations and conclusions are warranted" (p. 115). Utilizing verbatim

quotations supported the conformability criterion by demonstrating that the data, interpretations,

and outcomes are rooted in the original sources.

This study's conformability was addressed through a detailed section outlining such things

as my interests in sharing circles, how I perceived the subject, my previous experiences with

sharing circles, and the impact of the informants and data upon me. It was also addressed by the inclusion of verbatim quotations.

Ethical Considerations

Ethics were consistently considered during the course of this study in order to ensure the well-being of the participants, informants, the Aboriginal community, and myself. Prior to proceeding with the study, ethical approval was sought and received by the Ethics Review Committee, Faculty of Social Work, University of Manitoba.

Upon approaching informants, I informed them of the study, including the process and goals. They were informed that they could end the interview process at any time, change questions to be more acceptable to them, and they did not have to answer any question or questions they did not wish to answer. I confirmed that they understood that their participation was voluntary and that no repercussions would follow if they decided not to participate or if they limited their participation. I also informed them that the information that they shared would remain confidential during this time. They were not threatened, deceived, or coerced in any way. All individuals I approached agreed to participate in the interviews. Upon agreeing to participate, they signed a consent form.

While I told each informant that their names would not be used each informant stated that it did not matter to them whether or not I used their names. Regardless, I used pseudonyms throughout the study to disguise the identity of the individuals.

I attempted to maintain an egalitarian approach through the study. I thought of myself as an equal to the informants; a person who desired to learn from them. I was also prepared to offer emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual support during the research process. If the supports

needed were beyond my abilities, I was prepared to facilitate the connection between the participant or participants and appropriate resources. I am also prepared to offer support after the completion of the research process.

The management of information was also handled ethically. The interviews were taped and notes were made after the interviews. These tapes and notes were separately stored in my home in an unidentifiable manner. Upon completion and approval of this thesis, the tapes and notes are to be destroyed.

One of the two most pressing ethical concerns I faced during this study was my role as a complete participant. Researchers in the role of complete participant do not inform people that the researcher is a researcher (Neuman, 1997). Ethically, I was concerned that the people were left assuming that I was only a participant; they were not told that I was researching sharing circles as well. This concern was somewhat resolved through the following means.

I began by recalling that a significant aspect of Aboriginal research included insight and reflection (Hoare et al., 1993). When reviewing my role as complete participant, I reflected back to situations where I participated in sharing circles prior to initiation of this study. During these reflections I focused upon my own reactions, thoughts, feelings, and experiences. I also focused on the group dynamics as a whole, as opposed to specific individuals. In this manner I was able to incorporate my complete participant role while not invading the privacy of other participants without their permission. Further, the concern that people were not informed about my research role was lessened since it was less applicable.

Once I began this study I informed the people around me, as well as people who asked, that I was researching sharing circles. The people generally and specifically informed raised no

objections to the study. In addition, I continued to reflect on these sharing circles in a manner

which did not focus on the specifics of each individual participant in the sharing circles. Thereby I

attempted to respect their privacy and lessen the concern of people being uniformed about my role

as a researcher.

Regardless, the concern remained that there were people who participated in sharing

circles who were not fully informed that I was reflecting upon and studying these sharing circles.

In the end, in order to include these reflections, I relied upon several ethical principles as outlined

by Spradley (1980). I considered the participants first by examining the implication of this

research from their perspective. I protected their privacy by not focusing upon any particular

individual and keeping them anonymous. I did not exploit any participants for personal gain in that

in exchange I was willing to, and did, provide various forms of support to these individuals.

Finally, I stated frequently to various people, including the informants, that a copy of my

completed thesis can be made available to them.

Another significant ethical concern related to Aboriginal culture. It has been recognized

that "historically, community based models of assessment or research have treated the dynamics

of cultures as peripheral to the goal of constructing methodologies that produce 'sound' and

'reliable' data" (Webster & Nabigon, 1992). La Fromboise and Plake (1983) noted that

researchers have provided little support to the development of problem solving that is compatible

with Aboriginal worldviews, concentrated on negative outcomes, and generally gave attention to

issues related to their interests while excluding Aboriginal interests. Peat (1994) highlighted the

concern of cultural appropriation, which he suggested included using something in a way that is

inappropriate, disrespectful, or distorted. He compounded this concern by emphasizing the point

that traditionally when "a person comes into relationship with certain knowledge he or she is not only transformed by it but must also assume responsibility for it" (p. 65). Most significant to this study were Gilchrist's (1994) concerns that related to internalized colonialism. She stated that:

> Aboriginal researchers who accept uncritically Western scientific paradigm (Chrisjohn, 1993:8) and overzealously apply its mandates, in an effort to be considered a legitimate social scientist and who abhors the possibility of being accused of being radical, could cause the greatest damage to Aboriginal communities. At best, they become coerced into a 'describing your tribe' type of research. In our drive to decolonize ourselves we must also decolonize our knowledge production process. (p. 61)

In order to offset these concerns I incorporated both Western and Aboriginal science in this study. In relation to research processes and community participation, I regularly took part and assisted in traditional ceremonies and rituals to support my inward journey. I also tried to follow proper conduct for working with Aboriginal people traditionally. For example, I offered tobacco to the informants to show my respect to them and acknowledge that I was interested in something they had. Another example was that I offered each of them a gift of a wool blanket after they shared their thoughts. These gifts were given in order to follow through with the concepts of mutual support and maintaining harmonious relationships. Upon completion and acceptance of this thesis, it will be made available to Aboriginal people, and non-Aboriginal people, upon their request. This will be done in order to further support a harmonious relationship between myself, the informants, the participants, and the Aboriginal community as a whole. It will also provide material which addresses a problem solving method that stems from the worldviews of Aboriginal people. Finally, I recognize that in the long term, I have a responsibility to the knowledge shared with me and developed. I will continue to respect this knowledge by utilizing it in a manner which will not only support myself, but the Aboriginal community.

Limitations

Language

The first of the limitations relates to the language criteria for informant selection. It has been stated that people who do not understand the Indigenous language, or any Indigenous language, are limited because the true meaning of ideas, phrases, connotations, and the worldviews in general are only understood at one level (Aitken, 1990). Peat (1994) has stated that:

> When we enter the world of Indigenous American languages, however, we encounter profoundly different concepts and worldviews. Indeed, not only are the concepts enfolded within the languages radically different, but even the meaning of language itself and the function of the sounds people make is profoundly different.
>
> Language, so traditional Indigenous people say, is the door into their world. (p. 221)

Since I am only able to understand Cree in a superficial way, I was limited in truly understanding what sharing circles and related concepts meant for the informants whose first language was other than English. This point may go as far as to reflect Peat's comment that I never truly entered the door into the informants' world. However, since I am a Aboriginal person, I do reflect and can reflect upon certain levels of an Aboriginal worldview.

The Complete Participant Role

Another limitation relates to the participatory role taken. As a Cree man who participates in traditional practices, including sharing circles, the role of complete participants appeared to be the most desirable role to take. However, this role has limitations. It has been noted that the range and character of the data that can be collected will often prove restricted in practice and that it would be hard to optimize time for data collection since the researcher will be consumed in the

participatory role (Pearsall, 1970; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983). It has also been suggested that

people living within a culture cannot see anything but a reflection of how the world is to them.

They are unaware of fundamental assumptions, take events for granted, and leave important data

unnoticed (Fetterman. 1989). With awareness of the limitation, total involvement was necessary in

order to follow aspects of an Aboriginal approach.

Retrospective Interviews and Reflection

Several concerns have been raised regarding retrospective interviews. According to

Fetterman (1989) these types of interviews do not elicit the most accurate information since

people forget and/or filter events. These concerns are also associated with self- reflection

(Williams et al., 1995). However, these retrospective and reflective views can be substantiated

with further work and observations (Fetterman, 1989; Spradley, 1980; Williams et al., 1995). In

this study, I relied upon both retrospective interviews and reflection to support each other. I also

utilized participatory observations as additional support.

"Going Native"

Another limitation of the complete participant role raised in the literature is the concern of

"going native," or adapting a complete participant role psychologically (Pearsall, 1970; Neuman,

1997). Lofland (1971) stated that greater intimacy involved with a commitment to the setting and

people "will increase the difficulty of [the researcher] bringing himself to write about them and to

disentangle himself emotionally in order eventually to make an analysis" (p. 94). By maintaining

detachment, a researcher is less likely to "go native" (Neuman, 1997).

While the concerns tied to "going native" are real, there are arguments against it. It is

significantly paternalistic, has an aura of limitation, and acts against basic grounds of Aboriginal

science previously noted. The paternalism rests in the particular wording, connotations, implications of the concept. "Going native" generally implies that adapting such a stance is inferior to not "going native." It suggests that researchers are able to see and understand the lives and events of the participants and informants better than the participants themselves. Following this line of reasoning further, as a Cree man who actively participates in sharing circles and other ceremonies, I am unable to research my own culture because I would be too entangled emotionally. This line of thinking does not recognize that as researcher I maintained heightened awareness of the settings around me, and did not take events for granted.

The contradiction rests in the epistemological roots of the statement versus the epistemological roots of ethnography. Ethnography is based upon phenomenologically orientated paradigms. More specifically, Spradley (1980) stated that "the central aim of ethnography is to understand another way of life from the native point of view" (p. 3). Ellen (1984) suggested that "ultimately, the ethnographer's success does not depend upon intellectual mastery, but upon the competence with which s/he can interact socially with the members of the field studied, and on the help provided by the informants" (p. 228). The criticism of "going native" is based upon maintaining an distant objective stance, found in positivistic paradigms. As such, it limits the basic stance of ethnography.

The third argument against this issue of "going native" is related to the need for epistemological humility. Spradley (1980) suggested that "as we come to understand personality, society, individuals, and environments from the perspective of other than the professional scientific cultures, it will lead to a sense of epistemological humility; as we become aware of the tentative nature of our theories, we are thus able to revise them to be less ethnocentric" (p. 15).

Aboriginal science incorporates insight and reflection. It emphasizes the importance of holistic involvement in the learning process, including the emotional component. "Going native", or more appropriately, holistic learning is a requirement of Aboriginal science. If I maintained distance from the participants, informants, and events on the ground that I was avoiding "going native", I would not be exercising epistemological humility. I may even be falling into Gilchrist's (1994) concern of internalized colonialism.

On these grounds, while the problems associated with "going native" were kept in mind and addressed, the avoidance of "going native" seemed inappropriate for this study.

Summary

This chapter outlined the research methodology and design of this study. It began with an overview of issues related to research and Aboriginal peoples. The design, participants, and informants were described, including how the informants were accessed. Methods of data collection, data analysis, establishing trustworthiness were outlined. The chapter closed with a discussion of ethical considerations and limitations to the study. The findings of the study are described in the following chapter.

Chapter Four

Findings

Introduction

This chapter describes the findings of this study. The chapter is divided into five major

themes; "Historical Considerations," "Processes—The Physical," "Healing—The Emotional,"

"Learning—The Mental," and "A Circular Worldview—The Spiritual." These headings were based

upon how I interpreted the meaning of the themes and the crystallization that emerged during the

data analysis stage. The chapter closes with a summary.

Historical Considerations

Several of the people interviewed spoke of the history of sharing circles. Indeed, Glen

emphasized that "in order to get across how important these things are you kind of need to do a

little historical overview." He later went on and stated that Aboriginal people have been doing

ceremonies for 40,000 years. Fanny also emphasized the extensive history of Aboriginal people

conducting ceremonies when she stated that sharing circles have "always been here and they were

very strong."

The people interviewed noted that throughout history there have been various purposes

for conducting sharing circles. Marg suggested that sharing circles were used for such things as

sharing information, arranging hunting expeditions, and arranging marriages. She also stated that,

"a long time ago we didn't have marriage counsellors. Sharing circles were used to strengthen a

relationship's ties." Other reasons sharing circles were utilized were for addressing delinquency, to

make decisions (Mary), and for spiritual gatherings where people prayed, sang, told stories

(Fanny). Fanny recalled one of these circles:

I remember my grandfather, as a child we went, he took us, my brothers and I, to a church. And it's just a little Pentecostal church. So, uh, he took us and the church was, this is a long, many years ago so, many, many years ago. And there were benches in the church, you know, just rough benches. And so people were, had instruments, you know, had a violin and also there was a violin there and a guitar. And there weren't very many people, let's say about 6 adults. And, uh, there was a small light, so maybe it was kerosene lamp, and they were sitting at the front of the church. And I was there too but I was lying down on the, one of the pews I guess and there was, you know, like one of the benches. And they were all in the front there and they were all looking at each oth..., facing each other, so I guess that's why we have circles is because people face towards the centre, face each other. And when you get a group of people together, then there's no choice but to sit in a circle. So, uh, they would sing hymns but then they would tell stories too. And so then, uh, so I would be very tired but I'd get to hear the stories and so they would tell. I think they were scary stories (laughter), talking about seeing lights and, you know, and spirits, you know. So that's what they were doing. They were sharing and so whenever anybody talked, I liked it because then they, I knew they would tell some of those very exciting, maybe a little scary and I would be on that trip with them. So I think they've been around forever. Since the beginning of time.

Glen and Bernie outlined that our awareness of the history of these ceremonies has been affected by oppression. Glen suggested that when British hierarchial systems were brought to North America, Aboriginal systems that were based upon a holistic view were oppressed. One of the effects of this oppression was that Aboriginal people lost touch with the many metaphysical understandings and practices they once commonly held. Bernie noted that Christian beliefs were imposed upon Aboriginal people and that their own belief system was invalidated. As a result they were disempowered. She stated:

> I've talked [previously in this interview] about people who have Christian beliefs and have been disempowered because they're Aboriginal people. And I think it [participating in sharing circles] gives them a sense of, "gee, yea, we really did have our belief systems. We really, they were really valid," you know. And I think it gives them a sense of, um, pride that they have a heritage, you know that prior to colonization that we [Aboriginal people] had our own ways of doing things.

Overall, each person interviewed noted the historical importance of sharing circles for Aboriginal people. Also, in several of the sharing circles which I participated there were discussions of the historical importance of Aboriginal ceremonies, including sharing circles, to the well being of Aboriginal people.

Processes-The Physical

While Glen noted that every sharing circle is unique and that he has supported participants to establish their own circle process, each person interviewed noted several common attributes to sharing circles. These attributes were also present in most of the sharing circles that I participated in. There are common descriptive features to sharing circles. As well, there are specific attributes associated with the facilitator, the participants, and the process. As such, the physical processes became a major theme.

Descriptive Features

Number of participants. In the sharing circles which I participated I noted that the number of participants varied. In one sharing circle there were only five participants while in another there were over sixty participants. In most of the other circles there were between 10 and 20 participants.

Glen, Mary, Bernie, and Fanny commented on the number of participants. While Bernie acknowledged that she "didn't think there's a limit" to the number of participants in a sharing circle, each of them suggested that a circle can be too large if there are more than twenty participants. They stated that when a group is too large people are less comfortable and less willing to share. Mary and Fanny suggested that up to 15 people would be best. Glen only identified a small group as being preferential. Smaller circles are preferred because people are

more willing to trust one another (Bernie), to talk (Mary), and to open up (Glen). The participants

would also have more time and space to talk (Fanny).

The effects of circle size on the degree of sharing by the participates were reflected in the

sharing circles which I participated. Generally, people were more willing to share their thoughts,

feelings, and experiences when the circles were smaller. However, in one situation where there

was over sixty people I noted that many of the participants had a significant willingness to share.

It is important to note that in this situation almost all of the people were from a community of

communities, thus were relatively known to one another.

Time. In the sharing circles which I participated I did not note any time restrictions. In the

circle with over sixty participants, the first person started sharing at approximately 3:15 P.M. and

the last person finished speaking at approximately 7:45 P.M.. In another circle of five participants

the total process lasted less than 20 minutes. Still, in another the sharing process lasted two days.

In this case, the circle stopped for lunch and for the evening. It resumed the next day where there

was a break for lunch again.

Bernie confirmed this point about time restrictions:

I don't think there's a limit. I mean usually a sharing circle takes as long as it needs to. I've
heard of them being, taking days to finish, to complete. I've never participated in one that's
that long but when we were doing them we would, it's given as much time as we needed
so if there were other things planned and we were still in the sharing circle, that was really
accepted and respected is that we weren't finished yet and sometimes it would go into the
afternoon hours where, you know, there were other things planned that this took
precedence over whatever else was planned because it was given enough time to finish.

Fanny noted that each person does not face a time restriction either. "Everybody has a chance to

speak. And people, I think, can take as long as they want to speak." However, when circles

become too large some people get a feeling that people cannot share as extensively as they would

like. Mary stated "if there's too many people...the people in there won't be able to, like have the time....Like when I've been in a large circle, I tend to, uh, don't want to say too much cause there's too many people and they want the other people to get a chance to speak."

Place. The sharing circles which I participated in took place in a variety of locations. These locations included outside, an office, a community conference room, a ceremonial lodge, people's homes, a church basement hall, a treatment centre, and in a classroom.

The people interviewed also noted a variety of places where sharing circles could occur, including community classrooms and halls (Glen), churches (Fanny), treatment centres (Bernie), teepees (Marg), hospitals, and camps (Mary). It was noted by Bernie that sharing circles can be conducted anywhere "as long as there's enough room so that people can be comfortable, not laying around but at least being able to sit comfortably." An additional criteria was identified by Fanny: "I think it's important to go some place that's quiet. So that everything, literally speaking has, can be heard. So it needs to be in a place so that the quietest person or the person with the lowest voice can be heard."

Seating arrangements. In each of the sharing circles which I participated, the participants were encouraged to sit in the circle so that they were not sitting behind one another. In most instances, if there were any gaps between people, these were closed by the people moving to sit side by side. In one circle an Elder outlined that it was important to close these gaps so that people would be brought closer together and unified as one. In another instance when there was a gap in the circle, it was purposefully made to face the eastern direction to represent the place of beginnings. In another instance, the room was too small for the number of people and some

participants were forced to sit behind others. Overall, people generally sat wherever they

preferred as long as it was within the circle.

Similarly, each of the informants noted that people sit in a circle facing one another. Fanny

stated that "people usually sit wherever they would like to sit" within the circle. She also

highlighted that if there were too many people then the circle "can be layered, like, uh, one circle

and then a ripple effect. another circle behind them and then another circle after that." Mary noted

that she attempts to get someone she knows to sit on her immediate left so they could begin the

sharing process.

Atmosphere. For the most part. in each of the sharing circles that I participated I noted

that the atmosphere was one of mutuality and support. While everyone was encouraged to benefit

from what was shared, they also were supported to share their own contributions through their

presence, what they had to say. and what they expressed emotionally. For example, in one sharing

circle the conductor emphasized that we could all learn from one another since we all have a

significant view of the things we had experienced. My feelings of this circle and most of the other

circles was that my contributions were just as significant as the other participants. I only

experienced one exception to this atmosphere. In the one circle where the conductor was less

clear in outlining the guidelines and process and who was also disruptive, I noticed that the

atmosphere was not as supportive. It seemed that the conductor's opinion was deemed as the

most important opinion. It was as if she took the role of an expert. At one time when she spoke to

what had been said by a participant I noticed that participant looking down and slightly shaking

her head negatively. It appeared to me that the participant was annoyed that what she had said

was, at least, neglected.

In regards to the informants, Glen discussed the importance of a cooperative atmosphere

and the avoidance of hierarchy. He stated:

> You know, here we have a hierarchal system which to me comes from the Europeans that
> clashed with, uh, tribes and the philosophies that are in a cyclical system. Now if you look
> at it in terms of the circle, what does, uh, what are some of the benefits or positive aspects
> of the circle itself? Well, it creates an atmosphere of cooperation. It creates an atmosphere
> of equality. Eh? You look at it. Just the symbol itself. You put people in a circle,
> everybody's the same. Now when you come from a hierarchal system where someone is at
> the front and someone is at the back, or at the top or the bottom, what does that induce. It
> creates competition. Someone's got to be better than someone. So it creates this, this
> atmosphere of someone who is better than or someone who's less than. See. So there's a
> difference.

Bernie also noted the lack of hierarchy: "It's not hierarchal. It's not like I'm the teacher and I know

everything. I'm there to learn as much as I'm, I'm sharing. As much as I can get from the stories

that I hear too that I learn a lot." Both Fanny and Bernie suggested that the lack of hierarchy

included the conductor as well. "Everybody in that circle is on the same plane. You know, there's

no hierarchy in the sharing circle. Everybody is the same. Even the facilitator should blend in to

that" (Fanny). Bernie also noted that facilitator's role.

> The facilitator needs to be a part of the, part of the group and you're no different, you're,
> you know, you're, um, you're there to help make sure that the circle keeps going but you
> also, again it's part of that whole thing that whatever I'm feeling as a facilitator I can share
> or whatever things are happening in my life that I'm finding hard or that I'm excited about
> or that I'm happy about. (Bernie)

The Conductor

Characteristics. Each person interviewed noted that sharing circles have conductors, who

are also referred to as a facilitator or leader. Fanny emphasized that the "leader has a huge role"

and that the strength of a sharing circle significantly depends upon the facilitator. She suggested

that the facilitator must be kind, gentle, respectful, moral, ethical, confident, strong, and flexible.

Mary suggested that the conductor should be a good listener, patient, and accommodating. Glen emphasized that facilitators should be accepting while Bernie emphasized that they should be respectful of the participants.

In most of the sharing circles that I participated it seemed to me that the conductors could be characterized by each of these attributes. For example, in one sharing circle it was clear that the conductor had an established process for conducting circles. He completed each task with assurance. He remained respectful of each participant by listening intently to each of them without interruption. When one participant became silent for an extended period of time, the conductor remained patient and waited for the individual to complete her turn. When another participant expressed significant grief, he demonstrated through his facial expressions that he was empathizing with the person. In another instance, another conductor was faced with a youth who was so impressed at holding the attention of several adults that he did not want to relinquish his turn. The conductor demonstrated his patience by waiting for the youth to end his turn at his pace. He did not reprimand the youth at any point during the circle. Another conductor demonstrated her gentleness and firmness through her mannerism. When she spoke her voice was soft and soothing, yet when she outlined the guidelines she appeared to be clear, consistent, and firm.

I noted only one sharing circle where the conductor did not demonstrate patience and respect. This conductor would interrupt the person speaking and give her own impressions of what was being said by the participant. She also demonstrated impatience through her body language and heavy loud sighs when someone else was speaking.

<u>Responsibilities.</u> Fanny suggested that the first responsibility of conductors of sharing

circles is to prepare themselves:

> There's a process for going into each circle, whether it's a healing circle or sharing circle or teaching circle. And that is I think you need to prepare yourself. Facilitators need to prepare themselves. And so there are different ways of preparing. I think some people will, uh, you know, smoke tobacco, many people smudge, um pray, and...really slow down. And I think then you have to really tune into yourself and, uh, I usually try to remind myself to, okay, now listen.

Similarly in the sharing circles that I participated, the first responsibility of the conductor

appeared to be the arranging of a smudge and an opening prayer. Smudging will be discussed in

more detail in a following section. The conductors of the circles that included both of these

practices assigned helpers to smudge everyone and at times requested that a participant--an Elder

if present-- say the prayer. At other times the conductors would say the prayer themselves. Bernie

commented on inclusion of a prayer as well: "Usually the facilitator said a prayer to start the

circle. Um. And that could be the facilitator or you could ask one of the participants to do it."

In most cases, the conductor outlined how the sharing circle process will occur. They

often emphasized the importance of listening to one another, of not interrupting others when they

speak, respecting what others are sharing, and maintaining confidentiality. For example, this was

emphasized by one conductor who stated something to the effect that "what is said in this circle is

to remain in this circle: You can only share with others outside this circle about what you have

shared and not what other people have shared." Another conductor stated something like "if you

take anything from this circle use it only in a good way that does not bring harm to anyone." It

was often stated that people were not required to talk if they did want to talk and that when their

turn came they could just pass their turn to the next person.

I noticed that in each of the sharing circles, with exception of two, the conductors gave precise guidelines for the circle and they did not consume a lot time outlining the guidelines and process, nor did any of them spend much time confirming that everyone understood the guidelines. In one of the two exceptions the conductor did not spend any time going over the guidelines. However, in this circle the people had regularly participated in circles with one another. In the other situation, the conductor was not precise in outlining the guidelines. She also spent more time, in comparison to the other conductors, asking the participants if each guideline she attempted to explain was "okay."

In regards to the people interviewed, they acknowledged that they inform the participants of the guidelines and process of the sharing circles that they conduct. Glen noted, "one of the first things that I do is go through some basic rules or responsibilities that each of them [the participants] should consider before we actually move into anything....the purpose of the sharing circle is something that I establish first." Mary noted she "makes right in that sharing circle" by explaining the circle process and telling "them some of the rules, like about confidentiality, respect, and...talking only when it's your turn. And there's another one there where you have to, it has to do with respect where you don't comment on somebody else or take it personally." Bernie focussed on the need for a conductor to tell people who have never participated in a sharing circle about the process and guidelines:

> When you get somebody new, you tell them about respect and that a sharing circle is there for people to be able to express how they're feeling, what they're thinking, who they are, without feeling like they're going to get challenged or, uh, what they say, somebody is going to take offense to. And that you need to respect, even if you disagree with somebody in the sharing circle, that respect is very much a part of the sharing circle. The respect for people to be able to say what they feel and what they, you know, think.

Four of the conductors of the circles which I participated in also outlined that they preferred that once the circle had started people should not break the circle by leaving for any reason unless they absolutely had to leave. Another conductor outlined this condition prior to the smudging and prayer so that the people could make the decision of whether to participate or not. Bernie was the only informant who identified that the circle should not be broken.

Once the process and guidelines were outlined the conductors started the sharing process by giving the first opportunity to share to the persons on their left. During the sharing period the conductors appeared to be very supportive. This was evident by their focused attention on the speakers and body language. When a speaker was finished they would not comment, but they would acknowledge the speaker verbally by such sayings as "how how" or "ah how."

When others in the circle would not be paying attention to the speaker and were disruptive, the conductors would usually stare at these people to get their attention so that the conductor's disapproval was seen. In a few separate situations I noted that the conductors had to interrupt the circle at the point when a speaker was finished in order to generally remind the participants about the importance of listening and respect. It was obvious that when the conductors addressed the circle in this manner, the disruptive person quit being disruptive. I did not note a conductor in any of the circles to specifically address a particular person for being disruptive.

Out of the 12 circles that I participated in, there was one exception to these noted dynamics of the conductor. In one particular circle the conductor herself was disruptive. She occasionally spoke to the persons beside her when others were speaking. When others in this circle were disruptive she did not attempt to address their behaviour.

After everyone shared, including the conductors, the conductors would bring the circle to a close by giving a closing prayer and facilitating final acknowledgements between the participants.

The people interviewed also outlined similar processes followed by the conductor. Bernie and Fanny acknowledged that once everyone had the opportunity to share, the conductor would close the circle with a prayer. For example, Bernie stated "after everybody had shared, the closing of it again was saying a prayer." They also noted that the facilitator would close the circle by having each participant shaking hands or hugging the other participants.

Throughout the whole process, one of the main responsibilities of the conductor was to create a safe environment for the participants (Glen, Mary, Bernie, and Fanny). Bernie frequently focussed on the importance of creating a trusting and safe environment. For example, she stated that the purpose of sharing circles is that they are:

> A way of people again feeling safe and trusting what they're feeling, their opinions, their lives their lives are, they are able to share with people in a safe, trusting way. Um. To me that's, that's the most important thing. I think that sharing circles allow people to really express who they are, what they're feeling. What they think and without feeling like somehow somebody's going to take offense to what they say or somebody's going to challenge how they're feeling. I think it's a way of validating people's thoughts and feelings about whatever's happening to them.

In order to facilitate this process she stated that the conductor should:

> Make sure that everybody has time to say what they need to say. Um. Again it's also to keep the circle moving. To, um, again monitor whether people are reacting or challenging other people. To kind of, I hesitate to say, referee almost even sometimes when people get, um, like you said, make a comment about somebody else's, what somebody else has said. To really make sure that people are aware that they are there for themselves and, uh, whatever somebody else says is that person's. So, yea, I think, I mean that's the basic job of running it and to make sure people are respectful of each other.

She also highlighted that conductors should be respectful:

I think that one of the jobs of facilitating the sharing circle is to help people, um, deal with their own self rather than reacting to somebody else's. I think you have to be very careful with it. You know, I don't think you talk, you wait until somebody's finished and then if you want to say something at the end of it by, again, not specifically pointing out somebody but saying something like, I really encourage people to talk about what they're feeling rather than reacting to somebody else's stuff. So you may, you know, interject after people have finished talking but you never outright challenge somebody in the middle of their. Again, that's part of the way you show respect.

The Participants

Voluntary participation and acceptance. For each of the sharing circles that I participated in for this study. I was informed about the circle through word of mouth, by being invited, or by being a participant of another activity which included a sharing circle. Mary noted that people are generally informed about sharing circles through word of mouth or they are invited. Bernie noted that in the particular sharing circles she has conducted, the participants were already involved in a treatment process and that this process included sharing circles.

In the sharing circles that I participated, my participation was entirely voluntary. Once I was part of the circle. I did not feel coerced to participate more than I wanted. However, I did recognize that there is a strong group presence since most, if not all, of the participants followed the same systematic routine of sharing. I thought at the time that this presence could cause someone to feel pressured to participate more than they wanted. In two of the sharing circles there was at least one person in each of the circles who did not smudge. In seven sharing circles there was at least one person in each circle who decided not to speak. I did not note anyone else in these circles pressuring these people to smudge or to speak.

In regards to the people interviewed, they each stated that sharing circles are voluntary. Each participant can decide to sit in the circle, to smudge, and/or to speak. Glen and Marg noted

that people have to accept that some people in the circle do not want to participate by sharing or smudging since each person has the choice of whether or not to participate. Glen emphasized that the participants are responsible for their choices. He also highlighted that if people decided not to speak, they were still participating:

> Some people will take risks. Some people will sit back and listen. Through all of that, they're all learning. It's important to, to keep their mind and their hearts open to the learning process. If they choose to sit and watch, that's fine. They're still taking in the information. They're still seeing. Still feeling. you know....Respect that space. They'll still be learning anyway. you know.

However. Bernie noted that at times there were people who had quit participating by leaving the circle before it was over. thus breaking the circle. She noted that she had to get these individuals and bring them back to the circle:

> So a lot of times women, not understanding the sacredness of not breaking the circle, would walk out of the room because they were feeling so much pain or intense feeling they would leave. So what would happen usually is if I was the facilitator, I would say, "I have to leave the circle for a minute." And go and try and get her so that she could come back into the circle. Um. So in that way. I mean towards the end, people I think if they had been there for a certain amount of time, understood that you don't break the circle, you don't leave the circle until it's over. But initially there were times when we had to, you know. leave to go get somebody back and bring them back.

On another level of acceptance I often noticed that anyone who wanted to participate in the sharing circle was accepted. I had rarely heard of or seen people being turn away from the circle. One exception was when one individual wanted to participated, but he was intoxicated to the degree that he was staggering and his speech was loud and slurred. In this situation the conductor told the individual that he was welcome to participate at a time when he was sober and able to fully participate without disruption. Another exception when an individual was turned away was when the circle was closed to only certain participants. In this situation the individual

was informed that the circle was set only for these participants, but that he could participate in another circle which would be occurring in the near future.

Fanny, Bernie, and Mary noted that, generally, people are not excluded from participating in a sharing circle. Fanny also highlighted that people are not turned away as long as the interested people followed particular guidelines:

> Everybody's welcome. I've even seen people who've been drunk. Under the influence of alcohol and will come to the circle. So nobody's turned away. So, but I guess it depends on the intent of the circle. And, uh, but there's ways of behaving at a sharing circle. So people, you know what, I don't think I've seen anybody turned away. But people behave. Follow the rules.

Overall, the importance of accepting all people and what ever degree of participation they want to give, including not participating has been emphasized. This is balanced with respecting the circle processes, such as not breaking the circle by leaving.

Closed participation. As noted previously in the comment made by Fanny, some circles had particular intents. As a result, some circles had closed participation in that only certain people could participate. In one circle that I recalled, the only people included were those who previously stated their intent that they were going to participate. This circle was only open to the first 12 people who confirmed that they were going to attend.

Fanny, Mary, and Bernie outlined in their interviews that there are times when circles are open to particular people. For example, Bernie noted that she had conducted circles for women who had been battered.

Women's time. Conductors of the sharing circles which I participated in supported women on their time in different ways. Bernie identified women's time as the time when women were "menstruating, their cycle." In one sharing circle the conductor stated prior to it beginning that

women on their time should leave the room. Two other conductors stated that women on their

time had to sit outside the circle. One of these conductors still had the women on their time share

from outside the circle while the other conductor did not have the women share. Still, in other

circles there was no mention of women being on their time, thus it appeared that women on their

time could participate fully. Significant to note was that the times when women were requested

not to be present were the times when medicine bundles--the bundles which the conductors used

to carry their sacred objects and plant medicines--were present.

Marg spoke about her experience of women's time:

> I guess, uh, there's a high level of respect for women on their time. Yea. Because I feel, at least that's my opinion, when I was in my early stage of learning. That wasn't my place to be cause it created a disharmony in my life. My emotions quite often are very high and I didn't need extra people to be breathing down my neck with their problems when I was having a struggle to, you know, deal with my own issues. So, it's to be considerate for women on their time. And if they're not aware of it, just to mention it to them because that's a form of learning, eh? It's for them to be, to take care of themselves.

Bernie also discussed women on their time. However, she outlined how women were able

to participate in the sharing circle while they were on their time:

> Once all the women were in, we would start like a smudge. We used sage because, depending on what plant you picked with sage, you can use it, women can use it at any time. So it didn't matter if they were on their time, they could still use the smudge. And, um, because there's a female plant that you can pick with sage and a male plant. So as long as you picked the female plant you could use it for women who were on their time so it didn't exclude anybody that way. If somebody was on their time, they could still come in, into the sharing circle.

Participants' Responsibilities

I noted that the conductors of the sharing circles I participated in and the people

interviewed both outlined that the participants had particular responsibilities. In addition to the

general responsibilities, two responsibilities were highly emphasized, specifically being respectful and listening.

Being respectful. Most conductors emphasized the need for participants to be respectful. During my participation in circles respect was identified as meaning paying attention to the speakers, not interrupting the speakers, and praying for the speakers.

In regards to the people interviewed, Mary identified "respecting everybody" as one of the basic rules of sharing circles. Fanny connected respect to the participants being equal: "everybody has a right to be heard. Everybody has a right to speak and nobody's better than anybody else. Everybody that comes there is very important. And everybody, each person, deserves to be respected." She also emphasized that "the sharing circle is only as strong as those that sit down and show respect." Marg, Glen, and Bernie associated respect with non-interference, even when a participant disagreed with what was being said. For example, Marg stated:

> If you have a disagreement with the people, with the person that's, that's conducting the sharing circle, if you do not really like what that person is saying, at that time you did not have the right to interfere and say, "well I don't like what you're saying" or "how dare you say this" because that was not acceptable.

Bernie spoke repeatedly about respect. She extended the concept of respect to mean validating people's feelings, thoughts, and experiences by paying attention to the person and not pressuring someone to finish speaking.

Listening. In almost every circle that I participated, with only one exception, the conductors emphasized that when another participant speaks, we were to listen to them. This emphasis on listening was also made by the people interviewed. Fanny stressed that "listening is very important. Listening is highly, highly active and that is we're listening with open hearts, open

big hearts. And also with an open mind. And, uh, try to take in as much as you can and I guess trying to listen from where that person is speaking from." Glen noted that people need "to listen to that other person. Truly listen. Not just go, hmm, yea, hmm, uh huh, uh huh, yea. You know, and act like they're listening but to truly listen from the heart."

On an associated point, two people interviewed connected listening with respect. Glen stated: "the other participants or people sitting would be respectful and listen. So basically it was respecting that individual for who they were as a human being and allowing them the right to voice their own opinion. And then giving them the respect of listening, truly listening to what they had to say." Fanny also noted this connection between respect and listening: "One way of showing respect is by listening to whoever is speaking. And not to say anything but to listen."

Other responsibilities. While other responsibilities of the participants were not specifically addressed by the conductors of the sharing circles of which I participated, there were a couple of responsibilities highlighted by the people interviewed. Fanny suggested that one of these was the supportive attitudes people brought to the circle: "So the circle itself, the people's bodies themselves are the ones that are creating that very special place. And what makes it special is the attitude they have when they come." Beyond the attitude of support, she strongly emphasized the humbleness that she has felt in sharing circles. Bernie noted the other responsibility people have when it is not their turn to speak: "People are asked to pray during that time so that they can not only get their own thoughts together but help whoever is talking to be able to express what they're thinking and feeling and what life is like for them."

The Process

Most of the sharing circles that I participated in demonstrated that there was a general process followed when conducting sharing circles. Each of the informants also outlined a similar process. The circles would begin with a smudge and an opening prayer. The sharing process and guidelines would then be given by the conductor. The opportunity for each person to speak followed. Once everyone had the chance to speak the circle would close with a prayer and hand shakes or hugs. Each of these processes are described in more detail in the following section.

Smudging and the central alter. Each informant stated that sharing circles often include smudging. According to Bernie, smudging is the process cleansing your spiritual self and getting rid of negative feelings so that the participants can share whatever goes on their lives. Smudge is made out of sacred medicines, such as sweetgrass, cedar, sage, and/or tobacco, and is burned so that the smoke is used to cleanse oneself (Bernie, Marg, Mary, Fanny). Bernie explained that the way to smudge "is the same way people wash their bodies.....it's very much like a washing motion and asking for guidance for that day. And so you smudged all over."

Marg noted that smudging "opens your mind" so that people are in the circle with a "positive mind." Mary added that smudging not only cleans the person but the physical environment: "It cleans you out and opens you. It clears out the area where you're at in case there's some negative energy." Bernie suggested that smudging also helps people to focus on their own growth and what they are doing.

While each person interviewed stated that sharing circles often start with a smudge, Fanny noted that she has also requested from an Elder who had just finished conducting a sharing circle if they could smudge at that time. Her request was based upon the need to get rid of burden they

were carrying after the sharing circle. In this situation she stated that the smudging helped them to

unload the burdens so that they did not leave with the heaviness.

When people did not wish to smudge they were allowed to pass over this part of the

sharing circle.

> So anybody that came in after that, one of the other participants would, you know, go
> over why we used the sharing circle and why we smudged and people were never forced,
> if they didn't, um, if they didn't understand why we smudged or they chose not to be a part
> of the smudge, they could leave and then come back once the sharing circle started.
> (Bernie)

Glen noted another way in which people did not participate in smudging and yet remain part of

the sharing circle. He stated:

> Let's say you have a particular circle where 90% of the people or 99% of the people want
> a smudge. Uh, and one person doesn't. Well, I will just have them step back when the
> smudge bowl comes around. You know they have that space, they have that respect where
> they don't have to, didn't want to.

In my observations of the sharing circles that included smudging, I noticed that the

smudging would occur at the beginning of the circle. Once everyone had the opportunity to

smudge, the bowl or shell which contained the medicines used to smudge was placed in the centre

of the circle. This same placement of the smudge bowl was noted by each of the informants.

In addition to the smudge bowl being placed in the centre of the circle, I observed other

objects being placed in the centre. These objects included medicine bundles, candles, water,

rattles, drums, and some of the conductor's personal sacred items. At times these objects were

arranged in a particular manner and referred to as the central alter. Alternately, another sharing

circle occurred around a bonfire. At this circle there was wood for the fire, tea and water for

drinking, and the smudge bowl placed within the circle.

Each of the people interviewed also noted that additional objects may be placed in the centre. Glen, Fanny, Marg, and Mary each noted that there may be a medicine bundle in the middle of the circle. In addition, Fanny outlined how she would place a symbolic blanket in the middle of the circle: "What I've put in the centre is a blanket. And I don't carry with me a full blanket but a symbolic blanket and I carry a little one." Bernie focused upon the inclusion of water:

> The smudge would be placed in the middle along with, yea, along with either a bowl of water or, um, a cup of water or something. And again, it would allow people to focus. The water was also, um, there's some symbolic meaning to the water being there. Um. Life. Water is life giving. There's, um, can also be very restful for people so, you know, again if they didn't have the rock then they can focus on the water and just remain focused.

Finally, Mary noted that when sharing circles occur in a teepee there usually is a bonfire in the centre of the circle.

Opening prayer. The next step that usually occurred in the sharing circles I participated in was an opening prayer. The prayer would be said by the conductor, an Elder in the circle, or by someone in the circle who was requested by the conductor to say the opening prayer.

Similarly, each of the informants, with the exception of Glen, stated that sharing circles would often include an opening prayer. Bernie noted that while the conductor usually said the prayer, the conductor may request someone in the circle to say an opening prayer. Fanny identified that the conductor may request that an Elder say the opening prayer.

Fanny stressed that prayer is very important. She stated that prayer is one of the key elements that makes sharing circles so powerful.

Sharing. In most of the sharing circles that I participated, once the smudging and opening prayer were completed, the conductors outlined the process and guidelines. It was after these

steps that the conductors would begin the sharing process by giving the persons to the left of

them the first opportunity to speak. After the first person spoke the person on the left of the first

speaker was given the next opportunity to speak. The process was repeated in this manner so that

each person had an opportunity to speak, including the conductor. In every case the conductors

participated by sharing whatever they wanted to personally share. In this manner the conductors

were also full participants.

Bernie, Fanny, Mary, and Marg each noted a similar process of the participants taking

turns to speak by passing to the left or in other words going clockwise. While Glen noted this

process of moving to the left, he also stated that he did not know why the people would

"automatically go to the left" other that being a subconscious or unconscious thing. He added:

> You know, people will automatically go to the left when they're, when they're done. And,
> and then if you, just for, just for ah, just to throw people off sometimes they'll say, let's go
> to the right. And you know, probably people over here will be squirming, you know, like
> "guys they're going the wrong way." You know. But I do that just for the heck of it, you
> know. And to me that's, that's just, um, there's nothing, there's nothing major about it.

However, Fanny stated her concern that changing the direction of the sharing process makes the

process a little confusing. Marg was more concerned about which way the process moved. Her

explanation for moving clockwise was that the circle process follow patterns found in the world,

particularly the sun, in order to maintain harmony.

On a point about variations in the sharing process, Bernie outlined how a sharing circle

can be ongoing over an extended period of time for a particular group of people. She described

one particular circle: "So when we first started a group, we usually had an intake in September,

we would start the circles. So we had people that were there for at least three months at a time

within the circle so they got really connected. And then any time we had a bunch of new people

we would start another, another circle." In my participation, the closest I came to an ongoing

circle occurred was when one circle continued over two days.

Fanny noted an additional variation in the process of sharing which I did not experience

during my participation in the 12 sharing circles. She described the possibility of there being more

than a single round of sharing:

> And also there may be more than one round. The first round may be people just, usually
> what happens is that you introduce yourself. I guess there's a process of opening up the
> circle. So for me what I like is for people to introduce themselves, a chance to introduce
> themselves, and share whatever they'd like to share about themselves. And, um, and some
> people will state why they're there....and then you can do a round and people will share.
> And then you can do another round so you can do a number of rounds. And it seems my
> experience is that with each round it seems that we can go deeper into our sharing.

In regards to the participation of the conductor, three of the people interviewed spoke of

the conductor fully participating in the sharing. Bernie discussed her participation as a conductor

most directly:

> The facilitator needs to be a part of the, part of the group and you're no different, you're,
> you know, you're, um, you're there to help make sure that the circle keeps going but you
> also, again it's part of that whole thing that whatever I'm feeling as a facilitator I can share
> or whatever things are happening in my life that I'm finding hard or that I'm excited about
> or that I'm happy about.

Using an object to guide the process--the traveller. In six of the circles I participated in the

process of taking turns to speak was often guided with an object, either an eagle feather or a rock.

When going over the guidelines and process, the conductors usually stated that whoever is

holding the object is the designated speaker. Once the guidelines and process were outlined all of

the conductors passed the object to their left. When each person finished their turn they would

pass the object to their left. In this manner the rock served as a way to identify who was the

speaker.

Of the people interviewed, Mary outlined in the sharing circles she had conducted she would use a feather, rock, or "whatever." Glen noted that sometimes a talking stick may be used. Bernie only identified using a rock in the sharing circles she had conducted. She also explained the reason she used a rock:

> The way the rock was used was when a person finished sharing, they would then pass the rock on to the next person and I think it also helped them hang on to something. You know, it was something concrete that they felt safe. Again I think it's to do with safety and feeling comfortable that you have something in your hand that, uh, if you're nervous you can play with or, you know. There's some, how do you say it, it allows you to remain connected with something.

She later added: "part of the reason we use the rock was because you remain connected to something. You know, something that comes from the earth." Fanny noted using a stone, feather, and ribbon:

> Something maybe passed around. I call it a traveller. And, for example, an eagle feather may be used and, or a stone or ribbon. And maybe nothing will be used, you know. And usually what happens is when the sharing process starts, when people start to share, it goes usually from, what is it, the left hand side so it goes according to, what is it, counterclockwise [clockwise, sic], the way the sun rotates.

She also commented on the reason for using these objects:

> The eagle feather is also very strong and it gives people something to hold on to when they share. And I think it's comforting to hold a symbol. And it also provides, well comforting and provides some reassurance I think. I've seen people hold an eagle feather and stroke it and I've seen some people express their anger holding an eagle feather and really hit it hard, smash, smash. And you know what, that eagle feather never breaks. I've never seen an eagle feather break no matter who many hands it has gone through and people stroke, stroke, or poke, poke and, you know, flick it back and forth or just stroke it, it never, it never loses its shape. You know. And I'm always amazed with that so these symbols are very strong. Or ribbons and maybe the symbols have been blessed too, you know. And people sometimes will remark on the stone. Like their hold, the stone is being passed, it becomes energized too. So people can feel the stone heat up because it's been passed from one person to another.

Through the passing of the object each person had an opportunity to speak. I noticed that speakers held the rock for various amounts of time. Some people held the object but did not speak. Still, others just passed the rock on without speaking. During the time the object was held the other participants who did not have the object were quiet and appeared to be listening to the speaker. Eventually the object returned back to the conductor. At this point the conductor had an opportunity to speak.

Overall, I noted two instances where this sharing process was different. In one circle, where the people had been regularly participating in circles together, the first opportunity to speak was left open to anyone. They would place an object in the centre of the circle and allow anyone who wanted to pick up the object to initiate the sharing process. When the person was finished that person would place the object back to the centre of the circle. People who had yet to share were then allowed to pick up the object. This process continued until each person who wanted to speak had picked up the object.

In another circle, the conductor stated that we would not have to go around the circle in any particular manner. Anyone who wanted to talk could talk when they felt like it. As a result, in this circle people sitting across or on either side of the last speaker would take their turn. At times two people would be speaking at the same moment. Significant to recall was Marg's comment about the sharing process: "It goes in a circle. You cannot criss-cross. Yea. Because if you do that, then they [her grandparents and the people of that generation] believe that you created disharmony." It appeared to me that this second circle had, at particular moments, a significant amount of disharmony. While there could be several possible explanations for the disharmony, it appeared that it was associated with the process of sharing that was followed.

Closing prayer and acknowledgements. In each of the sharing circles that I participated, and which had an opening prayer, a closing prayer also occurred. Once again the conductor, a designated Elder, or someone else from the circle said the closing prayer. Usually, if the conductor said the opening prayer, then the conductor also said the closing prayer. Similarly, the same Elder that opened the circle with a prayer usually said the closing prayer. However, when a participant from the circle was requested to say the opening prayer, another person was asked to say the closing prayer. In addition, all but one circle had some form of a hand shaking or hugging process where each person was given the opportunity to shake the hand or hug each of the other participants. The conductors would assign someone to begin the process, if they did not start it themselves.

Of the people interviewed, Bernie, Fanny, Marg, and Mary stated that sharing circles usually include a closing prayer and acknowledgements such as hand shakes or hugging. For example, Bernie stated "at the end of the sharing circle they [the participants] would be hugging each other and leave feeling really good."

<div align="center">Healing-The Emotional</div>

The next theme topic I noted in the sharing circles that I participated in and which the informants also addressed was healing. While healing is not limited to the emotional aspect of people, since at least five conductors of the circles I participated in also associated it with the mental, physical, and spiritual aspect of people, it was frequently connected with emotional expression. Therefore, healing and the emotional aspect of people are discussed as a unified theme in the following section.

Emotional Expression

Glen identified that in order for his healing process to begin he had to learn how to become aware of what he was feeling, especially since "most people are out of touch with their emotional, spiritual aspects." He further outlined that part of the healing process for people is for them to express their emotions and that sharing circles are "one way of learning those things. Expression of emotions. Expression of feelings." He shared a story of how important emotions are to sharing circles and healing:

> Well I remember, my example, in a circle and then one of the things I was processing was my relationship with my stepfather. Never very close. There was, he was an alcoholic, raging alcoholic and there was really no bonding that took place in my relationship with him. So I needed to work on my resentment and my anger and rage towards him so one of the things that I was, uh, asked to do was pick someone in the group who resembled him and then I was to face this person and express what I was feeling. Well, you know, I'm bawling and I'm, you know, snot and everything running down my nose. And so the facilitator asked R. to go and get a Kleenex, "get G a Kleenex". So I'm processing my stuff with the guy. And then R. comes back with one ply of Kleenex (chuckle) sticks it in our face, you know, and we look at each other and we look at back and we just all bust out laughing, eh. You know. The laughter was so good to us, eh. Um. Even the rest of the group. They were getting caught up in my work. They were starting to connect and starting to cry and when that happened, boom, split, flew back the other way and we were all laughing at my situation, you know. Because there was money, you know. I don't know if R. meant to do that, I'll never know, you know, because he's in another place now. At that time it was perfect. Um. You know, the laughter is important. It's got to be part of this. And I see a lot of that in, with other communities, you know, that work together. Laughter brings people together. So, so tears, there has to be the other side of that, eh.

Bernie made a similar suggestion, stating that sharing circles, as a helping method, are really valuable. They help break down taboos against talking about such emotional experiences as pain. She stated:

> Initially I think people felt, they only shared superficial things within the circle, expressed really limited things, you know, I'm feeling really bad today or, but I'll get over it. As time progressed and as they got more, uh, trusting with each other, they would share more

about, you know, I'm remembering something today and I'm feeling really bad. And people would feel comfortable with crying and sharing emotions and within the circle.

Mary outlined that sharing circles "helps you to, make, say, cry or even laugh....helps you express emotions." Fanny also acknowledged that people express emotions in sharing circles, including hurt, pain, frustration, anger. She also highlighted that when people share their stories they may trigger other people's memories of their life. In this way they may feel certain emotions even when they are not speaking about their own lives:

> I think when you go to a sharing circle and you're listening, you will see yourself in what is being said. Often you will see yourself. That's why you learn at sharing circles. You'll see yourself, you'll see your whole life. You'll see what happened when you were a child. You'll see what happened as you were growing up. You'll see your mom. You'll see your dad, your grandma and your grandpa, your neighbours, your brothers and sisters and what are, what are being said. So whatever is being said, you p..., you may have lived that already or may trigger off some memory....And you'll feel. So if someone is expressing fear, you know, in meeting an animal in the bush for example, you'll feel, you'll feel that too, you know. Or if there is happiness or sadness, you know, you'll probably feel that too.

In each of the sharing circles that I participated, there was at least one person, but usually more, that expressed emotions such as sadness, anger, frustration, joy, and fear. These emotions were expressed through a variety methods, such as crying, raised voices, laughter, and nervousness. On several occasions these emotions were expressed with great intensity.

I also personally experienced a variety of emotions when listening and when I shared in circles. For example, I recall one circle feeling very confused. I watched as each person shared. Most of them hung their heads down, and in monotone, sad voices stated that they were very happy to be there. Yet, it seemed as if I was feeling personal pain and grief that was coming from many of them. When it came time for me to share, I discussed how I felt confused and as if I was experiencing their pain and grief. I had tears in my eyes and had a difficult time speaking. One of

the two Elders who were conducting the circle watched me closely. When I finished speaking, he interjected the circle process and stated that he felt these emotions as well and that he would have cried with me if I had start to cry openly.

Discharging, Cleansing, and Purifying

The healing aspect of sharing circles went beyond just emotional expression for the people interviewed. It was suggested by Glen that it was through this emotional expression in sharing circles that he was able to "discharge the stuff, this turmoil" and "cleanse and purify myself." Fanny also noted the discharging, or letting go of particular feelings. She said that "sometimes maybe there is resentment or anger or fear or something that I want to let go. I think a sharing circle is a good place to let it go," and that circles are "a place where a great emotion can be left."

Marg associated the discharging as being similar to seeing a counsellor and letting go of baggage:

> You use sharing circles when quite often you'd go see a counsellor. You know, like society we go see the counsellor. But in our sharing circle we go within our own people. And we talk about the dysfunctional or the hardships that we are encountering and once we've dealt with them we feel a lot better because we no longer need to carry that extra baggage of problems or whatever. You've dealt with it and it's gone. You may not come full terms to resolving the issue or the problem but at least you're able to voice what's bothering you.

Similarly, Bernie suggested that sharing circles could be used as a treatment method.

Mary noted that even if people are unable to talk about what they are facing in order to express or discharge the emotions their emotions, they are still able to receive help in other ways. She explained:

> When somebody's talking, you, uh, if you're unable to talk, you're shy or stuff like that when another person talks about it, something, usually you're able to relate to it so in that way you get, um, you don't have to say it again. Like it gets said for you so in that way you're helping yourself or that person's helping you just by telling their story if you're unable to do it. And, um, also when somebody's talking about something really painful that

you went through it also helps you in that way because it helps you to, uh, make, say, cry or even laugh.

Bernie also noted this mutual support through the sharing of similar stories:

> I really think that that's how the sharing circle is most effective when you have a group of people who have had similar experiences can really share. Can really say, uh, can really feel an exclusion, inclusion within a group, to say, "yea, I went through that too" you know, "I can really empathize with whatever" you know "I can really understand how you're feeling." Because they, they then are not alone.

In all but one of the circles that I participated there were people who expressed, either at the end of their turn to speak or after the circle had finished, that they "felt better," "lighter,"or "relieved." I interpreted their comments to have a similar meaning as to what the people interviewed explained about discharging, cleansing, and purifying. I also recall participating in one particular sharing circle when I was feeling extremely overwhelmed with what I was facing in my personal life. During my turn I outlined how I felt overwhelmed, angry, fearful, and sad. I felt comfortable enough to cry, which I did. When my turn was over I felt heard and supported. More significantly, I felt some relief even though I knew that what I was facing was not gone. I believe that I was able to discharge some of the turmoil I was facing and was better able to face my issues.

Healing Circles

Two of the people addressed whether there was a connection between the healing process and healing circles. Fanny suggested a sharing circle can be a healing circle. However, she also recognized that there are slight variations in the types of circles, but "it's really hard to pinpoint." Bernie was more strong in voicing that there is a difference in sharing and healing circles. She stated:

Well I've participated in healing circles. They're different. They are usually conducted by an Elder and, um, they're different in that the Elder can actually speak to what you're talking about whereas if you're just running a sharing circle the facilitator doesn't really share a lot of, um, doesn't give you direction about how you're, what you're talking about whereas an Elder can actually talk to you in a healing circle, give you some direction on things that you might be able to do to either get rid of some of the hurt, the anger, the pain, whatever, is able to help you with that more.

When I participated in sharing circles there were times when other participants referred to the circle as a healing circle. There was no correction made by the conductor or any others that the circles were not healing circles. Upon reflection, it was my impression that if a participant wanted to call a particular circle a healing circle, it was up to them. However, in one particular circle that I participated the conductors were two Elders. I recalled a slight difference in this circle in that the participants seemed to be asking more questions during their turn to speak. I also recalled that the Elders spoke more about healing generally, and their own healing experiences specifically.

Learning-The Mental

Another major theme I found evident during my participation in the sharing circles and which most of the informants emphasized was the learning process. It is significant to note that the informants associated learning not only with the mental aspect, but also to people's experiences, spirits, and emotions. However, in the following section, learning is associated primarily with the mental aspect of people, since learning involved mental development.

A Continuous Learning Process

In each of the sharing circles that I participanted, there was at least one person who stated that they had learned something. Indeed, in several, if not all, of the circles I learned something. For example, in one particular circle participants gathered to speak on a common issue, namely

Aboriginal worldviews. Throughout the sharing process each person gave a perspective that I

minimally, if ever, considered before. This circle carried on for two days in which time I had

several opportunities to share. After I spoke it seemed that some people would pick up on what I

had said and add to it. It was as if the concept of Aboriginal worldviews was building as each

person, including myself, commented on it. In this manner, I felt as if I was in process of

continuous learning about Aboriginal worldviews.

In his interview, Glen discussed the process of continuous learning. He stated that "for me

the whole, the whole experience of the sharing circle is continuous learning." Marg also

emphasized the sharing of information and learning process of sharing circles. She stated:

> Well, uh, to me sharing circles are a, a learning, a process of learning. Uh, passing on
> information that's very vital to a group of people because, I guess the best way I could
> explain it is, a long time ago when our ancestors did not have communication airways,
> they communicated in this manner. It could be various types of people, like in one key
> location, they may be outside tribes surrounding that little area. So in order for everybody
> to benefit by what's happening, I'd say for example, uh, our ceremony. Uh. The purpose of
> having a sharing circle was to have these people pulled in together and talk about new
> information.

Glen also acknowledged that all people benefit from the sharing of information:

> It works both ways. We share a lot of different information. And so, so with everything,
> it's a learning process. Everything is continuously learning, you know. And I can see the
> value of, of whether it's a talking circle, sharing circle, whatever term that you want to call
> it, you know, it still has great value.

He also added that whether or not someone does something with the information is up to each

individual:

> So, you know, for me the same thing would basically happen in the sharing circle. I would
> say if the sharing circle is provided with information that would be helpful in their learning,
> whether it's through a small presentation beforehand or someone just talking about it in
> the circle, then that will create an awareness for the group, for the circle. And once they
> have that, then the choice is theirs as to what they want to do with it.

In addition to learning from one another, Bernie noted that when people who have faced similar experiences share their life stories with one another, they become connected and their experiences are validated. She suggested that this connection and validation is a step in their learning and growth process.

Bernie and Fanny emphasized that the circle participants need to practice respect in order to learn. Besides practicing respect, Marg stressed the need for participants to watch and listen in order to learn. She stated "you learned through seeing, being able to visualize what's happening. Through hearing." Glen stated that people need to open their mind's eye as well as your heart.

The informants noted that once people are open to learning and are willing to take information that may benefit them, then a variety of skills can be learned through sharing circles. Glen noted that amongst the first things learned are basic listening and attending:

> So this is what ties in with what I'm seeing in sharing circles, you know. You're learning to respect the person who's talking. You're learning to develop your listening skills. Truly listen to the individuals. Whether there's feedback required, you know, in the process, that's up to the group. It's still, it all ties in with that. So for me the whole, the whole experience of the sharing circle is continuous learning and in being sensitive.

He later added:

> And basically it was just listening, that's it. Just listening. Paraphrasing, ah summarizing, um, but not giving any information unless it was asked for. So, you know I'm learning all these things, I thought, it all comes down to, to, to the basic process we have here with sharing circles. You know. This, this is that learning vehicle, this is a learning tool right here.

Marg noted that two of the basic communication skills she learned through sharing circles was patience and the ability to be quiet.

Bernie identified an experience where the participants learned to once again think for themselves. She explained that the participants began "to explore who they are, what they

think....And so for them it was a real learning experience about who they are and to begin to think about what their thoughts were." Similarly, Marg noted that sharing circles supported her to learn how to analyze. They also supported young men and women to learn about their responsibilities and preparation for entering adulthood. Glen identified a variety of things people learn from sharing circles, including how to identify, connect with, and express their feelings with honesty and responsibility.

Bernie noted that the opportunity to learn these things is not limited to only the participants. In her experience as a conductor of sharing circles she has learned as well. She stated "it's not like I'm the teacher and I know everything. I'm there to learn as much as I'm. I'm sharing. As much as I can get from the stories that I hear too that I learn a lot."

Teaching Circles

Of all the informants, Fanny was the only person to discuss a connection between sharing and teaching circles. Fanny suggested that "sharing circles are learning circles too. So, you learn things from there." However, she also mentioned that teaching circles are still somewhat different than sharing circles in that a particular concept is presented in order to learn about it. She also identified that the conductor would have the intent to teach about a particular concept.

Following Fanny points, the sharing circle that I participated in, where the concept of Aboriginal worldviews was the main topic being discussed, could be considered a teaching circle.

A Circular Worldview-The Spiritual

One of the most evident, at times striking, features of the sharing circles that I participated in was the circular worldview that appeared to be based upon spirituality. In one way or another each sharing circle incorporated some spiritual expression. Further, when the people interviewed,

particularly Glen, explained their understanding of sharing circles it appeared that the basic

philosophy was spiritual. In following suit, this section outlines this theme of spirituality and a

circular worldview.

Sacred for Some, Pagan for Others

Each of the people interviewed identified that sharing circles are, or can be, very sacred.

Fanny, Marg, and Bernie each identified that the inclusion of prayer and symbols, such as feathers,

stones, talking sticks, and blessed ribbons, make circles sacred. Bernie suggested "I think what

smudging rituals, rituals do is, um, is help people focus. To really focus on, on what they're doing,

on their own growth. That, that I find it's more, um, special for them to participate in the

smudging as well. That it becomes more sacred." She added that sharing circles are also made

sacred through the confidentiality that is maintained. Fanny stated, "So for me sharing circles are

very spiritual. So to me it's a spiritual ceremony and I feel that if smudging is not a part of that,

somehow it's cold, uh, and there's a little bit of an emptiness or a bleakness. You know, something

is stark." She also added that the inclusion of placing of cedar behind the people in the circle also

adds to making the circle a very special place.

Glen and Bernie noted that not all people see sharing circles as sacred. Bernie noted that

some people, "because of their Christian beliefs", associated sharing circles and smudging with

traditional Aboriginal spirituality and as such, it is viewed as wrong, evil, or pagan. Glen recalled

one particular community which was strongly aligned to a particular church was "not so

enthusiastic" about traditional activities. However, Bernie also noticed that some individuals who

hold such views have also been able to consider other perspectives:

Some of these women have never experienced anything with tradition or they have negative images of what traditional spirituality means. Within that circle they get fed, you know, they begin to understand that spirituality [traditional Aboriginal spirituality] is, um, is O.K. It's not pagan. It's not evil. It's not all of those things.

In one of the sharing circles which I attended, several people remained very cautious about

participating. They emphasized regularly that they were strong Christians. In order to

accommodate them this particular sharing circle did not include any smudging. I also noted that

the few people who addressed the topic of traditional spirituality were very cautious when they

spoke. In other circles I noticed people's passion towards the sharing circle as a sacred ceremony.

In these circles, there was smudging, placing of sacred bundles in the centre, and people who

shared openly about their beliefs. Even in some of these circles, there were some people who

identified themselves as strong Christians. They still participated fully and gave thanks for being

able to participate. There was a great sense of comfort and ease in these circles in comparison to

the one just previously noted.

Overall, it appeared to me that when smudging, sacred objects, and prayer were included,

there was a sense of sacredness to the circles. People seemed to be more respectful, listened more

intently, were less disruptive, and more frequently spoke about the Creator and spirituality.

Acknowledging the Spiritual and Asking for Guidance

Several of the informants noted that beyond the physical presence of the participants, there

is acknowledgement of spiritual others. For example, Mary noted:

You're not the only one that comes in here, you bring your family, you bring your people
that have even have gone on, you bring those people in there. So it's not only what you
see. So I get that sense of, I don't know, like a sense of something, how do you say, some
spiritual side. Spirit side. That's what I get from there too.

Another example was given by Glen:

The spirit world, our spiritual guides, our spiritual helpers, angels if you will, if you want to use Christian terms, are what guides us and directs us in this life here when we're lost. Now they will always be there. Like, uh, the Elders, the traditional healers that I've worked with and learned from for 4 to 5 years there says that when we come into the physical world, every single human being has a grandfather and that grandfather will watch over them and guide them.

It was also explained that these spiritual others can be requested to support people. Glen suggested that in traditional healing approaches, such as the sharing circle, "you ask the grandfathers to come in and heal the person." On the same point Fanny stated "so what do you do with all the pain and the hurt that's being shared. It needs to be taken care of. I always, for me, think that it needs to be somehow offered or allowed or acknowledged that Mother Earth or grandfathers will take care of all of that and we don't have to take it back."

I noticed that during several of the circles that I participated in people stated that they have prayed and asked for support from the Creator. At other times people said that "the grandfathers have watched over and guided them." In one particular circle, the conductor outlined in the opening that if someone felt any intense pain or hurt during the ceremony that they should pray and ask the Creator to help them through that time. This same conductor also told the participants that when the opening prayer was being said, they should say their own prayers to the Creator and grandfathers and ask them to support everyone in the circle.

While people may reach out to the spiritual others, or grandfathers, for support they are viewed as still holding responsibilities. For example, Glen shared part of a conversation he had with an Elder: "Basically that was his whole point. That you are responsible for your own path. No one else is. The guidance and direction will come from the grandfathers or grandmother, Creator, in those ways that you, that you've been taught."

Overcoming Blocks and Releasing Energy

When asking for help, Glen noted that people are trying to get support to overcome any barriers to healing that they might have. These barriers are self-created by people. He stated as an example, "people will create their own barriers by saying, 'well, Joe Bloe over there looks like someone I don't like so I'm not going to open up here.' That, that to me is a mental model that creates that, that hindrance, you know, so to release this energy or this emotion that's stopping me from healing." Mary acknowledged that this energy exists and that it may be negative. Fanny noted this energy on a group level and that the grandfathers can be called upon to help take care of it:

> Sometimes maybe there is resentment or anger or fear or something that I want to let go. I think a sharing circle is a good place to let it go. And I think that whoever is leading or facilitating, I think if they are able to do that, should somehow offer it to a grand..., grandfathers, that's what I think. Because I've been to circles and it sits there. And somehow the circles kind of just fall apart. I think we come together with a great purpose in a circle and so the circle must also, I think, at least when these circles decide to come up..., to separate, then it needs to be done in a very strong way. O.K. whatever business is there in the air, it needs to be deal..., the energy needs to be taken care of. And, um, and I think that helps.

It was suggested by Glen that when this energy is not dealt with people run the risk of becoming ill:

> Emotions are energy and if you don't learn how to express energy, then that energy doesn't go anywhere....because that energy doesn't go anywhere and it stays in the body, then that leads into the energy creating kidney infections, liver infections, heart infections and some muscles, you know, the bones. And everything gets infected because that energy isn't going anywhere. That negative energy. That anger. The hurt. The pain isn't moving. It isn't discharging from the body.

He further suggested that if the energy is not released, then his "doorways" to centredness, balance, and harmony are blocked.

The concept of releasing certain energies was also addressed in some of the sharing circles where I was a participant. In the sharing circle where I felt extremely overwhelmed with the anger, fear, and sadness that seemed to be present in the circle, I was encouraged to release this energy and to feel free to cry. In another circle, I recalled that a participant spoke about the connection between getting sick frequently and the inability to release grief.

Establishing Connections, Balance, and Harmony

It was also outlined by some of the informants that in addition to releasing this energy by reaching out to the Creator and grandfathers, it was also important to connect with the four aspects within ourselves, namely the spiritual, emotional, physical, and mental. Glen suggested that in the present time people have focused upon the physical and mental realms and avoided connecting with the spiritual and emotional realms. In turn he repeatedly emphasized that "we've got to move towards that in all aspects. That's what we've got to get in touch with is learning how to feel. Learning how to connect with our spirit." He also noted that people have to work on all parts of themselves at the same time and through this work we move to becoming more balanced and in harmony:

> There's this balance and harmony and, you know, to bring out all those parts of myself in terms of the four aspects. You know you have the emotional, the physical, the mental and the spiritual. Um. It's about coming to balance with all aspects of self....And everything. And for me to begin my journey I need to explore each of those doorways.

This concept of becoming balanced and in harmony was repeatedly addressed in most of the sharing circles that I attended. For example, balance and harmony were key topics in the sharing circle which addressed Aboriginal worldviews.

The Function of Ceremonies

In attempting to release energy and establish connections, balance and harmony, ceremonies play a significant part. For example, Mary and Fanny indirectly noted that there were ceremonies that helped people to release energy. They identified such ceremonies as healing ceremonies (Fanny) and grieving ceremonies (Mary). Glen identified that ceremonies help him to release energy, connect with others, and become centered:

> You know when you're in that sweat lodge, uh, or when you're in that sun dance, you know, you're connected as a circle, uh, both at a conscious level and an unconscious level. We're all connected and for me it all ties right back into the sharing circle, you know. I'm moving through each of these experiences. All four aspects of self, the journey to the true self, the centre, the centre of the universe, is me, the centre of the universe is you, those people sitting over there. That's where the journey is. So, you know, if I need to get in touch with those parts of myself, then I need a place or a vehicle that will allow me to do that. And sharing circles will allow that.

Glen also gave an encompassing clarification that "all our ceremonies are about right brain phenomenon. You know, accessing the spiritual, the emotional, the dreams, the vision, the holistic thinking." In other words, all ceremonies act to help people release energy, make connections with each other and within, and bring about balance and harmony. They act to bring each person "to the centre which is the Creator or the Great Spirit that is in the centre of me and you and everybody else and everything" (Glen).

At times, ceremonies were noted to be used together to helped people become centred. Mary, Fanny, and Glen each noted that at times pipe ceremonies may proceed in conjunction with a sharing circle. They also noted that sweat lodge ceremonies may include a sharing circle. There was a pipe ceremony in three sharing circles that I participated. While none of the sharing circles

that I participated in and noted for this study occurred in association with a sweat lodge

ceremony. I have participated in sweat lodge ceremonies that have included sharing circles.

We Are All One

According to the people interviewed, the concepts of connecting, balancing and

harmonizing a person's physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental parts extends beyond the

individual. It can extend to more than one person when they come together. Further, by coming

together they can experience being one entity. They suggested that sharing circles support this

level of connection, balancing, and harmonizing. For example, Marg suggested that sharing circles

bring harmony to the group. Mary identified that people in circles experience "feelings of, um,

belonging somewhere....a chance to become one." Glen made a similar comment:

> So it works, I know, for people who are becoming in tune with this energy. So again it
> goes back to that circle. People with a connection as one. Because isn't that one of the
> basic teachings of our whole philosophy is that we're all one. Right. We're all one. One
> spirit in a sense. We're all one, you know, the unconscious, the subconscious are all
> connected as one.

I have witnessed and experienced the feeling of a circle of people coming together. In one

particular circle I felt a strong sense of connection and commitment. I also felt that I belonged to

this group of people and that they would truly do whatever they could to support me. When

people spoke it seemed like I clearly understood their experiences and felt their feelings. When the

circle came to a close it was as if something was ending, almost dying. People felt so strongly

towards one another that when some of them hugged, they cried and held on to one another for

awhile. One comment that stood out to me during this time of departure was when someone said

something to the effect of "take good care of my heart because you are carrying part of it with

you." This circle was different than most of the others in that the level of connection and empathy was far deeper and more intense.

Circles and Cycles

It appears that sharing circles are guided by a particular worldview that emphasizes cycles and circles. Marg and the people who taught her about such things as sharing circles believe that "everything goes in a circle." Fanny also noted the importance of circles in the people's view. She stated "Why is that so important? I guess it's life. So you have birth and you have your life cycle and then you move into another, you know, onto the other side or to another plane, you die, you leave this earth and go to the spiritual world. All that's a cycle. So that's how we live I guess is in cycles." Glen also shared why he thought circles are important:

> So for me, that, you know, just not going into detail with it is, is one of the things that I see why the circle is so important. Uh, the circle itself, whether it's with the Aboriginal people, like any other culture in the world have that in their culture in one way or another. You know, whether the mandala or some other form. But the symbol itself is as prominent throughout many cultures. So that's how I see that. That it creates this unison, this unity, at a conscious level and an unconscious level. That's the purpose of that. All are one, all are connected. All our prayers are focused.

Symbolism

The informants also implied that symbolism is important to this worldview. For example, throughout the interviews each informant discussed a variety of symbols. Glen, Fanny, and Bernie noted the circle is a symbol of cooperation, equality, and life. Fanny and Glen discussed the earth as our mother. In regards to another symbol, he noted that when circle participants hold an eagle feather and speak, they are "actually verbalizing themselves as a form of a prayer." He later added:

So, so for me, that's how I see, you know, the individual holding that feather is, is actually in a form of prayer. With the Creator, with other human beings, with all things, with mother earth, with the grandfather who are found in the four cardinal directions, everything, you know. And I'm owning what I'm saying. I'm holding that feather and that feather represents honesty and integrity as well. See, so you see it all ties in with that. And now the rock is another thing too. It's, uh, it can be used for destruction, or it can be used to build.

All informants spoke about spirits as grandfathers and/or our relatives. Mary spoke about

doorways that people can enter to move from the physical to spiritual realm. Bernie spoke of how

the rock that is passed around sharing circles symbolized the earth. She also spoke of water as

"symbolic of life".

Fanny shared a story that reflected the incorporation of symbols in the sharing circles she

conducts:

And so what, I remember one time, and this was a fairly large group but that was the best we could do and so you work things out so that everybody has a chance to speak. And, um, so time was very important. Anyway, and sometimes people are just very reluctant, like not every group will behave the same way to, uh, to, I guess, this process. So I think actually this was a teaching circle cause that's O.K., I'll just tell you this one. Anyway, I had put a blanket out and, uh, offered you know those who shared, you know, that were, we would share our thoughts and our feelings will go towards the centre here, the centre of the circle. And we all agreed to be together, you know. And, so anyway, time was going on and this particular session, people were talking, you know, really talking and they seemed to be feeling comfortable. But we needed to take a break. And so then, um, so then there was a chance to take a break, probably after a round. And, uh, so people were glad to. That's the other thing, you can always come and go I think at a sharing circle. But sometimes it's very hard to leave a circle when people are talking and so, uh, I, you know, gave a break. That's how when you're a teacher you sort of hold certain powers. (chuckle) So anyway, people were glad. They wanted to take a break without missing anything. Anyway a woman was talking to me and she was backing up and she, her feet were starting to touch the blanket. And so there were other people who didn't leave the room who saw her backing up towards the blanket and they said, "watch it, watch it, watch it, you're stepping on our feelings." (chuckle) So she jumped and she turned around and said, "oh, I'm sorry, I'm sorry." And they said, "yes, look at, you're just pushing our feelings around." You know. So she went down and she started scooping, you know, back onto the blanket. She says, "here", she says, "didn't want to, didn't mean to knock these off." You know, she was sort of making a motion that the feelings should

be going back on to the blanket, you know, so it was very interesting for me to see. But, um. there is this respect for feelings. And that the feelings were something that were just, it's just something that we can't, the feelings are not own....., are not seen. The feelings are something that can be seen and that are almost tangible, you know. And so when they were talking. some of them had seen it, their thoughts and stories were actually put out for everybody to see and that they should be taken care of so you don't step on them and again knock them off the blanket. So I like that story. Uh, so then at the end I made sure that I went over and asked people to take what they wanted back, take care of whatever it was they shared, you know, because there might be another time that they choose to take this out again. And, uh, and then those things that they didn't want to take, I said, "well, I'll ask, I can't remember who, to take care of them." You know. And so then you make motions with your hands and they will take. And so people are glad. Cause sometimes they don't want to take a resentment with them, you know, just leave it there, you know, so I think it's important that it be taken. Other times I've said I'll take them in this blanket and put them off some place safe. I've done that too. And so people think that's good. Well taken care, even the resentments and their anger but they are taken care of and it was nice to let go. So, anyway, so you can't shake the blanket, you know. So I always make sure I fold up this blanket and now that and unfold it in a very deliberate way. I use candles too, and water.

Overall, Fanny suggested that these symbols make sharing circles more sacred. They also provide comfort and reassurance.

In ten of the 12 sharing circles I attended it appeared to me that there was some overt form of symbolism. For example, in four of them water was placed in the middle of the circle. In one of these circles it was explained that water was one representative of life. In another sharing circle there was a lit candle placed in the middle and was said to represent a campfire as well as life.

Summary

This chapter reviewed the findings of the research conducted through interviews with five key informants and my participation in 12 sharing circles. The findings were organized under five major themes. The themes were "Historical Considerations," "Processes--The Physical," "Healing-

-The Emotional," "Learning--The Mental," and "A Circular Worldview--The Spiritual." The

following chapter discusses the findings in relation to the literature review.

Chapter Five

Discussion

Introduction

The initial purposes of this study were 1) to outline the similarities and differences

between particular social work approaches and an Aboriginal approach to helping, and 2) to study

sharing circles in order to address the lack of information of culturally appropriate methods of

practice when working with Aboriginal people. The first purpose was addressed through the

Literature Review chapter. The descriptive aspect of the second purpose was addressed in the

Findings chapter. This chapter continues with the second purpose by comparing the findings of

the research to the Aboriginal approach outlined in the literature review, and by making some

interpretive points. An outline of the possible implications of the study follows the interpretations.

Recommendations are made in relation to social work research, education, and practice. The

chapter closes with some comments for Aboriginal people to consider.

Comparing the Research Findings and the Aboriginal Approach

It is apparent that what I had experienced during my participation in sharing circles and

what the informants had shared is a close reflection of the Aboriginal approach outlined in the

literature review. There were also a couple areas where no direct connections were made. These

similarities and areas of no connection are identified in the following table which follows Turner's

(1988) outline previously identified in the Literature Review chapter. The outline's eight main

headings are background, general attributes, perception of person, view on functioning, helping

qualities, the helper, group practices, and limitations. The table reiterates the summary of the

Aboriginal approach outlined in the literature review. It also summarizes the research findings.

Table 10:   Comparison of the background of an Aboriginal approach and the research
               findings on sharing circles.

An Aboriginal Approach	Research Findings
Background	
Based upon the medicine wheel, an ancient symbol of the universe. It has been generally applied to explain issues and abstract ideas.	Only Glen noted the medicine wheel. However, several of the informants discussed the attributes directly related to the medicine wheel. During my participation in sharing circles, the medicine wheel and its related attributes were discussed frequently, but in relation to the sharing circles.

Table 11:   Comparison of the general attributes of an Aboriginal approach to helping and the research findings on sharing circles.

An Aboriginal Approach	Research Findings
General Attributes	
Key concepts.	
A general theory which focuses on developing centredness and growth through the concepts of wholeness, balance, connection/relationships, and harmony.	Centredness was addressed by the informants in terms of releasing negative energy. This energy had to be released in order for people's "doorways" to be opened so that they may be able to centre and balance themselves, and come to harmony. Several participants also outlined the importance for people to connect with the four aspects within themselves; the physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental. Further, they related these aspects with the attributes of balance and harmony.
Concepts related to the people being served.	
Healing is a daily, lifelong journey to *pimatasiwin*—a good life—which is achieved through maintaining centredness.	Healing is a main theme of the research findings. Healing comes about through emotional expression, discharging turmoil, and through cleansing and purifying oneself. There was no mention of *pimatasiwin*. However, this may be due to the fact that the interviews took place in English.
Additional concepts.	
In order to reach *pimatasiwin* certain values are emphasized, particularly sharing and respect, while others are avoided. Spirituality is vitally important as the basis of all connections and beings. As such, healing involves the spiritual aspect of people.	Sharing, respect, and spirituality were clearly identified. Respect is one of the basic rules of sharing circles. Sharing is a basic process of sharing circles, even when people choose not speak, their presence is a form of sharing. Spirituality was one of the most evident themes identified in the findings. While healing was connected to the emotional aspect, it was also associated with spirituality.

Table 12:   Comparison of the perception of person in an Aboriginal approach and the research findings on sharing circles.

An Aboriginal Approach	Research Findings
Perception of Person	
View of human nature and activity orientation.	
People are inherently good, but bad/evil/negativeness is acknowledged to exist. They are orientated towards being, and being-in-becoming.	Positive and negative energy was acknowledged as existing. Indirectly it was noted that human nature is orientated to being, and being-in-becoming. For example, a significant aspect of sharing circles is the mental component where people experience the opportunity to learn from the sharing of one another's experiences. Another example is related to the emotional aspect. Informants suggested that the expression, discharging, cleansing, and purifying of one's emotions also leads to people facing and overcoming personal issues. In both of these examples, people are actively striving to accept and understand their present situation while working to develop themselves through continuous learning and healing.
View of individuals, time orientation, and relationships.	
People are purposeful as they are attempting to reach *pimatasiwin*. They are past, present, and future time orientated. Relationships are highly significant to well-being and reaching *pimatasiwin*.	Whether people are purposeful was not directly stated. Indirectly it was noted that people attempt to become more balanced and in harmony. Relationships were very significant in that people were seen as being one entity when they come together. Coming together also produces positive feelings of belonging and therefore a sense of serving a purpose.

Table 13: Comparison of the view of functioning in an Aboriginal approach and the research findings on sharing circles.

View on Functioning	
Role of history and individual development.	
History has influenced people individually and as groups. All life is based upon a cyclic nature, thus people go through developmental stages, but on a personal level.	History, particularly the effects of oppression were noted to influence individuals and Aboriginal people as a group. Cycles are frequently noted on the physical and metaphysical levels.
Importance of consciousness-unconsciousness.	
Consciousness and unconsciousness are important and both are incorporated in the helping process.	Consciousness and unconsciousness were periodically discussed throughout. Indirectly it was discussed in relation to spirituality.
Nature of change and the role of motivation.	
Change is tied to balancing, maintaining relationships, and harmony of the whole. The whole, the universe, is in a constant state of flux and cyclic transitions, thus change is ongoing. Motivation stems from within individuals and their desire to reach *pimatasiwin*.	Change is addressed under each of the themes, particularly the spiritual theme. Overall it is related to relating to others, releasing negative energy, coming to centredness, balance, and harmony within oneself and with others. Thus, change is also tied to a life long process or journey of development.

Table 14:   Comparison of the helping qualities in an Aboriginal approach and the research findings on sharing circles.

An Aboriginal Approach	Research findings
Helping Qualities	
Focus of helping.	
The focus is on relationships that exist on various levels.	Sharing circles were seen as a form of therapy or counselling. The focus of helping was not discussed directly. Indirectly the informants stated people were to concentrate on their own experiences, listening and being respectful to others, addressing and balancing the four aspects within each person. The idea that we are all related was highlighted. Conductors try to maintain the process so that people are supportive to, and not interfering with one another.
The helping relationship and specific techniques.	
The helping relationship is an interdependent one where experiences of learning and growing are shared. It is to be supportive, helpful, non-coercive, respectful of individual autonomy, and generally indirect. Techniques are general and include storytelling, use of humour, role modelling, ceremonies, and participation of Elders.	Sharing is key to sharing circles. Each person's independence and self-responsibility was noted. People are free to participate to any degree they wish, thus non-coerciveness and individual autonomy was noted. It was also noted that people have to respect the group and this included not leaving at just any time. Other points about the relationship included non-interference, support, respect, and learning and healing indirectly through sharing personal stories. Techniques discussed include storytelling and role modelling through sharing stories, ceremonies, use of humour, the participation of Elders, discharging, prayer, spiritual guidance and healing, and smudging.

Table 15:   Comparison of the helper in an Aboriginal approach and the research findings on sharing circles.

An Aboriginal Approach	Research Findings
The Helper	
Specific knowledge and skills, and goal setting.	
Helpers are required to have experiential knowledge of centredness and the issues. Knowledge and skills also include humility, use of silence, listening, and speaking from the heart. While the ultimate goal is to reach *pimatasiwin*, other goals are determined by the person being helped.	Conductors are to be kind, gentle, moral, ethical, confident, strong, flexible, good listeners, patient, accommodating and respectful. They are to have previous experience in conducting sharing circles. Conductors have to be able to tune into themselves in order to be prepared to listen, to clearly outline the process, and maintain the process so that people are respectful and feel safe. Indirectly it was noted that the conductor does not direct other people, thus people determine their own goals.

Table 16:   Comparison of group practices in an Aboriginal approach and the research findings on sharing circles.

An Aboriginal Approach	Research Findings
Group Practices	
Background.	
Circles have been a part of Aboriginal cultures historically and are based upon the medicine wheel perspective. They have been used for ceremonies and meetings and continue to be exercised as a group format.	The informants discussed the historical uses of sharing circles. Uses included sharing information, arranging hunting expeditions, arranging marriages, marriage counselling, addressing delinquency, making decisions, and spiritual gatherings.
Key attributes.	
Circles vary in size, but generally range from 10 to 15 people. All members participate voluntarily. The focus is determined by the participants and there is a lack of emphasis on time limits. The spiritual realm is included, although the degree which traditional Aboriginal spirituality is included may vary. Characteristics include dignity, unity, acceptance, respect, and harmony, thus they reflect an Aboriginal approach.	While large circles over 60 participants were acknowledged, smaller circles of less than 20 were noted as being most preferential. Generally there are no time restrictions, the focus is determined by the participants, unless it is a teaching circle, and spirituality is a very significant component. Characteristics include sharing, respect, listening, harmony, cooperation, and acceptance.

Table 16 continued: Comparison of group practices in an Aboriginal approach and the research findings on sharing circles.

An Aboriginal Approach	Research Findings
Group Practices	
Member's and helper's roles.	
All people in the circle are learners and teachers. They are required to share, listen, not judge, and have humility, strength, courage, and respect. Helpers outline and facilitate circle processes and utilize some basic counselling techniques.	All people, including the conductors, participate equally. Everyone can learn and teach through sharing. Participants and conductors are to listen, not judge one another, and be humble, supportive, respectful, patient, and strong. Basic communication techniques are demonstrated and learned through the sharing circle processes.
Processes.	
Individuals share without interruption and judgement, and contribute to a group understanding. Individuals develop a sense of holistic connection.	Sharing occurs without interruption and judgement. All people contribute to a group understanding and individuals develop a sense of belonging; a sense of all people being together as one.

Table 17:   Comparison of the limitations of an Aboriginal approach and the research findings on sharing circles.

An Aboriginal Approach	Research Findings
Limitations	
Since this Aboriginal approach has not been written upon as an approach to social work, it has not been critiqued. Indirectly it has been suggested that the approach is ethnocentric, and that certain interventions may be inadequate or harmful.	Mary was the only informant who spoke of limitations. She suggested that when people do not understand that people are sharing about themselves, they may get the impression that the speakers are talking about them when their personal stories are similar. As a result people may feel hurt. Another criticism related to group size. If the group gets too big, people may feel less comfortable and less willing to share.

Discussion and Implications

Upon reviewing the table, it is clearly evident that the informants and my experiences in sharing circles reflected an Aboriginal approach to helping. There were only two areas where there was no connection. First, while it was noted in the literature that this Aboriginal approach is based upon the medicine wheel, the informants did not discuss the medicine wheel as the basis to their work in sharing circles, nor was it mentioned as the basis to the sharing circles that I participated in. It is noteworthy that the informants and some of the conductors of the sharing circles, I participated in, did talk about the concepts used to describe the medicine wheel, such as balance, connections, and harmony. Second, the Aboriginal approach suggested that people were striving to reach *pimatasiwin*. Neither the informants or I noted any discussion of *pimatasiwin*. However, comments were made that appeared to imply a similar meaning; such as, people are striving to become more balanced and in harmony with each other and the environment. On each of the other points the information shared by the informants and experienced through my

participation in sharing circles generally match or was similar to the basic points of the Aboriginal approach described in the literature review.

In addition to the themes noted in the Findings section, and the match between the literature outlining this Aboriginal Approach and the research findings, another prominent point emerged. This point dealt with how each individual and people in society related to each other. When considering each individual, it is apparent that this approach emphasizes respect and responsibility for individual autonomy. For example, Ross (1996) noted the importance of personal responsibility when an individual attempts to reach *pimatasiwin*. He stated:

> Only you can find the will to take those first steps towards trusting others, towards taking hold of the hand that reaches down to help you. The healers can show you how they trust each other, how they don't let go of each other, but they can't force you to reach out yourself. They can only demonstrate, teach, encourage and receive. *Everything else must come from the individual who needs the healing.* (emphasis added, p. 190)

Similarly, the research findings noted that individuals are responsible for their own healing. For example, Glen reiterated comments made by an Elder: "You are responsible for your own path. No one else is."

Autonomy and respect were also discussed in both the literature and research findings through the concept of non-interference. Non-interference was discussed in relation to sharing circle processes. The literature and information from the research emphasized that when one person is speaking, the other people in the circle are not to interfere with the speaker. They are to respect the speaker and listen from the heart.

In addition to having respect and responsibility for each individual's autonomy, people also have respect and responsibility for others in society. This responsibility was noted in the literature review. For example, Jim Canipitatao, in a translation from Cree, stated, "we must help

each other and ask for God's help to understand each other, love each other and help each other, my relatives. It is better to ask for unity, to work together, to think of our grandchildren. This is the Cree way" (cited in Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1975, p. 43).

This commitment to society was reflected in the research as well. For example. Bernie spoke of how people are to respect the group by validating people's feelings. thoughts. and experiences through paying attention to the people when they speak and not disrupting the group by leaving. In this manner, listening is an act of sharing. Another example of responsibility to the group noted in the research was the importance of sharing. People may share their experiences so others can take the opportunity to learn from those experiences.

Thus, it appears that beyond the central themes, another consistent point evident in the literature as well as in the research findings is respect and responsibility on two levels. The first level is the individual level where autonomy and self-responsibility is emphasized through such actions as non-interference. It appears that this is the level that connects with the person-centred approach, but not with the life model approach. The second level is the societal level where individuals interact in a manner which does not disrupt the group and where they also contribute for the benefit of others. This is demonstrated through such actions as non-interference and sharing. It appears that this level has some connections to the life model approach, but not the person-centred approach.

Overall, the literature review and research suggests that an Aboriginal approach to helping exists. This approach is based on and consistent with Aboriginal worldviews. Stemming from this approach is at least one practice, sharing circles. While this approach has some similarities to two Western based approaches, the life model and the person-centred approaches, there are many

differences. Considering this overall point, that an Aboriginal approach exists, raises some further considerations.

So What Does All This Mean?

Foremost, there is the need for the social work profession in its entirety to recognize that Aboriginal worldviews, approaches, and practices to helping exist. This recognition needs to include the point that while these worldviews, approaches, and practices may hold some points which are similar to some Western based worldviews, approaches and practices, there are differences that make Aboriginal worldviews, approaches, and practices unique. The Canadian Association of Social Workers' (1994) presentation to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples recognized the need for fundamental changes to social work practices which include the recognition of Aboriginal worldviews, approaches, and practices. Individual social workers also have to make this recognition.

Once this recognition is made throughout the profession, other implications may also be recognized. The first of these is that the profession has to realize that its understanding of Aboriginal approaches to helping is limited. Mawhiney (1995) commented on this limitation. She stated "we need to acknowledge the extent to which our learning in mainstream social work education programs is still based on dominant-held middle-class, patriarchal and white values, traditions, assumptions and ways of thinking; ways that are limited in their application to First Nations" (p. 226), and that "some structural shifts are needed in how social workers are prepared for practice" (p. 227). Second, the profession has to recognize that there are many people who understand these approaches and utilize the practices that stem from them. These people are likely to be the traditional Aboriginal Elders and healers. Third, it has been noted that Aboriginal people

face a variety of issues more often than non-Aboriginal people. These issues include, but are not

limited to, unemployment, lower education attainment, and violence (Barsh, 1994). The likelihood

that a social worker will be working with an Aboriginal client is high. Considering this possibility,

the social work profession needs to reach out to, and support, Aboriginal Elders and healers with

knowledge of Aboriginal worldviews, approaches, and practices. Through reaching out and

supporting them, the profession may receive reciprocal support either directly, such as in service

provision, or indirectly, such as through their participation in the education system.

These points of learning about Aboriginal worldviews, approaches, and practices -- and

the likelihood of working with Aboriginal people -- are associated with additional implications

that need to be highlighted. Upon learning about and recognizing that there are connections

between this Aboriginal approach and the life model and person-centred approaches, some social

work researchers, educators, and practitioners may suggest that the life model and person-centred

models are culturally sensitive and/or appropriate approaches that can be utilized as the basis for

practice when working with Aboriginal people. However, Sue et al.(1996), in their discussion of

shortcomings of contemporary theories of counselling and psychotherapy, suggested some points

that have to be considered. They stated, "it has been suggested that worldviews are highly

correlated with cultural upbringing and life experiences....Given that schools of counselling and

psychotherapy have arisen from Western-European contexts, the worldview they espouse may not

be shared by racial/ethnic minority groups in the United States or in different countries" (p. 7).

They suggested further that, "it is impossible to import a theoretically disembodied technique

from any theory of counselling and psychotherapy without changing some aspect of the technique

itself or the theory to which it is imported" (p. 10).

In light of what has been suggested by Sue et al. (1996), utilizing the life model, person-centred, or possibly any other Western approach as the basis for practice with Aboriginal people and relying on the connections between the approaches to allow for sensitivity may mean that one group's worldviews would be acting as the basis for practice with people who hold another set of worldviews. Further, if Aboriginal worldviews are incorporated in order to only support Western practice to be more sensitive, the possibility remains that Aboriginal worldviews would become changed and disembodied since only parts of the views are considered. Aboriginal people receiving services would be making accommodations in how they understand the world in order to correspond to Western views held by the social worker. Thus, learning about Aboriginal worldviews, approaches, and practices must be taken into context. In terms of education, this means that Aboriginal approaches must be considered and taught as a complete approach in-and-of themselves and not as secondary matter added to sensitize upcoming or graduated social workers.

In terms of practice, this means social workers should strive to utilize the services of Elders and traditional healers, especially when working with Aboriginal people who follow their traditional culture. Social workers also need to be prepared to utilize approaches and practices that are culturally based if all attempts of reaching Elders and traditional people are unsuccessful. This raises a particular dilemma for social workers, particularly non-Aboriginal social workers, who have not learned and are unable to follow such approaches and practices.

The dilemma is whether to utilize a social work approach, such as the person centred or life model approaches, or be caught not offering any services. In such situations, all efforts should be made by the social workers to acknowledge to the people they are serving that they are

working from particular views, and utilizing certain approaches and practices. They should also acknowledge the limitations of their abilities and their willingness to work in cooperation with the people their are serving in order to offset these limitations. Such acknowledgement and cooperation could support the people being served to identify what they would accept as appropriate. The people being served may also be able to identify other service providers, such as Elders and traditional healers, who could be brought into the processes.

Associated with the provision of culturally based approaches and practices is whether non-Aboriginal social workers should be providing culturally based services such as sharing circles. Considering the point made by Sue et al. (1996) that Western worldviews dominate most services providers, there is a real concern that their use of approaches and practices that are based upon Aboriginal worldviews will not completely reflect Aboriginal worldviews. There are people who stand against non-Aboriginal people utilizing Aboriginal based practices while others are accepting of such actions.

I believe that whether a non-Aboriginal social worker utilizes Aboriginal approaches and practices should depend upon at least three factors: First, the degree which they have been able to experience Aboriginal approaches and practices and whether such practices have become part of their personal worldviews; second, whether they can truly reflect Aboriginal worldviews in their actions, and third, whether they and their actions are accepted by the Aboriginal community generally, the Aboriginal people with whom they are in relationships specifically, and the Aboriginal persons with whom they are working particularly.

Recommendations and Comments

In light of these implications several recommendations should be considered. These recommendations are made in several areas, including social work research, education, and practice. In addition to these recommendations, there are comments made for Aboriginal peoples to consider.

Recommendation for Social Work Researchers

This study has only explored the concept of an Aboriginal approach to helping as demonstrated through the practice of sharing circles. The initial research purposes of 1) outlining the similarities and differences between social work and Aboriginal approaches, and 2) studying sharing circles in order to address the lack of information on culturally appropriate methods of practice when working with Aboriginal people, can be carried further. For example, more people who conduct sharing circles could be interviewed. People who have participated in sharing circles but who have not conducted them should be interviewed in order to develop a greater understanding of the effects of participation. In addition, other research questions addressing similar areas should be considered. They include:

-What other Aboriginal practices are being utilized by Aboriginal people in order to support people? What are the connections between social work and these practices?

-To what extent are sharing circles and other practices being utilized? What is influencing the degree of use of Aboriginal practices?

-What are the outcomes of utilizing such practices?

-What are the experiences of non-Aboriginal people participating in such practices?

-Can these practices be incorporated directly and fully into social work practice?

Research on such topics can be a very sensitive issue. Some Aboriginal people may disagree that

further research is needed. For many Aboriginal people these approaches and practices have been

researched from an Aboriginal perspective. As the knowledge is passed on from one generation of

practitioners to the next, the implicit understanding is that the practice is grounded in an

Aboriginal worldview. For them, these approaches are already well based and understood.

However, in relation to social work practices, these approaches and practices are only starting to

get some attention. In order to support a greater understanding of how these Aboriginal

approaches can be supported by the social work profession, further research is needed. Prior to

new research on the topic, Aboriginal people must be contacted in order to seek approval for such

work. This issue of sensitivity raises further research questions to be considered, including:

-How do Aboriginal people, including Elders and healers, feel about Aboriginal practices

being researched by Western academics?

-What are the most appropriate ways to research such practices?

Recommendations for Social Work Educators

The views of Aboriginal people need to be included as a point of reference in all aspects of

social work education. These aspects include, but are not limited to, social welfare policy

development and analysis, social welfare administration, and direct social work practice. The

inclusion of Aboriginal worldviews in each of these areas is based upon the fact that worldviews

influence each area, which in turn influence social workers and the people with whom they will

work. In addition, social work education should include Aboriginal approaches such as circles as

vehicles for teaching.

Educators also need to support Aboriginal approaches and practices in their own right without having to adhere to a separate cultural perspective for legitimacy, such as the theories stemming from Western worldviews. Support involves the inclusion of traditional Aboriginal Elders and healers who hold understandings of Aboriginal worldviews (Clarkson et al., 1993; Ross, 1996). These individuals could also outline the approaches and practices that stem from the worldviews. Including such individuals does not preclude the need for social work educators to learn about the approaches themselves. Not having another person available to teach about Aboriginal approaches is not a reason for inaction.

Recommendations for Social Work Practitioners

As previously noted Aboriginal people face social issues in larger numbers than non-Aboriginal people. As providers of services meant to address these issues, social workers have to be prepared to work with Aboriginal people. In order to offer the best possible services, social work practitioners have to understand Aboriginal issues from Aboriginal peoples' perspectives. Such understanding can be acquired through participation in Aboriginal ceremonies, offering tobacco to Elders and healers, and requesting support in learning about Aboriginal ways.

Practitioners also need to respect Aboriginal approaches and practices. Such respect can be demonstrated through the incorporation of Aboriginal Elders and healers in services either through referrals, joint service provisions, and consultation. Respect also means letting the worldviews, approaches, and practices stand on their own merit, instead of judging or critiquing them from Western practitioners' perspectives. Practitioners need to advocate for and support the respect of such views to other social workers as well as society in general. Most important, service providers have to recognize their limited understanding of Aboriginal worldviews. They

need to know how their own worldviews, approaches, and practices may support or hinder their work with Aboriginal people. This awareness can support their developing understanding of Aboriginal worldviews, approaches, and practices and how the two sets of views connect and do not connect with each other. Such recognition can also free them to see the Aboriginal people they are serving as sources of knowledge, as in the sharing circles where each person is a student and a teacher.

Comments for Aboriginal People to Consider

As an Aboriginal person conducting this research I discovered more and more the basis of the conflicts that exist between an Aboriginal worldview and the conventional practices of social work. I discovered how few opportunities I had to incorporate the values given to me by my family and elders. As Aboriginal people, we need to understand that we need to play the part as teachers in dealing with professions such as social work.

As Aboriginal people I believe we need to respect and stand up for our own practices, our own approaches that guide these practices, and our own views that determine our approaches. In order to do this, we need to continue learning about our history from our perspectives. We need to continue to overcome the belief that has been instilled in many Aboriginal people that these practices are irrelevant, or worse, to be feared. We need to continue turning to our own Elders and healers as legitimate providers of information and resources. We need to continue learning who we are as Aboriginal people.

This does not mean that we disregard what non-Aboriginal society has to offer, but to learn how we may incorporate what is available in a manner which supports these needs, as well as our views and practices. We also have to stand up and voice that our views deserve to be

included in the institutions which serve us. In order to make such a proclamation, we have to be

willing to share our views and practices with those who will respect them.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Letter to Interview Participant

Dear Madam/Sir:

As a graduate student of the University of Manitoba Faculty of Social Work I am trying to develop a greater understanding of sharing circles. I am intending to demonstrate this understanding through the written recording of this understanding in a thesis and an oral presentation.

To development of this understanding I am interviewing Aboriginal people who have conducted sharing circles. These individuals know about Aboriginal culture, particularly sharing circles; have conducted of sharing circles for more than a year and on several (more than ten) occasions; have a role as an Aboriginal helper, either through a formal paid position or in an informal voluntary helper capacity; are able and willing to participate in an interview process which examines their knowledge of sharing circles; and are willing to be interviewed in English.

I believe that you match these points and I am interested in learning about your understanding of and experiences with sharing circles. I am inviting you to participate in an interview process to share this understanding. You are under no obligation to say yes to this request.

If you do participate, you are free to participate to any degree you wish. All information you share will not be linked specifically to you, unless you request for your contributions to be specifically acknowledged.

If you are willing to participate, please read and sign the enclosed consent form and return it to me. Once the consent form is signed we can arrange to set up an interview time. If you have any questions in the meantime, please feel free to reach me at the following telephone numbers and address.

Home
(204) 677-2213

2-129 Nickel Road
Thompson, Manitoba
R8N 0Y6

Work
(204) 677-1450 – Phone
(204) 677-4110 – Fax
Faculty of Social Work at Thompson
3 Station Road
Thompson, Manitoba
R8N 0N3

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Yours truly,

Michael Anthony Hart

Appendix B: Consent Form for Interview Participant

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN INTERVIEWS REGARDING SHARING CIRCLES

I,_____, agree to participate in the an interview process that will take one or more sessions in order to share my understanding of and experiences with conducting sharing circles.

I understand that

-any information that I will provide will not be associated with me by name in any public written or verbal reports that may follow this interview process, unless I request for specific acknowledgement of my contributions:

-I am free to withdraw from this process at any time I wish:

-I will be informed about the research findings and how the information I shared is to be used;

-a copy of the final draft will be made available to me upon my request; and

-if I do not agree with how information I shared is included in the draft then I will be given a predetermined, mutually agreeable amount of time to voice my disagreement and revisions will be made to reflect my views more accurately.

_____   _____
Date   Signature

_____   _____
Date   Witness

Appendix C: Interview Questionnaire Guide

INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE GUIDE

1. What are sharing circles?

2. What is the process to conducting sharing circles?

3. Who participates in sharing circles?

4. Are there individuals who are not allowed to participate in sharing circles? Who?

5. What have people experienced when they have conducted sharing circles?

6. What beliefs do Aboriginal people who conduct sharing circles have about sharing circles?

7. Do people become eligible to conduct sharing circles? How?

8. Where are sharing circles conducted? Are there reasons for particular locations?

9. When are sharing circles conducted? Are there reasons for particular times?

10. Why do people participate in sharing circles?

11. How many people can participate in sharing circles?

12. What do people need to know about sharing circles before they participate?

13. Are sharing circles similar to any other Aboriginal practices? Which ones?

14. Are there other Aboriginal ceremonies that can be include with sharing circles? Which ones?