NISTAWATSIMAN

EXPLORING FIRST NATIONS PARENTING:

A LITERATURE REVIEW AND EXPERT CONSULTATION

WITH BLACKFOOT ELDERS

ELDERS:

LEONARD BASTIEN AND AUDREY WEASEL TRAVELLER – Piikani First Nation

STEWART BREAKER AND KATHY BREAKER – Siksika First Nation

WILTON GOOD STRIKER AND EVELYN GOOD STRIKER – Kainai First Nation

PROJECT PARTNERS:

GABRIELLE LINDSTROM, PhD (C) – Member of the Kainai First Nation

PETER CHOATE, MSW, PhD – Assistant Professor, Social Work, Mount Royal University

Recommended Citation:

Lindstrom, G., Choate, P., Bastien, L., Weasel Traveller, A., Breaker, S., Breaker, C., Good Striker, W., and Good Striker, E. (2016). Nistawatsimin: Exploring First Nations parenting: A literature review and expert consultation with Blackfoot Elders. Calgary, AB: Mount Royal University.

Key Words: First Nations parenting; Aboriginal parenting; parenting and child protection; Blackfoot parenting traditions.

Nistawatsiman is a Blackfoot word which means rearing children with all the traditional teachings of our people, that include compassion, harmony, trust, respect, honesty, generosity, courage, understanding, peace, protection, and knowing who your relatives are.

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Introduction

In the midst of an evolving national political landscape, Canadians and Aboriginal peoples are treading on new terrain as we are all challenged to undertake the journey towards reconciliation and begin to heal the wounds inflicted by the events of our shared colonial history; a history that continues to shape the experiences of most Aboriginal peoples today. Recently, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal decision (CHRT, 2016) determined that the most vulnerable sector of the Canadian population, Aboriginal children has been, and continues to be, discriminated against. Moreover, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC, 2015) put forth 94 calls to action that are meant to move Canadian society and Aboriginal peoples towards reconciling and healing from the deleterious effects of the Indian Residential Schools and other forms of colonialism. This emerging relationship between Aboriginal peoples and Canadian society at large demands that we take a close look at the systems that have contributed to the on-going oppression of Aboriginal peoples and attempt to redress the many past and present injustices that have contributed to the poor socio-economic situation of many Aboriginal communities. This involves an understanding that imposing ones will onto another does not result in positive changes, yet this is exactly what the Canadian government has done both historically and contemporarily with regards to the original inhabitants of this land – the Aboriginal peoples, with the most vulnerable of its members, the children, feeling the brunt of the colonial hammer. Significantly, the child welfare system, a system of authority meant to protect the rights of children, our country's most defenceless population, has been actively participating in the assimilative agenda of the federal government with regards to its treatment of Aboriginal children. In response to some of the issues above as they relate to the child welfare

system, the purpose of this paper is to provide a comprehensive overview and analysis of the scholarship that encompasses relevant topics surrounding the theme of Aboriginal parenting. By so doing, we seek to contribute to a larger conversation about the relationship between child protection services (CPS) and Aboriginal peoples. Our focus is on how parents are considered and assessed by CPS. In this paper, we raise the notion that the foundations of assessment have not been rooted in Aboriginal cultural and their world view of family and parenting.

It is vital to remember that child protection services were imposed upon Aboriginal peoples. As Cameron (2007) notes, the Indian Act transfers authority to enforce provincial child protection laws on reserves. Before we delve into the topics proposed above, we first offer definitions of key terms related to our review.

Definition of terms

Adoption: "The conscious decision to care for a person, be it a child, adult or elder, who is not directly biologically related, but who has displayed a need for familial support and protection" (Lee, 2015, p. 87).

Neglect: A condition that is structurally determined by such things as poverty, parental substance abuse and lack of appropriate housing (Blackstock, 2009).

Universality: "The application of the same standards and protective mechanisms established in child welfare legislation to all children within each province" (Kline, 1992, p. 415).

Cultural structure: "The variables and processes that occur within a way of life [and includes] all the items living and non-living that provide cultural understanding and context" (p. 34-35).

Cultural attachment: "a philosophy, which encapsulates how an individual bonds to his or her culture. Cultural attachment creates a direct spiritual force, where the bond begins, develops, and evolves for the individual" (p. 39).

Crisis event: A term used refer to both community, when the collective experiences shock or disruption, and systemic crises, when individuals experience poor treatment within the criminal justice system (McCaslin & Boyer, 2009).

Networks of care: Refers to the availability and access to social support systems for parent(s) and include immediate and extended family and community. "[T]his system of support is characterized by factors, such as income support, care and nurturing of children, and participation in unpaid housework, provided to multiple family households by extended family members. These components are essential in the successful day-to-day functioning of these lone parent families" (Quinless, 2013, p. 3). Informal networks of support include family and community and more formal networks include childcare agencies, social support agencies, support groups, etc. (Quinless, 2013).

Hidden homelessness: A condition in which people live with friends or family because they cannot afford shelter for themselves is a part of relative homelessness (Peters, 2012, p. 322).

Constrained agency: The idea that homeless people "are competent actors actively engaged in negotiating their social and spatial environments with a context of overwhelming constraints that set limits to their choices and actions" (Peters, 2012, p. 334).

Jordan's Principle: Although it still has not been implemented, it is a child-first policy passed in 2007 to ensure that jurisdictional issues between the Federal and Provincial government would not impinge on the health and well-being of First Nations and if jurisdictional issues should arise, the jurisdiction of first contact would take responsibility in providing funds and services until issues can be resolved. Its scope continues to be limited by the government and has yet to be fully implemented (King, 2012).

Neoliberalism: A political rationality dictating that economic free market values are extended to social and moral spheres in which citizens are independent and individually driven. Hence, support services are individually conceptualized and those requiring it are seen as failures in self-sufficiency (King, 2012).

Inclusive liberalism: A political ideology conforming to many of the same features of neoliberalism but with an understanding that there is a "need for a certain amount of social investment in order to generate human capital and 'empower' citizen-subjects to participate in the paid labour market" (King, 2012, p. 33).

Custom Adoption: "The cultural practices of Aboriginal peoples to raise a child by a person who is not the child's parent according to the customs of the First Nation and/or Aboriginal community of the child" (Carriere, 2015, p. 40).

Parental ethnotheories: Having motivational and cognitive properties that provide a frame of reference for responding to and interpreting children's behaviors, these are the "shared child-rearing beliefs, values, and practices, constructed within broader cultural belief systems" (Cheah & Chirkov, 2008, p. 402).

Autonomous-relational self: An individual perspective that is the "product of families who encourage a dialectical synthesis of autonomy and relatedness and promote independent decision making while expecting family members to remain close to each other over the life course" (Cheah & Chirkov, 2008, p. 404).

Linked lives: The notion of how experiences and events affecting one generation influence the development of subsequent generations' lives (walls & Whitbeck, 2012).

Culture of expectancy: The notion that all needs of a community are met externally creating a cycle of dependency; especially applicable to First Nations reserves in Canada (Makokis, 2009).

Background

In our examination of the literature, we remain inspired by both an emerging relational landscape and the value and relevance of Aboriginal ways of parenting to determine how Aboriginal child-rearing practices can be recognized as valid, distinct and acceptable in the eyes of CPS and the courts in which many families find themselves addressing child protection concerns. Many other topics surround the periphery of Aboriginal parenting and must be addressed in order to appreciate the complex and multi-layered historical and contemporary contexts of raising children according to Aboriginal cultural protocols. As such, this review offers a broad and comprehensive examination of the literature allowing us to ask fundamental questions that address why Aboriginal parenting is an issue, how it has been addressed previously, how parenting is defined in Aboriginal contexts and significantly, determines the gaps in Western perspectives on family structure and parenting that cannot account for the differences in childrearing practices between Eurocentric based notions of family and those of Aboriginal cultures. Moreover, we address the failure of linkages to Western family dynamics and theories, offer an Aboriginal cultural basis for parenting that includes broad cultural principles that can be adapted and modified, and notably, provide suggestions for future directions and implications for systemic change as informed by the Aboriginal voice. Finally, we identify some of the gaps in the literature to which this review responds to, and then offer a synthesis of the scholarship from a conceptual lens that is created from the voices that emerged out of the literature.

In undertaking this comprehensive literature review, we conducted a broad, and exhaustive search of the relevant scholarship using the following key phrases: traditional Aboriginal child rearing practices; Aboriginal traditional kinship structures; and finally, First

Nations traditional families. We then narrowed the scope after scanning the abstracts and utilized an ancestry method of reviewing the literatures. What follows is the results of our work beginning with an analysis of the scholarship that speaks to why addressing the issue of Aboriginal parenting is both important and vital in the context our emerging national landscape and the current crises-level state of Aboriginal communities.

Why is this an issue?

Child protection has been involved in the lives of Aboriginal families at a rate that far exceeds that of the balance of Canadian peoples (Aboriginal Children in Care Working Group (ABCCWG), 2015; Trocme, Knoke & Blackstock, 2004). The roots of this lie heavily in the legacy of the Residential Schools where intergenerational family and parenting patterns were lost (TRC, 2015). This disruption was founded upon the belief that Aboriginal family values, at odds with those of the dominant culture of the times along with the goal of forced assimilation. Residential schools were followed by what became known as the "Sixties Scoop", a term coined by Patrick Johnson (1983). This saw Aboriginal children removed in large numbers from their families and communities into foster and adoptive homes across North America. These removals were often done without the knowledge or consent of the families (Johnson, 1983). As Raven (2007) notes, "Sadly, the involvement of the child welfare system is no less prolific in the current era...the "Sixties Scoop" has merely evolved into the "Millennium Scoop (p.67)." Blackstock (2007) suggests that CPS took on the assimilative role of the Residential Schools in that they continued the disruption of family and community life by ongoing removal of children into foster care.

The Sixties Scoop began a trend of over representation of Aboriginal children in the care of CPS which is a trend that continues today (Trocme, Knoke & Blackstock, 2004). Until recently, child protection workers lacked knowledge in Aboriginal culture:

> In the 1960s, the child welfare system did not require, nor did it expect, social workers to have specific training in dealing with children in Aboriginal communities. Many of these social workers were completely unfamiliar with the culture or history of the Aboriginal communities they entered. What they believed constituted proper care was generally based on middle-class Euro-Canadian values (Hanson, 2009).

In current times, when parents come into contact with CPS, a fundamental question is whether or not they can be 'good enough' to parent their children (Choate & Engstrom, 2014). Core to this question is the base of comparison and the cultural definition of family.

Muir and Bohr (2014) contend there has been little research conducted on Aboriginal parenting and family structure: "Much of the scant past research on Aboriginal families has focused on the 'deficient', nonmainstream parenting which was practiced by Aboriginal parents" (p. 67) with an emphasis on overgeneralizations and a tendency to homogenize Aboriginal tribes. Stewart's (2009) literature review presents various issues from an Indigenous (Dene) perspective located at the intersection of Western social constructivism theory and Indigenous ways of knowing in the context of family counseling practices, specifically practitioner and family interactions. It was found that it is important to ascertain a client's group or cultural identity and his/her knowledge of the cultural history, which is an important first step in determining the contours and complexities of Aboriginal parenting. Stewart (2009) tells us that erroneous and misunderstood assumptions about Indigenous cultures have resulted in devastating effects on families and whole communities. These effects include have collective impact and significantly, Stewart (2009) asserts that "low self-esteem in Indigenous communities is linked to achievement in life, and the ability to adjust to environmental demands" (p. 66). Utilizing statistical data,

Quinless' (2013) study reports on the prevalence and features of First Nations teenage mothers between the ages of 15-19 as heads of households focusing on cultural networks of care supporting the notion that teenage lone parent households do not have the negative impacts on children and parents as held by mainstream society. Quinless (2013) maintains, "Understanding First Nations family structure and organization is important for researchers and social policy makers when considering the development of programs, policies, and services intended to benefit lone parent families" (p. 1). As of 2006, 25% of urban Aboriginal families were lone parent families and over one-third were lone parents on-reserve headed by females living in varying degrees of poverty dependent on factors such as age of children and education attainment levels, access to employment opportunity, urban or on-reserve location (Quinless, 2013).

Prominent Child Protection Concerns

> Aboriginal children and their families in Canada are more likely to live in poverty, and their poverty is more likely to be entrenched and intergenerational in nature. While more than half of Aboriginal Canadians now live in urban many live in rural and remote communities. Aboriginal families are more likely to live in sub-standard housing; struggle with addictions; experience food insecurity; be single parent led; experience a lack of family and other supports; and lack the skills, education and economic development opportunities required to become self- sufficient. (ABBCWG, p. 6)

The intergenerational impact of assimilation efforts underpins this reality. This has led, however, to a belief, for example, that domestic violence and addictions are rampant concerns within Aboriginal family systems along with the impacts of poverty. As Torcme, Knoke & Blackstock (2004), the real concerns are rooted in the socio-economic concerns that are beyond the control of CPS.

The assumptions that the socio-economic issues lead to greater addictions and domestic violence may not be substantiated when examined. A recent study in the United States (Cunningham, Solomon & Muramoto, 2016) has noted:

> In contrast to the 'Native American elevated alcohol consumption' belief, Native Americans compared to whites had lower or comparable rates across the range of alcohol measures examined. These findings can be used to help address misinformation about NA alcohol consumption. And they raise questions as to the origin of dramatically higher rates of alcoholic liver disease mortality reported for Native Americans (p.73).

Similar work needs to be done in Canada, but this research raises a vital discussion about assumptions around Aboriginal families and culture. The assumption may also be driven by the biased sample that is a child protection population such that it is those with the problem who come to CPS attention. However, since similar work has not been done in Canada to our knowledge, this is a significant research gap, which may impact how Aboriginal families are viewed. A further research gap surrounds how the majority of Aboriginal families not in contact with CPS are functioning and in what ways are they or are they not similar to other parts of Canadian society.

In Anderson and Nehwegahbow (2010) examination of family violence in Aboriginal communities, they contend that it is difficult to measure the level of domestic violence in First Nations, Metis, and Inuit communities because of unreliability in assessment/measurement tools in police reports, although there exists relative statistics available from the 2011 household survey that are useful in allowing us to discern trends and generalize conclusions about family violence. They found that some factors of family violence are related to historical trauma and persistent marginalization: "Marginalization and discrimination put communities at risk of violence and the same factors deny victims protection of the welfare and justice system [and]

The experience of having a violent father or mother while growing up significantly increased the likelihood of parenting role impairment" (pp. 18-19) for Aboriginal children.

This is not to say that there are not significant mental health, substance abuse, domestic violence and maltreatment problems within Aboriginal populations, as there are with all other populations of Canada. Rather, it is to say that Aboriginal peoples need to be seen in the same heterogeneous way that the rest of Canada is seen – populations with strengths and challenges; populations with highly successful people and those that are less so. But Aboriginal people also need to be seen as having a different world view about children, family, community and culture than those who have historically been responsible for setting the standards within CPS (Lafrance & Bastien, 2007).

How has it been dealt with previously?

The assessment of parenting in CPS services throughout the Western world has largely followed an approach rooted in Euro-Centric definitions of family. The principle models that exist tend towards seeing family as nuclear units consisting of parent(s) and children (Budd, Clark & Connell, 2011; Choate, 2009; Pezzot-Pearce & Pearce, 2004; Budd, 2005; White, 2005; Reder, Duncan & Lucey, 2003; Budd, 2001). There have also been efforts to address the needs of specific populations such as those with Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (Choate, 2013); parents involved in drug manufacturing (Choate, Harland & McKenzie, 2012); parents with intellectual and other disabilities (Feldman & Aunos, 2010; Tymchuk & Feldman, 1991); those with mental illness (Jacobsen, Miller & Kirkwood, 1997). There has been no specific approach developed for Aboriginal populations, although we believe that such an approach can be created. The existing approach to PCAs has not been validated in what are often called minority populations (although the term really means populations that are not part of the dominant

culture). Thus, the present approaches to PCAs have received criticism in the United States in respect of non-Caucasian populations (Lee, Goplan & Harrington, 2004) as well as in Australia with respect to the Aboriginal populations in that country (Drew, Adams & Walker, 2010). There has also been some criticism in Canada (Mushquash & Bova, 2007).

The models presently used also tend towards the use of psychometrics as an important part of the assessment process. However, their use with Aboriginal peoples is coming under question due to the lack of norming that is inclusive of Aboriginal populations (Choate & McKenzie, 2015). As well, in the Federal Court of Canada recently held that the tests used in the correctional system to classify risk were not "sufficiently predictably reliable for Aboriginals because of the cultural variance or bias of the tests" (Ewert v. Canada, 2015, para. 40). This raises the important question about the validity of the present approach both in terms of the underlying concepts being used as well as the tools.

Others have raised concern that many of the basic concepts in social work are not applicable to Aboriginal culture. For example, Blackstock (2009) has shown that Ecological Theory, taught widely in social work programs across Canada and elsewhere, does not represent an Indigenous worldview, but rather a Western one (p. 18). Blackstock goes on to show that other major theories in social work either have a poor fit with Aboriginal realities or are so poorly researched and validated in Aboriginal cultures as to raise questions about their utility. Even Maslow's Hierarchy of (Maslow, 1943), which was based in his research amongst those of the people of the Blood Reserve in Alberta has failed to accurately reflect the cultural reality in which it was developed (Blackstock, 2009).

> Blood First Nation scholar Billy Wadsworth (2008) explains that Maslow's interpretation of Blood perceptions of human and societal need are not wholly reflected in Maslow's final model. If Maslow would have more fully integrated Blood First Nations perspectives, the model would be based on community self-actualization and

transcendence instead of on individual experience. It is interesting to explore Maslow's model in greater detail and realize that the individual needs require some level of social interaction to achieve and yet the model does not fully account for social realities. For example, it is very difficult, if not impossible, for one person to entirely meet his or her physical needs alone; thus, arguably, one must reach outside oneself, drawing on the resources of others, to achieve even the bottom level in Maslow's individual hierarchy of need. From a Blood perspective, the model would also need to take full account of ancestral knowledge, and more expansive concepts of time, as well as acknowledge multiple dimensions of reality (Blackstock, 2009, p. 36)

Maslow's theory is an example of a powerful interpretation of human behavior, held to be true, applied to Aboriginal peoples, yet not reflective of their cultural reality.

In the absence of culturally rooted theories and approaches, parents, children and families continue to be assessed using approaches widely adopted by child protection across Canada.

This is partly driven by the need for some cases to be heard by courts when considering a variety of applications under provincial and territorial child protection legislation. In accepting testimony of experts regarding the parenting capacity, courts follow the direction of the Supreme Court of Canada (SCC) in R. v. Mohan (1994). In that case, the SCC determined that the expert must be properly qualified expert within their field and that special scrutiny must be given to those offering novel approaches that are not rooted in scientifically accepted methodologies within the specific field of study. The expert must also offer evidence that goes beyond what a layperson is likely to know (Glancy & Bradford, 2007). This has laid the foundation for expert testimony regarding assessment of capacity of parents involved with child protection in Canada and the acceptance of the assessment methodologies noted above (Choate & Hudson, 2014).

How is family defined in Aboriginal cultures?

In searching the literature for this section, we encountered a dearth in the scholarship that spoke specifically to the ways family is defined in Aboriginal cultures. To be sure, the relational worldview of Aboriginal cultures entails a perspective in which all people and things are related, and the notion of relationship "is the cornerstone of tribal community" (Cajete, 2000, p. 86). Thus, the concept of family extends beyond kinship ties and, as Cajete (2000) states, "Through community Indian people come to understand their 'personhood' and their connection to the 'communal soul' of their people … it is the context in which the person comes to know relationship, responsibility, and participation in the life of one's people" (p. 86). This quotation is significant in terms of defining Aboriginal family, for its definition resides in a worldview in which 'we are all related' – a perspective which transcends the notion of family as a self-contained unit independent of connections to the natural world. As such, we offer an analysis of the scholarship from a more generalized perspective that considers the structure of Aboriginal family and the protocols associated with membership; specifically, that which concerns adoption.

From an Aboriginal perspective, McCaslin and Boyer (2009) provide a broad analysis of the literatures surrounding First Nations community dysfunctions at multiple levels that confronts and implicates the systemic after-effects of colonialism as the main stressors on individual and communities. The research offers recommendations that can serve as a model towards decolonization at the intersection of Aboriginal traditional ways of knowing and Western institutional frameworks for wellness. For our purposes, McCaslin and Boyer's (2009) work is useful in framing how we approach any attempt at defining family within an Aboriginal worldview. Significantly, McCaslin and Boyer (2009) state that healing and "transformations require new patterns of thinking, acting and behaving that honour and respect First Nations

cultures and traditions" (p. 62). They further maintain that vital to this endeavor, is questioning the "systemic structures of colonialism that operates in ways that are antithetical to Aboriginal knowledge, teachings and ways of life" (MacCaslin & Boyer, 2009, p. 62). In the following section, instead of seeking to address their question regarding the structure of colonialism, we are inspired to determine the structure of the Aboriginal family in response to their recommendation that transformation demands new ways of thinking.

Structure

In her report that draws on history, strengths and challenges of Aboriginal families from an Aboriginal perspective, Indigenous scholar Castellano (2002) provides significant insight into our study stating, "the [Aboriginal] family instills values, the sense of what is important, what is worth preserving, protecting, and if necessary, fighting for" (p. 15). In Western contexts, it is the foundation that provides the stable conditions for its members to venture out into the world as individual citizens (Castellano, 2002). Family responsibilities are shared with social institutions such as education and extra-curricular social interest groups. In traditional Aboriginal societies, the family was the only institution and was made of relational networks extending beyond kinship ties. Aboriginal family traditions and relationship building also includes community building in efforts aimed at economic sustainability and independence, control of education and resources, and community interdependence (Castellano, 2002). Moreover, Castellano (2002) also illuminates that as of 2002, Aboriginal families were heterogeneous with diverse memberships based on location, access to traditional knowledge, extended kinship systems and fluidity. Some were intergenerational nuclear family units holding steadfast to Aboriginal traditions, others were 'families of the heart' with no kinship ties but came together to fulfill certain needs. Some of Gerlach's (2008) findings include similar themes based on: First Nations perspectives of

family as extending to a variety of supportive networks beyond kinship categories; intergenerational learning and doing within families; and the enduring and negative impacts of the Indian Residential Schools. Simard and Blight (2011) draw on studies that dispute how standard assessment tools measure levels of acculturation into dominant society rather than levels of cultural identification. They further contend that layers of relationships form the core of Aboriginal development conceptualized within family contexts that include nuclear, extended, community, nationhood, clan, and cultural families as being integral factors in the development of children (Simard & Blight, 2011).

In the context of Aboriginal female, lone parent households, Quinless (2013) maintains that it is "imperative that researchers are able to contextualize this important aspect of family diversity that exists between various Aboriginal identity groups" (p. 1). Factors that must be considered when defining Aboriginal family units include such things as age of parents and children, number of children, location (on or off-reserve), and Aboriginal identity (Quinless, 2013). Quinless (2013) asserts that even within lone parent households, there exists diversity especially between urban and reserve families with at least half living with extended family in multiple family household arrangements. Additionally, current notions of family are based upon a Western industrialized framework which "does not adequately reflect the diversity among First Nations lone parent families, but rather creates a particular view by assigning First Nations lone parent families to fixed concepts, which are conceptualized as sharing a common collective identity irrespective of diversity" (Quinless, 2013, p. 1). An example of this is found in Canadian census standards which do not consider extended family members as comprising a single family unit. Instead, Canadian census standards define this arrangement as 'multiple family' households.

Interestingly, Peters' (2012) examination of today's Aboriginal family household structure revealed that members of urban Aboriginal households may include the 'hidden homeless' population who cycle in and out of absolute homelessness, thus changing the dynamics of the household. For example, those who are considered homeless and staying with family members regularly looked for signs indicating they were still welcomed with the women assisting with household chores such as cooking or caring for the elderly/children, and the men may assisting financially. Peters (2012) also found that families with young children may be living with relatives or friends while waiting for their own shelter and often provide caregiving services, and try to minimize their presence as much as possible. Additionally, the hidden homeless population may move often as they negotiate family relationships in their quest to maintain shelter (Peters, 2012). Clearly, the structure of Aboriginal families is diverse making a singular definition very difficult to arrive at.

Even contemporary dominant society struggles to define family given the many changes that are taking place around family composition (Taylor, Morin & Wang, 2011). The point is that attempts to create one working definition of family is likely impossible and thus, attempting to impose a dominant cultural view of family on Aboriginal peoples is likely even less valid. This matters greatly as such definitions extend to child protection policies and practices. If indeed Aboriginal culture is based upon kinship systems, then that system should be engaged in the child protection process which may include assessment, case planning and interventions. Thus would even include efforts to sustain family connection during times when a child is placed outside the family. Thus, visits may consider the larger family system rather than just a biological parent (Bodor, Lamourex & Biggs, 2009).

Adoption

Drawing on the strengths and principles of traditional Anishnaabe adoption customs that challenge Western colonial Aboriginal identity boundaries, Indigenous scholar Lee (2015) tells us that traditional Indigenous adoption codes allowed for fluidity in tribal membership and increased acceptance based in a humanitarian code of compassion. Traditional definitions of band membership were dependent on full participation in tribal practices, shouldering tribal responsibilities, autonomy in creating associations, fulfillment of needs, and community acceptance rather than on full-blood quantifications. Likewise, Carriere and Richardson (2009), in their article describing how Attachment theory is not appropriately applicable to the relational contexts of Aboriginal child-rearing, maintain that for Aboriginal families, kinship systems are interconnections that extend beyond human relations and include connections to the natural world. Adoption, from an Indigenous perspective, is meant to strengthen community bonds rather than sever them. They further argue, "[P]ractices that included extended family care and community connections are more relevant to Indigenous children and their families" (Carriere & Richardson, 2009, p. 52). For the purposes of our review, this is an important distinction and one which warrants consideration by the justice system in regards to parenting assessments.

In her recent article, Indigenous scholar Carriere (2015) examines the lessons that could be learned from Yellowhead Tribal Services Agency open adoption program, which is based on traditional Aboriginal principles; "in particular, the importance of connectedness to family, community culture and nationhood for Indigenous children and adoption" (p. 39). She tells us that custom adoption was practiced, and formally or informally recognized, in traditional Aboriginal communities for a variety of reasons usually related to replacing loss of a child, supporting family members and giving children to those who could not have any. Ultimately, all

initiatives directed by First Nations child welfare authorities are an attempt to "to recover and reclaim traditional practice" (p. 43). Moreover, Bertsch and Bidgood (2010) assert that in Aboriginal culture, adoptions "are acts of generosity from one family to another… Typically children are given to those who do not have children or to those whose child has passed away" (p. 101). Legal transference in adoptions is a Euro-centric practice that holds no significance in Aboriginal culture. Instead, adoptions are finalized through ceremonies and feasts. Aboriginal cultural adoption is based upon extended connection, sustaining roots and knowing one's cultural positioning.

Moving forward, Bertsch and Bidgood (2010) maintain that Aboriginal people need to regain trust in government systems and a receive a genuine commitment to collaborate and honor Aboriginal childcare and parenting perspectives by increasing Aboriginal adoption recruitment that employs Aboriginal workers who are better able to deliver the information in a way that is understandable such as user-friendly forms and accessible language; adjusting policies to make them more flexible to the evolving cultural needs of Aboriginal peoples; understanding the role of family in Aboriginal culture. Moreover, they point out, "In this regard the opportunity for regular birth family contact is of primary importance, and should be agreed on before adoption finalization. Not only did participants see the lack of connection with the birth parents in adoption as problematic, but they indicated that the grandparents, aunts and uncles were overlooked as well" (Bertsch and Bidgood, 2010, p. 103). Inarguably, and as illuminated above, a space for Aboriginal adoptions must be made that considers the fluid nature of Aboriginal family membership based in cultural values of compassion and generosity.

Although this section is relatively brief, it has been useful in better understanding the complexities involved in attempting to define Aboriginal families. Thus, based on this

scholarship we can conclude that the Aboriginal family is a diverse cultural institution that provides the framework for cultural continuity and consists of a web of networks of care in which membership is fluid. What follows is an overview of the literature that speaks to the knowledge disparities in regards to Western perspectives on child-rearing.

Gaps in Western worldview on child-rearing

In this section, we seek to address the following question from a multitude of perspectives: what are the gaps in Western perspectives that cannot account for the differences in childrearing practices between Eurocentric based notions of family and those of Aboriginal cultures? Harris (2006) provides useful context for this endeavor. Using the medicine wheel as the framework for developing culturally appropriate curricula for First Nations students in a social work program, Harris' (2006) article discusses the impetus for changing the way social work education is created and delivered and the processes involved. Moreover, Harris (2006) asserts that the greatest challenge in changing social work curricula has been overcoming the failure of Western mainstream ideology to value Aboriginal perspectives as a source of education and learning and to recognize these worldviews as legitimate. This is significant for our purposes and serves as the entry point for discussing other findings gleaned from the scholarship.

In her article proposing a new theory upon which First Nations parenting can be built upon that is a blending of Western and Indigenous epistemic principles, Indigenous scholar Blackstock (2009) tells us that ontological differences are apparent between First Nations run child protection agencies and provincial child welfare in that First Nations conceptualize child safety within a community model and Western based thinkers see it at the individual child level. In spite of these difference, most child welfare workers adhere to Western standards despite their

relative ineffectiveness in alleviating child neglect in First Nations communities (Blackstock, 2009). Further to this, Western social work theory was born out of colonialism, and continues to construct Aboriginal parenting within a deficit construct that fails to acknowledge the value in Aboriginal epistemology and ontology as a possible source for a framework upon which to develop new approaches to child care (Blackstock, 2009). In Quinn's (2007) discussion of culturally appropriate healing interventions that address the intergenerational impacts of colonization on Aboriginal children and families involved in the child welfare system, she declares that Western mental health interventions have been largely ineffective in their application to Aboriginal peoples and tend to focus on symptoms rather than the root causes of illness. Within historical contexts of child welfare interventions that include the sixties and seventies scoop of First Nations children, Macdonald and Macdonald's (2007) article provides a critique of the child welfare system from an Indigenous Mi'kmaq perspective that is informed by social justice theory and ultimately argues for a change in social work education that will include First Nations history and perspectives. They assert "Western theory, pedagogy and practice is evidenced in the actions of early social work pioneers who genuinely believed that removing a First Nations child from his or her parents, community and culture due to poverty and poor housing conditions was in the child's best interest" (Macdonald & Macdonald, 2007, p. 39). The justice system imposes the defence of individual rights as the basis for informing a child's best interests and racist policies continue to be pervasive factors determining how the system is protected rather than the rights of FN children to culture, language and identity (Macdonald & Macdonald, 2007).

From a justice perspective, Kline's (1992) early article that focuses on an analysis of court documents. She argues that Canadian legal structures, from an ideological and historical

standpoint, are entrenched with liberal notions of racial superiority that justify apprehension of First Nations children as a benign, necessary intervention with no emphasis on maintaining First Nations identities (Kline, 1992). In order to prevent this, First Nations must be ideologically empowered in countering apprehensions. Additionally, Kline (1992) draws on Indigenous perspectives that argue child welfare laws are racist and lack any cultural relevancy for First Nations asserting, "[C]ourts have final authority under legislation to determine whether, and in what form and duration, a child should be placed into protective care once apprehended" (p. 381). Child welfare authorities justify their apprehensions on court orders regardless of other viable protective alternatives such as kinship care or support programs. Moreover, Kline (1992) tells us there is a wide body of literature to support the notion that Anglo-Canadian law is created out of individualistic ideals that are abstract, appear to be neutral, universal, and unbiased but is in fact racist and oppressive. Significantly, Kline (1992) points out,

> The tragic impact of child welfare law on First Nations can be attributed in part to the liberal form taken by the best interests principle in child welfare adjudication. It has directed judges to focus on the child as an individual abstracted out of her community and cultural contexts, and it has rendered judicial decisions impartial and objective and, thereby, unassailable. (p. 391)

Furthering this notion, Kline (1992) tells us that a variety of reasons exist as to the over-representation of First Nations children in the child welfare – some blame an over-zealous system while others blame First Nations cultural and parenting deficiencies. To be sure, she maintains that ideologies of childhood born out of 16th and 17th century notions of children as utterly dependent and separate from adults, informed the creation of individualistic child welfare

laws and policies – a perspective which 'decontextualizes' children from their cultures and families (Kline, 1992).

In a similar vein, scholars Bertsch and Bidgood (2010) provide an examination of the perspectives of First Nations members towards adoptions and based on their findings, offer recommendations that would make adoptions more culturally appropriate. Bertsch and Bidgood (2010) refer to the sixties scoop as a clash in ideologies between Western and Aboriginal perspectives on parenting, family structure and child safety with dominant society defining the parameters of what constitutes appropriate parenting. Within these definitions, Aboriginal parenting was seen as lacking fundamental features of a healthy family – Aboriginal parenting traditions, poorly understood and misinterpreted, were always seen as inferior in comparison to Western ideologies of family (Bertsch and Bidgood, 2010). Often times, non-Aboriginal people believe that any adoptive home could provide for all the needs of Aboriginal children without any cultural considerations. This belief essentially equates to a form of color blindness.

From an occupational therapeutic perspective, Gerlach's (2008) study draws from interview data using comparative data analysis to determine how the needs of First Nations children with developmental disabilities can best be met and in doing so, acknowledges that, like many of the social service provision systems, occupational therapy is founded upon the cultural tenets of Euro-Canadian values. Significantly, Gerlach (2008) concludes that from an Aboriginal perspective, a "child with a developmental disability may not be viewed as deficient but as someone able to be part of the community in his or her own way" (p. 19). In spite of this, she argues, "The predominance of child development research based on Caucasian, middle-class families further perpetuates assumptions of a universality that may be used inappropriately as benchmarks for all families" (p. 19).

In their examination of the perceptions of First Nations mothers living in poverty and receiving parenting support, Harris, Russell and Gockel (2007) sought to determine the socio-economic factors that were involved and the degree First Nations mothers put their children at risk of apprehension because they live in poverty. Their findings reveal that Western ideologies of parenting assume that Aboriginal parenting practices are couched in cultural deficits and that Aboriginal parents should be blamed for their short-comings (Harris, Russell & Gockel, 2007). This perspective assures that Aboriginal children continue to be overrepresented and "privileging mainstream ideology of child rearing undermines and invalidates Aboriginal parenting practices and traditions [indicating] a need to reverse the current status of FPS [Family Preservation Services], which has minimal priority within child welfare, and to restructure social services in order to eradicate poverty" (Harris, Russell & Gockel, 2007, p. 22). Ball's (2010) study also corresponds to the existing scholarship echoing the stance that programming efforts are offered through a Western lens that fails to either recognize or acknowledge traditional Aboriginal fathers' role in parenting. From a spiritual perspective that is both unique and apart from the standpoints provided above, but entirely relevant within an Aboriginal context, McCabe (2008) explored the spiritual healing potential of traditional Aboriginal approaches to healing and also concluded that Western perspectives based in science only consider reality as something that could be observed, understood and explained, and all other realities and ways of knowing are discounted and seen as untruths. The fact that Western perspectives do not account for other stance is clearly established above, but in spite of this, there are other views on parenting and practices which have remained intact for millennia which are evidenced in the following section.

How is parenting defined in Aboriginal contexts? What is the role of the parents?

In this section, we draw on diverse perspectives as they emerged in the literature. Much of the findings are based on specific parenting studies and there is a mixture between traditional and contemporary approaches to Aboriginal parenting. In an attempt to ascertain the features of traditional Aboriginal parenting, Schmidt, Broad, Sy and Johnston (2012) contend that it is difficult to do research on Aboriginal child rearing perspectives at the community level because of the colonial legacy and resulting disruption of traditional parenting practices. Notwithstanding, Muir and Bohr (2014), in their comparison between Native American mothers and Euro-Canadian mothers parenting practices, found that some aspects of traditional parenting practices have been retained while others have vanished. Child autonomy and independence is fostered and counterbalanced with large amounts of adult affection. Extended families, which were complex structures not limited to kinship lines were also connected spiritually, were an important factor in child development (Muir & Bohr, 2014). Developmental milestones vary individually and depend on the uniqueness and characteristics of each child. Moreover, Muir and Bohr (2014) found that discipline styles varied with Native American Aboriginal mothers using less harsh discipline and if used, generally there was a deep lesson or teaching behind it that would benefit the child overall. There was also a lack of verbal language usage that is culturally embedded but seen as a deficit in the Western perspective – a fact which may also explain why Aboriginal children score lower in literacy and language tests (Muir & Bohr, 2014). Significantly, Muir and Bohr (2014) also found that for Native American mothers, there was a strong emphasis on spirituality in child rearing.

Benzies (2013), in her study on Aboriginal parenting in Canada, contends that traditional parenting practices involved the absence of corporal punishment, intergenerational childcare, and leading by example rather than explicitly controlling behaviors stating, "Parenting is typically viewed as a collective responsibility of the extended family and the community" (p. 381). Children may live parts of their lives with various people within the family system as the needs of the child suggest (Myrick, Herick & Patterson, 2009). Benzies (2013) assertion aligns with the earlier definition of Aboriginal families as consisting of relational webs. Also illuminating aspects of traditional parenting, is Peacock and Morin's (2010) examination of a First Nations custom adoption program, and it is worth quoting them at length here:

A long time ago adoption was a common practice of our people. Children were gifts from the Creator. They gave meaning to life, these children, teaching us about unconditional love, bringing joy and laughter. To a man, a child should never go without food, clothing and shelter. To a woman, a child is a responsibility whose priorities come before their own. Together a man and woman were responsible for the well-being of the child mentally, emotionally, physically and spiritually. Relatives helped in bringing up these children. Grandparents, uncles, aunts and the whole community helped each other to enhance the lives of children. These were our ways, what happened to our people. Francis Alexis, Alexis Nakoda Sioux Nation (Peacock & Morin, 2010, p. 71).

This quotation is vital in understanding traditional parenting practices and how many of these practices are still alive in Aboriginal communities today.

Cheah and Chirkov's (2008) cross-cultural study examined the parenting perspectives of fifty Aboriginal mothers and fifty-one Euro-Canadian mothers to determine differences in parenting practices and goals, why they have these parenting goals and the underlying cultural

value systems out of which they originate. Some of their findings illuminate the fact that traditional approaches to parenting encompass a belief in the autonomy and agency of children as a way to foster competence in specific life tasks and the reliance on family and community connections in supporting competence and mastery (Cheah & Chirkov, 2008). Significantly, differential highlights between Aboriginal and Euro-Canadian mothers include: the importance placed by Aboriginal mothers for their children to retain cultural traditions and spirituality more than the Euro-Canadian mothers; the value placed on socialization by Euro-Canadian mothers for their children's personal gains in contrast to the importance of socialization for the collective good for the Aboriginal mothers (Cheah & Chirkov, 2008). Another area of significance resided in the importance Aboriginal mothers placed on respecting elders and the parent-focused, individualistic, often self-serving motivations the Euro-Canadian mothers expressed regarding parenting goals (Cheah & Chirkov, 2008).

In his historical commentary on the traditions behind the tendency amongst Blackfoot tribes in favoring certain children over and the implications for adulthood, Raczka (1979) describes how the Minipokas, favored children among the tribe, were treated and provides substantial detail regarding the Blackfoot worldview surrounding ceremonies, spiritual beliefs, socio-economic structures, and kinship systems. He asserts that the Minipoka had many caregivers and were afforded much autonomy and respect and their treatment in ceremony and society was equal to that of adults (Raczka, 1979). Raczka's (1979) article reminds us that in determining the role of parents in traditional Aboriginal society, we are missing the full picture if we fail to consider the role of children as well. In his descriptions, Raczka (1979) makes it plain that all processes in Blackfoot culture were interconnected, and quite seamlessly, integrates

stories, dreams and adoption ceremonies into the same paragraph; thus effectively demonstrating the holism of traditional Blackfoot perspectives on parenting.

From the perspective that considers the impacts of colonization, Gerlach (2008) found that First Nations childrearing perspectives include the consideration of the connections between health and spirituality, and conceptualizes it as a shared collective responsibility that is also influenced by such things as oppression and assimilation resulting from historical and enduring colonial impacts. In his exploration of the disruption of traditional Aboriginal parenting resulting from the Indian Residential schools (IRS), Morrissette (1994) offers interventions from a clinical counselling perspective aimed at ameliorating these effects and asserts that IRS operated in opposition to "Native ways of parenting and learning" (p. 383) and is misaligned with the "nonpunitive approach [that] underlies Native parenting" (p. 383). It is important to keep in mind that at the time of writing, there was very little exploration of the topic as epitomized in his statement, "[D]ocumented information pertaining to this era is minimal" (Morrissette, 1994, p. 382). Since however, overwhelming documentary and anecdotal evidence has emerged that offers profound insight into the colonial mindset driving the IRS.

GFellner's (1990) early article focuses on the customs and psychology related to child-rearing using a questionnaire administered to university-enrolled Indian and white parents providing a comparative analysis between the two styles. GFellner (1990) refers to 'folklore' accounts to provide a theoretical foundation that can offer a framework for explaining First Nations traditional childrearing practices – this is typical of the perspective at the time and implies that First Nations practices and beliefs were transmitted through folklore – a process which has been criticized as minimizing First Nations histories and beliefs by relegating these to folklore and myth. Although she does not give the source of these folklore accounts, she

describes some of the practices originating from First Nations beliefs as being the facts that First Nations parents value children as equals, give them individual freedom and significant autonomy which is in stark contrast to the restrictive, controlled and structured practices of white parents. Moreover, traditional views on spirituality value a naturalistic perspective and extended family play a significant role in the upbringing of children (GFellner, 1990). The actual findings of GFellner's (1990) study reveal there is no significant cultural difference between Indian and White parenting practices with the exception of those related to physical behaviors. Regarding parents' perceptions of ideal child-rearing, cultural differences were found in parents beliefs of what constitutes ideal parenting practices in that Indian parents were more consistent in their parenting ideals and actual parenting practices in comparison to White parents. In other words, their perceptions of their own child-rearing practices was either equal to or exceeded perceptions of ideal child-rearing practices. GFellner (1990) concludes that this belief may reflect more flexibility in the case of Aboriginal child-rearing perspectives.

In another early article, Gray and Cosgrove (1985) report on the findings of 1-2 hour(s) interviews with minority parents working in various capacities in the social work field, significantly Blackfeet Indians, regarding cultural perspective on child abuse in an effort to determine areas to improve cross cultural understanding in American child protective service workers. Some emerging themes of their findings include dominance and submission differences across cultures and the degree to which the parents delegate authority to children. The results from Gray and Cosgove's (1985) study, pertaining to the Blackfeet interviewees, were that 23 potential misunderstood childrearing practices emerged. Significantly, parents allowed children a great deal of autonomy and preferred children learned by 'doing' rather than being told what to do and how to behave. It was also found that after six or seven years of age, Blackfeet parents in

the community do not engage in physical affection with the children (Gray & Cosgrove, 1985). They also lead by example as role-models to appropriate behavior which, at the time of the report, has not been positive due to family bread-down and rampant alcohol and drug abuse in communities. There is an intergenerational responsibility to raise children in Blackfeet communities, which has led to an increase in grandparents raising grandchildren, although this was not the case in traditional societies (Gray & Cosgrove, 1985).

Utilizing a theoretical approach to help explain Aboriginal parents' perspectives on the impacts Indian Residential Schools had on their parenting, LaFrance and Collins' (2003) study was conducted in the hopes of better preparing social work practitioners working with Aboriginal families by providing insight into Aboriginal parents' experiences, and resultant effects, at the IRS. Their study is helpful in illuminating traditional parenting approaches that were practiced before the influence of the IRS. For example, LaFrance and Collins (2003) establish that in Aboriginal families, each family member had a different role to play in child-rearing. For example, the grandparents were the teachers and the aunts and uncles disciplined the child. These roles were undertaken for specific purposes: to draw on the wisdom of the elders; and by having the aunts or uncles mete out the discipline, it creates a stronger bond between parent and child and minimizes potential feelings of animosity. As a result of being nurtured by multiple care-givers, Aboriginal children grew up with a strong identity with deep ties to family and community and nationhood. Because child-rearing was shared, no individual person became overwhelmed or stress-out with parenting responsibilities (LaFrance & Collins, 2003). This is an important feature in Aboriginal parenting since Western ideals of the nuclear family would have parenting responsibilities shouldered primarily by the mother.

From a more contemporary perspective, Harris, Russell and Gockel (2007) found there is a tendency for young Aboriginal mothers to blame themselves for lack of parenting skills and inability to conform to Western parenting ideologies. They are also aware that a safe environment is a factor in parenting safely and effectively, but because of their poverty, Aboriginal teenage mothers have limited choice in where they reside. The urban-based mothers in the study are also aware of the risk that isolation places them in in terms of lack of emotional supports, but expressed a desire to be active participants in support any efforts geared towards improving their parenting (Harris, Russell & Gockel, 2007). Moreover, young mothers place value in their cultural identity reflected in parenting practices – practices which support cultural continuity. Harris, Russell and Gockel (2007) state, "Urban Aboriginal mothers also appreciate Aboriginal service providers' familiarity with their specific needs and issues. There is a sense of common history that doesn't need to be explained, and which can facilitate a bond with workers" (p. 26). Related to this reality is the need to have their role as mothers acknowledged and seen as being important; a reality that is explored in Eni and Phillip-Beck's study (2013).

Employing a life story-telling methodology, Eni and Phillips-Beck (2013) sought to determine the perspectives of First Nations women towards teenage pregnancy and motherhood and the structural determinants that lead to high rates of First Nations teenage pregnancy and parenting. Significantly, Eni and Phillips-Beck (2013) found that although teenage pregnancy, linked to post-colonization effects, persistent poverty and socio-economic marginalization, is considered a health crisis according to Canadian health and social standards, there exists an overwhelming attachment to traditional perspectives of parenting in that children are still regarded as gifts from Creator. Moreover, there is still a belief in the central role of the child within the family and community.

With regards to the role of father, Ball (2010) tells us, "[M]any Indigenous fathers face challenges in their daily lives that constrain their involvement in fathering and fathering programs to a greater degree than most non-Indigenous men" (p. 124). Factors impinging on Aboriginal fathers' ability to assume parental roles are linked to colonial historical factors but are compounded by the devastating social stigma they face as deadbeat dads and individuals prone to excessive violence (Ball, 2010). In light of these pervasive stereotypes, Ball (2010) asserts that Indigenous fathers are the most socially excluded group of the population (p. 126). Although it is certain that traditional roles of Aboriginal men have largely been diminished, or reversed, due to colonization, when they are active in parenting, they play a significant part in the development of children.

In Billson's (1991) earlier report on a case study examining role-reversal among the Blood tribe, it was found that traditional roles of males and females in the Blood tribe can be largely conceptualized as the men being the providers, and the women as the sustainers. In today's society, Blood women are now taking on the role of both provider and sustainer in terms of being the both the 'bread-winners' and care-givers. Moreover, Billson (1991) declares that in spite of the fact that traditionally, Blood women did not carry as much decision making power as in other tribes such as the Iroquois, and were largely dependent on men, their roles in economic activities and ceremony – "Religious power was passed through the women to the men" (p. 7) - still provided the balance between the sexes. Colonization would shift the balance and be the source of persistent anomie, loss of culture and identity, and social pathologies "in the form of suicide, alcoholism, drug abuse, fatal accidents, divorce, desertion, spousal assault, and murder" (Billson, 1991, p. 9). Although Blood women have taken on more responsibilities related to role-reversal, Billson (1991) emphasizes that they still maintain the home and continue with

traditional domestic work which serves as an insulating factor since this is the role they assumed in traditional society. Furthermore, many men in the Billson's (1991) study reported feeling either very happy with the role-reversal or having deep resentment leading to increased alcohol abuse the potential for violence towards women. The impacts of role-reversal include on Aboriginal families include: increased power, stress but also confidence for women; and for men, a closer relationship to their children; loss of self-esteem and increase in domestic violence. Overall, there has been an increase in domestic violence, alcohol abuse and the break-up of marriages, with the children also going with the mother.

As evidenced in the literature above, although the roles of Aboriginal parents have evolved and adapted to meet the changing times, the practices remain conducive to cultural continuity particularly in regards to instilling cultural values such as respect and spirituality. Furthermore, the studies are helpful in illuminating the fact that there exists tangible and observable differences in the way Aboriginal people parent in comparison to their Euro-Canadian counterparts. Below, we expand on Western theories, how they have been applied to child welfare interventions and programming with respect to Aboriginal people and how these have failed to be relevant to the contexts of the lived reality of Aboriginal parents.

Address the failure of linkages to Western family dynamics and theories

In this section, we begin with a brief general overview of the misalignment of Western theories on family and child development with the historical and contemporary experience of Aboriginal people as an entry point into broader issues. We then provide a broad summary of the structural and ecological realities of Aboriginal people thereby establishing the irrelevance of

applying Western theoretical approaches to Aboriginal contexts. Finally, we offer some examples of specific Western theories on child development and parenting.

Blackstock (2009) contends that a lack of theoretical frameworks that assist in explaining structural determinants of child neglect in a First Nations context are greatly needed and that the primary ones in use such as anti-oppressive, ecological and structural theories are developed from a Western perspective and then applied to Indigenous contexts despite their misalignment with Aboriginal ontology. Harris, Russell and Gockel (2007) maintain that too little research exists that examines the perspective of Aboriginal parents regarding parental support and prevention programs in spite of the fact that "Family preservation services are not sufficient to address the inequity experienced by urban Aboriginal mothers" (p. 29). Clearly, some changes need to be made in terms of how we think about, and frame, solutions to better fit the actual life experiences of Aboriginal parents.

In examining an initiative between a First Nations community in Alberta and provincial child welfare, LaFrance and Bastien (2007) discuss the factors involved in integrating Western and Aboriginal epistemologies to inform child welfare practices. LaFrance and Bastien (2007) assert that current methods used in service provision are based in Euro-centric paradigms and are, very often, in opposition to Aboriginal perspectives. Nonetheless, Euro-centric perspectives based in individualistic liberal policies are used to justify the services provided to Aboriginal communities. Child welfare is in fact doing Aboriginal children a great disservice since many grow into adults unsure of where they come from and to whom they belong (LaFrance & Bastien, 2007). Instead, LaFrance and Bastien (2007) argue for a return to traditional Aboriginal values regarding childcare approaches and placement. Moreover, they declare that current Western thought has its origins in a Cartesian philosophy that places man in opposition to nature

through its dichotomy of mind and matter which has resulted in the development of the scientific method (LaFrance & Bastien, 2007). This philosophy has been applied out of context to inform "interpersonal relations, philosophy and ethics" (LaFrance & Bastien, 2007, p. 107) eventually leading to a dehumanizing assembly line production work ethic steeped in power imbalance and bureaucracy. LaFrance and Bastien (2007) maintain that this fragmented system of production, out of which modern social services and child welfare are born, does not respond well to changes. As such, they emphasize, "The pursuit of scientific and professional solutions to the problems of people seems at times to have estranged child welfare from the communities and the people it serves" (LaFrance & Bastien, 2007, p. 107). This assertion is vital in showing the disconnect between Western theory and Aboriginal lived realities. Below, we briefly expand on some examples of the Western theories that have been applied to context of Aboriginal family experiences beginning with Attachment theory.

Attachment Theory

The notion of attachment differs in Aboriginal parenting since the child does not 'attach' to just one or two central caregivers (Muir & Bohr, 2014). This fact is illuminated in Carriere and Richardson's (2009) study describing how Attachment theory is not appropriately applicable to the relational contexts of Aboriginal child-rearing. Moreover, they argue that the notion of 'connectedness' in an Indigenous worldview, which broadens the scope of a child's relational potential, is much more appropriate than attachment to one or two central persons (Carriere & Richardson, 2009). In their examination of the literature on attachment theory to determine its relevancy to Aboriginal parenting, Neckoway, Brownlee and Castellan (2007) found that attachment theory is a primary model that is applied to Aboriginal parents within the context of child welfare although its efficacy and appropriateness has not been examined. They contend that

attachment theory does not consider the role of extended family in providing care for Aboriginal children and instead views childcare using a linear model rather than a wider social relational model (Neckoway, Brownlee, Castellan, 2007). Furthermore, socio-economic issues relating to colonization and power imbalances renders mother-child attachment as a minimal concern. Because of this, they recommend that it is important that over-emphasis on attachment theory and its application in Aboriginal communities is not extended to such a degree that it supersedes socio-economic and historical factors that have led to the crises and dysfunction evident in many Aboriginal communities today.

Additionally, Simard and Blight (2011) maintain that Western models of child development do not account for the spiritual component of self. Significantly, Gray and Cosgrove (1985) found that because perceptions of child abuse depend on the cultural background of the observer, which is usually White, researchers admit that the dominant cultures ideologies regarding child abuse will likely always prevail and many children have been, and will continue to be bought into the care of protective services when there is no threat to their safety (Gray & Cosgrove, 1985). Benzies (2013) contends that attachment theory, although widely applied in an Aboriginal parenting context despite little research proving its efficacy, is neither culturally appropriate nor do adherents to the theory consider the historical and cultural variations of Aboriginal peoples. Attachment theory's primacy on "a purely dyadic mother-infant relationship does not exist in a shared parenting model … may be insufficient to explain child development in the context of Canadian Aboriginal cultures where there is an expectation of multiple relationships with other caregivers " (Benzies, 2013, pp. 381-382). Likewise, the notion of a purely nuclear, Aboriginal family appears to also be a disillusionment.

Nuclear Family

Ball's (2010) innovative, qualitative study examining the contemporary role of Indigenous fathers illuminates the cultural strength and resilience encapsulated within Indigenous fathering approaches that has not been previously captured in research and programming efforts from a Western, Euro-centric perspective. It was found that Eurocentric "models of the nuclear family, in which one father figure (along with one mother figure) is intended to meet all of a child's needs for guidance, discipline, affection, and support, have never characterized traditional Indigenous communities" (Ball, 2010, p. 130). Moreover, Ball (2010) found that the participants, Indigenous men, spoke of 'circles of care' as a network of kinship and community connections in which notions of childcare were traditionally couched in principles of reciprocity and interdependence in stark contrast to Western notions of a nuclear family: "hegemonic Eurocentric constructions of men's roles—as heads of households, clans and communities and as dominant decision makers in allocating family and community resources—may have been inconsistent with traditional Indigenous family and community structures and constructions of masculinity" (p. 126). Additionally, LaFrance and Collins (2003) maintain that current conceptualizations of appropriate parenting and family models, such as the nuclear family, fall short in capturing the Aboriginal reality of parenting that draws on a network of kinship systems including aunts, uncles and cousins, with the child at the center of this family structure. Thus it is difficult to determine the role of parenting in traditional societies if we do not consider the roles of the child.

Development Theory

Simard and Blight (2011) assert that in the context of development theory, "Applying non-Aboriginal developmental theories with Aboriginal youth exclusively will not provide a

complete or exact description nor will it show positive outcomes, because it is quantified against mainstream norms. These norms do not include the socio-economic contextual factors, which influence development" (p. 32). Instead, Aboriginal development must be understood within a critical framework that considers the social-historical context of Aboriginal perspectives on "cultural structure, cultural attachment, identity development, relational development, and task achievement" (p. 32). Ball (2010) illuminates the fact that Developmental theory falls short in capturing and explaining the variety of Indigenous men's challenges and experiences – instead a chronosystem of development is offered to better explain the difficulties and ruptures within an ecological system that Indigenous men experience.

With these viewpoints in mind, we move on and offer a wide picture of the experiences of Aboriginal peoples as it emerged in the scholarship.

Structural/Ecological realities of Aboriginal families

Informed by the literature, we expand on the diverse experiences of Aboriginal families in consideration of the following factors: degree of meaningful attachment to Aboriginal identity; impacts of colonization and the IRS; institutional and systemic realities; addictions; and finally, teenage pregnancy and single lone-parent families. This area of the review is vital given Bougie's (2014) assertion that Aboriginal children belong to the fastest growing population but are among the poorest in the country. Some of the scholarship contends that part of this reality resides in the fact that over time and across generations, Aboriginal peoples have developed a negative perception of their identity; a concept we discuss below.

Identity

In terms of Aboriginal parents' current reality, sociologist and Indigenous ally Frideres (2008) addresses some relevant issues in his discussion on Aboriginal identity within a historical and contemporary context with a focus on its evolution, variations, and adaptations within a 'nested' framework. Some of his findings suggest that Aboriginal identity, including practices related to cultural continuity are fluid with individuals able to adapt to the expectations of traditional community and Canadian mainstream expectations (Frideres, 2008). He contends that traditional Aboriginal identity is constructed within the context of a collective worldview through an attachment to place whereas urban Aboriginal peoples have less access in developing a strong identity based in attachments to land, or spatial identity, and their main concern is survival in the city rather than maintaining or fostering the growth of an Aboriginal identity (Frideres, 2008). As such, Frideres' (2008) discussion puts forth the idea that an Aboriginal parenting/family model must reflect the fluidity of contemporary Aboriginal identity and practices arguing that a fluid Aboriginal identity is representative of a contemporary reality that Aboriginal peoples do not possess a singular cultural identity, but are instead bicultural. Stewart (2009), aligning with this perspective, maintains that Indigenous youth possess a sense of bi-cultural identity in which they are aware of their traditional beliefs as well as mainstream contexts in which their identities are also shaped.

Countering this notion and of particular significance is Castellano's (2009) finding that although many Aboriginal peoples live an urban existence that is far removed from traditional lands, they still retain familial ideals rooted in traditional conceptualizations of relational responsibility and a collective ethos. Urban Aboriginal families, especially those with a young single mother as a head of household, face multiple barriers in comparison to reserve-based

families (Castellano, 2002). Interestingly, and in spite of this tendency towards biculturalism, Frideres (2011) maintains that today's Aboriginal identity is a resurgence of past traditions and a mixture of contemporary adaptations to society – there is increased social acceptance to be Aboriginal so more people are identifying with it. Informed by a more culturally inclusive national legislation, 1970 marked a new era and brought with it changes in Canada's multiculturalism policy leading to an Aboriginal cultural revival directly related to this social acceptance.

In his review of documents from 1978-2008 that seeks to reveal Aboriginal people's perceptions of state sanctioned assimilative policies and the underlying rationale, Cherubini (2008) expands on three major themes that emerged from the scholarship: 1) there exists various perceptions of Aboriginal identity; 2) traditional Aboriginal educational perspectives and approaches are misrepresented and misunderstood by mainstream; and 3) Aboriginal standpoints are degraded by national perspectives because they are seen as coming from a place of disadvantage and deficit cultural attributes. Cherubini (2008) maintains that ignorance of Aboriginal epistemologies brought on by hundreds years of discounting and dismissing them as primitive, have largely contributed to the power imbalance – a facts which relegates Aboriginal people to the low income brackets, high educational dropout rates, over-representation in the justice and child-welfare systems and high dependency on social services (p. 222). Moreover, incongruence between neoliberal government policy and Aboriginal worldviews in which the former dominates and pushes Aboriginal peoples to the social margins effectively serves to 'shelter' the rest of Canadian society from perceiving the value of Aboriginal epistemology and knowledge (Cherubini, 2008). He further asserts that conflicting paradigms combined with Western dominance have fashioned a 'deficit' lens through which social systems conceptualize

Aboriginal children; thus, programming and interventions are developed from this deficit

perspective (Cherubini, 2008). Overall, Cherubini's (2008) work tells us that a position of

'imposed disadvantage' and 'forced dependency' continues to relegate Aboriginal peoples'

requests for access to services and equal rights low on the political agenda, which only

reproduces the power imbalance and further erodes the way Aboriginal peoples are perceived.

From an Indigenous, de-colonizing perspective that is also related to Aboriginal identity,

Lee (2015) argues that the current social service adoption system is another tool to assimilate

Indigenous children into Western society and that notions of Indigeneity as defined by Canadian

law are only a means to an end – the more diluted the blood quantum, the less responsibility the

government has to Indigenous peoples and the greater the chance that more Indigenous lands will

be owned by Canada – Aboriginal identity is inextricably tied with Aboriginal land. Lee (2015)

further postulates that current models of band membership are a relic of colonial legislation with

Aboriginal identity conceptualized in terms of blood quantum; adoption into tribal membership

runs counter to current membership models,

> [B]ecause it inherently suggests the possibility of belonging without direct biological
>
> connection, [and] is suspect here as it can challenge the biologization of Indigenous
>
> citizenship and identity; benefits meant for First Nations, such as treaty rights, Aboriginal
>
> rights to hunt and fish, exemption from certain taxation, and access to education funding,
>
> are regulated in such a way that privileges one's claim to registration as an Indian under
>
> Canada's Indian Act. (p. 87).

Lee (2015) concludes that "family-making has been hijacked by the Indian Act" (p. 95).

Significantly though, Innes (2010), in his exploration of the kinship patterns of the Cowesses

First Nations tribe, found that First Nations bands continue to define collective identity based on

pre-reserve and Indian Act conceptualizations of membership entitlement which transcends colonial definitions of Indian identity.

In a study exploring traditional family structure, Carlson (2010) determined that Aboriginal families are a political structure that dictates governance and authority on a Coast Salish community. Returning to the old ways involves challenging colonial imposed governance structures legislated through the Indian Act (Carlson, 2010). This particular finding offers hope in the sense that Aboriginal families are equipped with the necessary cultural tools to rebuild positive individual and collective identities. Likewise, and from a spiritual and philosophical perspective, Carriere (2015) tells us that traditional epistemology, which contributes to the formation and stability of Aboriginal identity, is very much alive and that the teachings provided through dreams are still very much accepted as another way of learning and guidance throughout one's life.

Simard and Blight (2011) provide additional insight telling us that cultural identity formation is an integral process in the lives of Aboriginal children and refers to the connections individuals have to a certain group or culture. Cultural identity includes factors such as a "person's attachment to cultural values, teachings, language, sacred traditions, territory, shared history, and learned wisdom" (Simard & Blight, 2011, p. 40). Misrepresentation of a person's cultural identity, such as that related to colonization where Aboriginal culture is viewed through a convoluted lens of ethnocentrism, is a form of oppression and one that Aboriginal children navigate through on a daily basis. Significantly, Simard and Blight (2011) maintain that cultural identity "is living with spiritual purpose grounded in the cultural structure of the Aboriginal nation" (p. 41). Using statistical data gathered from 2006 Children's survey and in the context of promoting cultural continuity and preserving Aboriginal identity, Bougie's (2014) recent article

examines how the family, home and community can contribute to off-reserve Aboriginal children's heritage language fluency and hence, a stronger attachment to Aboriginal identity. Significantly, it was found that daily exposure to Aboriginal language in the home and community increases a child's chance of attaining language fluency. Aboriginal children raised by grandparents, or in close proximity to grandparents, had a higher level of heritage language fluency than those raised by parents or out-of-community foster care placements (Bougie, 2014). Social networks consisting of people already fluent in Aboriginal languages, participation in traditional community or ceremonial events also contributed to language fluency (Bougie, 2014). Significantly, Bougie (2014) maintains that child care arrangements place children at greater odds for not attaining language fluency since these placements are usually with non-Aboriginal agencies. Aboriginal languages make up the worldview of Aboriginal people, thus access to language learning for Aboriginal children is a vital component contributing to cultural continuity and the development of a positive Aboriginal identity.

Effects of Indian Residential Schools and Colonization

No examination of the structural determinants of Aboriginal parenting would be complete without considering the devastating impacts of colonization and the Indian Residential Schools. In their article aimed at providing historical contextualization and insight into contemporary practices of Aboriginal parenting in the hopes of reducing the number of Aboriginal children in the care of social services, Muir and Bohr (2014) found that the parents of Aboriginal children are considerably younger than mainstream Canadian parents and often suffer the intergenerational effects of a colonial legacy such as dysfunctional value systems, racism and poverty, all of which are factors leading to poor parenting. They confirm other findings that the Indian Residential Schools (IRS) contributed to the loss of traditional parenting, abuse, and the

inability to express love and affection. Harris, Russell and Gockel (2007) acknowledge a connection between colonization, poverty and First Nations child apprehensions. Significantly, Castellano (2009) maintains that the current challenges for Aboriginal families today are rooted in the colonial legacy that brought about, and continues to inform, the struggle to maintain Aboriginal culture, identity, responsibility and autonomy within a collective framework. The reality of intergenerational trauma, combined with a misunderstanding of traditional Aboriginal child rearing practices contributes to the high numbers of Aboriginal children in the care of child welfare authorities (Muir & Bohr, 2014). Muir & Bohr (2014) also found that as of 2011, almost half (48.1%) of the children in care were Aboriginal, despite the fact Aboriginal people make of 4.3% of the population. Moreover, Blackstock (2009) tells us that Aboriginal children are 8 times more likely to end of in the care of child welfare authorities than their non-Aboriginal counterparts. She also reports that most of these children are in care for neglect issues, as opposed to abuse and maltreatment, which is connected to the structural deficits that are the legacy of the fiscal assimilation policies of Canada (personal communication, March 16, 2016).

In spite of this bleak picture, Muir and Bohr (2014) contend, "It does appear that traditional child rearing methods, although perhaps altered by colonialism and trauma, are still being widely practised and transmitted by Aboriginal peoples," (p. 70) especially in light of the fact that not all Aboriginal children attended IRS. Related to this, in Fontaine, Forbes, McNab, Murdock and Stout's (2014) anthology chapter that focuses on the digital stories gathered from six Indigenous women whose mothers were survivors of the IRS, three major themes emerged which determined how the IRS had impacted their lives: i) feelings of alienation, detachment from, and reconnection to their mothers; ii) childhood and adult trauma and; iii) resilience, reconciliation and journeys towards healing. The narratives express vulnerability, cultural

inadequacy in loss of language and traditional cultural practices but also a desire to return to traditional motherhood.

In Bombay, Matheson and Anisman's (2011) quantitative study examining the impact of IRS on second generation IRS survivors, increased depression, perceived discrimination, exposure to adult traumas and difficult childhoods were among some of the findings. Significantly, Bombay, Matheson and Anisman (2011) assert that First Nations adults whose parents attended IRS experienced negative consequences since "many survivors returned home with inappropriate behavior patterns, including abusive or neglectful parenting behaviors modeled after the care-giving behaviors witnessed at [IRS]" (p. 369). They further argue that second generation IRS survivors are subject to an increase in 'perceived' discrimination (Bombay, Matheson & Anisman, 2011); a stance which tends to minimize the very real and deeply wounding psychological impacts of racism and discrimination. This perception, according to Bombay, Matheson and Anisman (2011) is better understood when we consider the fact that "although Aboriginal peoples, in general, experience high levels of discrimination, children of IRS survivors may be more sensitive to such experiences, resulting in greater depressive symptoms" (p. 370).

LaFrance and Collins (2003) provide additional insight into the IRS experience contending that the schools not only robbed children of their rightful cultural legacy and the security of being raised in a close-knit community with a web of caregivers, but also removed appropriate parenting role-models for the children; something that is particularly damaging to Aboriginal children given that we unconsciously raise our children in much the same way we were raised. Those children who returned to their Aboriginal community knew very little of their cultural values and traditional child-rearing practices. Moreover, the IRS neither prepared the

students for life in Aboriginal communities nor did it prepare them for life in the mainstream society (LaFrance & Collins, 2003). Further to this, LaFrance and Collins (2003) contend that parents who had children in IRS were free of care-giving responsibilities and those who were raised in the IRS, later growing into adults and parents, expected that the same freedom should be afforded to them. As a result, they often left their children to pursue their own self-interests (LaFrance & Collins, 2003). Because of the extreme physical, emotional mental and sexual abuse, many parents who grew up as children in the IRS, transmitted this bitterness to their own children and although absent in traditional caregiving societies, corporal punishment was regularly used as a form of discipline (LaFrance & Collins, 2003). LaFrance and Collins (2003) declare, "When the family structure is weakened or destroyed, the culture and society cannot help but be affected" (p. 109), and those who were raised by IRS survivors "also report a history of neglect and abuse in their own childhoods accompanied by feelings of inadequacy as parents and how to raise children in a healthy way" (p. 112). Significantly, LaFrance and Collins stress that in spite of the damaging effects, great resilience emerged out of the IRS experience.

Simard and Blight (2011) further maintain that colonization has eroded, and continues to erode, Aboriginal identity and misrepresents history resulting in persistent misunderstandings and misconceptions about Aboriginal peoples – a process which hinders cultural identity development and spirituality in Aboriginal children. Employing a life course perspective as the theoretical framework and path analysis, Walls and Whitbeck's (2012) study reports on the results of a longitudinal study aimed at understanding the intergenerational impacts of government relocation policies on over 500 Indigenous youth and their mothers whose grandparents, or great-grandparents, were relocated from traditional Indigenous territories. Significantly, Walls and Whitbeck (2012) provide evidence that transitions from reserve to urban

environment represents a "move from tight-knit, small, intergenerational communities to the anonymity of urban life [and] was one of the latest large-scale government assault on cultural values of sharing and strong intergenerational family obligations" (p. p. 1276). They use the concept of linked lives to demonstrate how experiences are transmitted across the generations. Parent-child interactions form the basis for intergenerational continuity and significantly, research has "shown how parental deviance is linked to maladaptive parenting, in turn increasing the risk for problematic child outcomes" (Walls & Whitbeck, 2012, p. 1276). Moreover, Walls and Whitbeck (2012) assert,

> The process is the erosion of intergenerational influences. Grandparents were separated from their sons and daughters and grandchildren. They could not teach the cultural ways of parenting by providing appropriate role models of strong parents and elders. Their children, in turn, were more at risk for demoralization (depressive symptoms) and substance abuse. This eroded their abilities as parents, so that the next generation was more susceptible to early substance use and delinquent behaviors. And so it goes until the cycle is broken. (p. 1289)

The above quotation is useful in assisting us to better understand the process of intergenerational trauma and how these historic events ruptured traditional parenting practices. Clearly, the doors to the Indian Residential Schools have been shut, but this does not mean that mainstream perspectives are necessarily open to accommodating and modifying programming to reflect this reality. Blackstock (2007) argues that child protection simply took over the role of the IRS and are even more deeply involved in the out of home care of Aboriginal children today than during the years of the IRS. This fact becomes evident in the following section.

Institutional and Systemic realities

This section is representative of the social and systemic context within which Aboriginal families navigate through and the challenges they must face in attempting to conform to the expectations of a different culture. Arguments abound that Aboriginal peoples should be better equipped to face these challenges, since hundreds of years of contact should have acculturated them to Western societal norms. Clearly however, the accumulating evidence related to the systemic challenges faced by Aboriginal peoples, some of which is presented below, paints a very different picture.

Carriere and Richardson (2009) provide good insight into the structural realities of Aboriginal families in telling us that the current situation of Aboriginal children in care is worse than it has ever been with some 40-60% of all children in care being Aboriginal – a fact they refer to as the "institutionalization of Aboriginal children in child welfare" (p. 51). The 60s scoop has evolved into the millennial scoop and it is now Aboriginal social workers who are doing the 'scooping' (Carriere & Richardson, 2009). Drawing on past court cases and evidence, Carriere and Richardson (2009) found that many Aboriginal apprehensions occur in the first year of birth, sometimes right after birth, with no opportunity for mothers to demonstrate appropriate parenting capacities to the courts. They further contend that Aboriginal adoptees experience high levels of spiritual dissonance and disconnectedness, despite being in homes that are loving, nurturing and healthy – they remain compelled to seek connections to their family of origin (Carriere and Richardson, 2009). McKenzie, Seidl and Bone (1995) concluded that many standards in First Nations child welfare policies and guiding principles are similar to mainstream views. They further assert, "[C]hild-rearing, family, and parenting matters are shaped by the historical relations between First Nations and governments, religious organizations, and the

agencies that provide social services" (p. 636), as opposed to conforming to a more traditional Aboriginal family model of parenting with an understanding that many traditional practices have been lost due to colonization. Gray and Cosgrove (1985) found that although child protective services claim that cultural differences in child-rearing practices, and perspectives regarding child abuse and neglect must be considered, they are rarely, if ever, acted upon.

Moreover, Kline (1992) provides a historical analysis of Child Welfare intervention since its inception in 1946 as a system of assimilation veiled in liberal discourses of integration and equality. She asserts that, for example, in British Columbia "the number of First Nations children in care increased from 29 children in care in 1955 to 39 per cent of the total number in care in 1965 [and] From 1969 to 1979, an average of just over 78 per cent of status Indian children placed for adoption each year were adopted by non-First Nations families" (Kline, 1992, pp. 387-388). Kline (1992) maintains that courts have regularly dismissed the collective social consciousness of First Nations bands (in cases where they have advocated for retaining First Nations children in First Nations communities) as not being in the best interests of an individual child. She points out that racism is rarely, if ever, dealt with in the context of child welfare legislation (Kline, 1992). Instead, the justice system uses liberal ideological rationale in order to explain away allegations of racism:

> [The] law remains not only compatible with racism, but is also a mechanism for its reproduction and reinforcement. Here the innocence of law is expressed in terms of the impartiality of the best interests of the child standard - impartiality being a crucial presupposition of liberal legality. The portrayal of law as impartial ensures that it appears innocent of politics, thereby reinforcing its claim to legitimacy. This impartiality is

premised upon universality of application: if the law applies equally to everybody, then it

must be impartial. (Kline, 1992, p. 415)

This notion of universality effectively conceals unequal power relations in the legal and child

welfare system, thus innocently reproduces oppression and inequality.

Significantly, King (2012) states that "[T]he discrimination experienced by First Nations

children is so blatant that it must be rationalized, justified, and reframed as something else" (p.

334), which involves shifting the blame from federal or provincial policy makers and holding

First Nations accountable as purveyors of their own misery and vulnerability to discrimination.

Setting the stage for justifying discrimination against First Nations, "there exists in Canada a

particular discourse that paints First Nations as the undeserving recipients of government hand-

outs. This includes the false perception that First Nations receive too much government funding,

do not pay taxes, and have a lot of money" (King, 2012, p. 35). Economic disparities on reserves

and lack of employment are seen as First Nations problems grounded in laziness, poor work ethic

and an unwillingness to move to areas with more opportunity. Economic constraints placed on

reserves due to the Indian Act are not even considered as a structural determinant for poverty.

King (2012) argues that moral dilemmas posed by failure to implement Jordan's Principle are

framed within neoliberal standards within which decision makers say "First Nations are to blame

for the conditions on reserve, and that the most rational, cost-effective, and beneficial path lies

not in respecting Indigenous sovereignty but in absorbing this 'marginalized' community into

mainstream society" (p. 36).

Macdonald and Macdonald (2007) contend that Aboriginal children adopted into White

homes often exhibit severe mental distress and internalize negative stereotypes and prejudices

aimed towards Aboriginal people; thus alienating them from their culture and identity. They

further declare, "The provincial child welfare authorities who delivered services to First Nations peoples living on reserves in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s were largely extensions of the previous residential school system, on the continuum of [assimilationist] practices towards First Nations peoples and communities" (Macdonald & Macdonald, 2007, p. 38). Moreover, within child welfare, 'blame-the-victim' attitudes prevail and structural poverty is still seen as the fault of Aboriginal peoples laziness and unwillingness to choose a better life through hard work and individual initiative (Macdonald & Macdonald, 2007).

Employing a qualitative case study research design and using data derived from individual interviews and small focus group discussion, Smith, Edwards, Varcoe, Martens, and Davies' (2006) study sought to discern ways to increase access to pre and post-natal healthcare for Aboriginal parents from a community-based Aboriginal stakeholder perspective within the context of a post-colonial standpoint theoretical framework. They found that historical factors related to colonization of Aboriginal peoples have resulted in the persistence of health disparities, and although there have been improvements in the last twenty years, health disparities are rooted in the 'othering' of Aboriginal peoples, but factors such as geographical isolation, administrative issues related to staff turnover, service continuity and funding also contribute to the discrepancies (Smith, et., 2006). Moreover, social determinants of health models unique to each community have not been developed and noted improvements in healthcare delivery and cultural congruence have not been documented or disseminated in any impactful way (Smith, et al., 2006). Thus, the experiences of Aboriginal cultures in colonized societies are located in ongoing and daily encounters of systemic and collective violence evident in discrimination and racist judgmental attitudes on the part of the dominant culture (Smith, et al., 2006). Moreover, Eni and Prakash, (2009) provide an overview of the how Manitoba Child

Health's First Nation's run home support program, Strengthening Families (MCH-SF), has developed its programming at the intersection of Western, mainstream programming and Aboriginal cultural perspectives. They discovered that overall health disparities between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal maternal population combined with low-participation rates for pre-natal care by Aboriginal expectant mothers, have prompted the need for maternal health-care home visitation programs within the last 30 years (Eni & Prakash, 2009). Further to this, Eni and Prakash (2009) state, "[E]valuation of outcomes of care for pregnant and parenting Aboriginal people must recognize and appreciate the unique experiences of individuals, families and communities within a broader historical context of Aboriginal people's lives" (p. 28). This stance echoes Gray and Cosgrove's (1985) perspective which maintains that assertions such as those above are often articulated, there is little to no action behind the words.

McCaslin and Boyer (2009) assert that Aboriginal peoples are the fastest growing population in Canada providing a portrait, as of the report's published date, of the health realities of Aboriginal peoples. These include higher birth and infant mortality rates; lower life expectancy and increased chance of an unnatural death, to name but a few. These health disparities are structurally determined and can be linked back to early colonial policies entrenched in the Indian Act, and other assimilative legislation such as the IRS (McCaslin & Boyer, 2009). Significantly, their research found that

> Aboriginal social assistance welfare programs and its delivery was discriminatory [and] that Aboriginal children in the welfare assistance program are caught in a legacy of colonialism, racism and exclusion. Their developmental years are fraught with high rates of poverty and its related causes and consequences from health problems, poor housing and educational difficulties to astounding numbers of children taken into state care and of

youth in trouble with the law or victims of violent crime. (McCaslin & Boyer, 2009, p.

70-71).

Moreover, the researchers found that Aboriginal women are more than 3 times likely to

experience intimate partner violence, maintaining that "The violence that is so prevalent in

Aboriginal communities is directly related to the sexual and physical abuse that generations of

Aboriginal people suffered in residential schools" (McCaslin & Boyer, 2009, p. 75). Further to

this, McCaslin and Boyer's (2009) research found that child welfare has replaced IRS placing

Aboriginal children at structural risks which refer to "the consequences of taking children away

not only from their nuclear families but from their cultures, traditions, extended family

communities, and ways of life" (p. 71). Neglect is the main reason why Aboriginal children are

apprehended yet, neglect is quite often determined by poverty levels and the inability to provide

the necessities of life. Poverty in Aboriginal communities is directly linked to colonialism and

the "politics of oppression" (McCaslin & Boyer, 2009, p. 71). Moreover, McCaslin and Boyer

(2009) maintain that there is a belief that one solution will suffice across First Nations

communities and this belief is one of the reasons why programs and treatment models are not

working – there is no template for working with all First Nations communities.

In examining Canada's neoliberal undercurrent, Anishnaabe practicing social worker and

scholar King (2012) seeks to examine the ways that Canada has failed to provide adequate

services to First Nations children by not enacting Jordan's Principle and viewing Aboriginal

peoples through an ideological lens based on racial discrimination. She argues "that

policymaking and implementation in Canada rest firmly within a neoliberal political rationality

where moral decisions are those that reflect free market values" (King, 2012, p. 29). Social

policy is a government tool used to manage people and inducing their conformity to neoliberal

values through a process "which particular ideas, values, and assumptions are cast as 'good' and 'normal,' and through which such ideas are taken up by subjects, internalized, and reproduced" (King, 2012, p. 32). In this way, maintains King (2012, discourses surrounding the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' are confined to neoliberal standards about who has conformed and who has not. King (2012) further asserts, "Neoliberal thought frames the market as a neutral force that rewards those who work hard" (p. 33) thus, those who are in need of help, have not worked hard enough so are undeserving. According to King (2012), as distinct societies, First Nations do not conform to neoliberal ideals resulting in social policies aimed at integrating them into the free market and assimilating as neoliberal citizens. Moreover, King (2012) concludes that because of this non-conformity and persistent lack of funding and access to the basic necessities of life, many First Nations people are forced to place their children in foster care because they cannot provide these basics. In care, children lose their culture and identity and often adopt neoliberal values; thus, reproducing the good neoliberal citizen.

Understanding how these complex social forces impact the lived reality is vital in understanding how Aboriginal people respond to and cope with the systemic challenges. In the following section, we briefly highlight a study conducted by Nygaard (2012) regarding addictions as being related to the structural reality of Aboriginal families.

Addictions

Nygaard (2012) used a qualitative, community-based study to determine, from a mental health perspective, the nature of First Nations culture in terms of authenticity and its role in resilience and recovery from addictions. The findings suggest that culture is a complex concept and a lack of fully understanding its role in substance abuse impedes social services' attempts in assisting individuals in the recovery process. She tells us that a return to traditional cultural

practices and beliefs has led to recovery success and maintenance in First Nations alcoholics in a treatment context but little exploration has been done to determine the role of culture in a home environment (Nygaard, 2012). Significantly, Nygaard (2012) states that "Healing in the aboriginal context is seen as encompassing not only typical concerns such as peer support and overcoming personal challenges, but also the need to address broader socio-political issues such as the impacts of colonization and residential school on identity" (p. 163). Some participants in her study, most notably those who were non-Indigenous, found that culture served as a liability in addictions recovery because FN cultural values such as generosity and sharing actually foster community alcoholism. Additionally, the participants in her study who felt culture was useful in recovery and a preventative factor in the cycle of addictions were Indigenous recovering addicts who had experience with 'culture a treatment' (Nygaard, 2012). An important finding of Nygaard's study is that a strong cultural identity contributed to resilience as did supportive community initiatives: "This research highlights the reality that the effects of colonialism are so multidimensional that culture is only one part of the puzzle—and solutions to address issues like addiction must also address a broad range of interconnected structural problems like economic development, racism, access to resources, health and education" (p. 171). This study also provides a direct connection to the ways that a strong attachment to Aboriginal identity can act as a buffer against the negative impacts of socio-historical factors and the resultant dysfunctional and harmful ways that Aboriginal peoples have taken up in attempting to cope with these effects. Aboriginal children growing up in dysfunctional homes are particularly vulnerable in enacting out negative behaviors, and early pregnancy is but one outcome; a topic we highlight below.

Teenage pregnancy and single female parent households

Significantly, Benzies (2013) establishes that Aboriginal children are seven times more likely to be born to an adolescent mother compared to non-Aboriginal children and that the main reason Aboriginal women leave school is to care for their children. Eni and Phillips-Beck (2013) assert that "factors such as sexual maturity, emotional instability, belief systems, personal values, expectations favorable to premarital sexual activity and teen parenthood, lower educational levels, a dislike of school, and less involvement in religious activities are associated with a greater vulnerability to teenage pregnancy" (p. 1), although poverty, linked to a poor future orientation, is the overarching determinant of teenage pregnancy. Moreover, in spite of the fact that motherhood is looked upon as honorable, mixed emotions in the community regarding teenage pregnancy are prevalent (Eni & Phillips-Beck, 2013). For the participants in Eni and Phillips-Beck study (2013), the choice to become pregnant was not often a conscious one although it involved a need to be loved and needed by someone else which was linked to the fact that many in the study experienced neglect and abuse by their parents, and quite often, sexual abuse when they were children. Eni and Phillips-Beck (2013) illuminate other factors involved in Aboriginal teenage pregnancy that include: increased prevalence in relationships with abusive partners and the perceived need to get pregnant to maintain intimate relationships; the presence of grandmothers were a tremendous support in the lives of teenage mothers with the grandmothers working to protect their grandchildren from the abuse they suffered; a lack of sexual preparedness and that sex is a responsibility to keep oneself safe – these expectations were not transmitted generationally; and experiences of social isolation and anomie for the young mothers. Moreover, Eni and Phillips-Beck (2013) assert the young girls in the study felt pressured into sex because everyone around them was engaging in it. Positive aspects of teen

pregnancy include motivation for change and improving life circumstances, as well as the support of extended families. Although there was some involvement with the grandfathers, Eni and Phillips-Beck (2013) assert the fathers had little to do with raising the children:

> Relationship stories of the young women typically included one of two themes with the fathers of their children: either they remained together, 'partied' a lot and suffered, sometimes extreme, domestic violence until they left the relationship, or they separated from the fathers prior to having the baby. The stories revealed a lack of attention to longterm co-parenting and typically focused on immediate feelings of love or desire to 'be with him forever.' Once the feelings faded, women said little about ongoing sharing of child rearing responsibilities. (p. 16)

Eni and Phillips-Beck (2013) maintain that efforts to prevent teen pregnancy must start with education that reflects cultural values and beliefs but also mainstream realities, including the profound influence of drugs and alcohol on sexual consent, and opportunities for youth to engage in creative and educational pursuits.

The above overview of the scholarship outlining the structural factors that contribute to the present-day reality of Aboriginal families is useful in determining how they influence the family structure and impacts on the children. Below, we shift to a somewhat more positive orientation in examining the literatures that support an Aboriginal cultural foundation of parenting.

Aboriginal cultural basis for addressing parenting

For millennia, Aboriginal peoples have provided a safe, sustainable and optimal environment most conducive to the development of children. Emerging research into the relational neurobiology of parenting offers scientific proof supporting the fact that Aboriginal

parenting practices fostered ideal conditions for healthy brain development in Aboriginal infant and children. It should not be forgotten that the majority of Aboriginal family and community systems are finding ways to raise their children. As such, this section focuses on diverse and multi-faceted scholarship surrounding research protocols, current initiatives, relational neurobiology of parenting, and studies that advocate for a return to traditional Aboriginal ways of parenting.

In their article exploring a collaborative consultation process in the context of Aboriginal research, scholars Schmidt, Broad, Sy and Johnston (2012) report on an Anishnaabe community-based research project aimed at ensuring all stakeholders are involved and informed regarding the future direction of child welfare initiatives. From this work, they concluded that research must adhere to the ethical standards of the First Nation community and approach it from that perspective using respectful terminology and language that is understandable to all members. Further to this, we need to set the context for the research rather than assume that participants will already be knowledgeable about how the research is to be conducted. Schmidt, Broad, Sy and Johnston (2012) provide a model for consultative research as consisting of four research phases: 1) pre-consultation phase – encompassing above considerations; 2) consultation; 3) community feedback sessions based on collected data; 4) assessing validity of findings. Additionally, they used a medicine wheel format to conceptualize the concepts they wanted to explore with participants based in four quadrants of inquiry (Schmidt, Broad, Sy & Johnston, 2012). McKenzie, Seidl and Bone (1995) found that a holistic model of parenting that focuses on extended family care, emotional and physical care, and spiritual guidance were primary features of the Aboriginal parenting model. Simard and Blight (2011) tell us that culturally restorative approaches include practices that build on Indigenous ancestral knowledge such as incorporating

the natural protective network which "is a principle of child, family, extended family, community, and Nationhood, contributing to the successful life way of the child [and] incorporates cultural attachment theory as the main impetus to developmental learning" (p. 31).

Because of the profound barriers and marginalization Aboriginal children experience, Benzies (2013) reminds us that it is important to situate support systems within the context of their respective cultures and historical realities while also considering the great diversity that exists across Aboriginal cultures and variety of parenting practices. With its focus on the evolution and dynamics of a child's micro-interaction in multiple relationships, Benzies (2013) suggests that Bronfenbrenner's (2005)[1] bioecological theory of child development may be more appropriate in explaining the Aboriginal collective approach to child-rearing as well as the resulting effects on child development. Moreover, interventions designed to support Aboriginal parents include those that focus on the proximal relationship of both the child and parents together. For example, Head start and other early intervention programs not only focus on minimizing impacts of poverty on the child, but also work to "turn around" the effects of intergenerational effects on parents (Benzies, 2013, p. 387). Stout and Kipling (2003) also advocate for interventions that allows Aboriginal people to make a break with the past, or come to terms with their past, in order to foster resilience levels. To be sure, in light of the history of colonialism and residential school, intervention efforts need to focus on the spiritual aspect of healing and parenting.

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[1] This refers to the more mature version of Bronfenbrenner's often-cited theory. It is important to note this given multiple references to earlier versions. In the most recent iteration, he stated: "The form, power, content, and direction of the proximal processes effecting development vary systematically as a joint function of the characteristics of the developing person; of the environment—both immediate and more remote—in which the processes are taking place; the nature of the developmental outcomes under consideration; and the social continuities and changes occurring over time through the life course and the historical period during which the person has lived. (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, p. 996, italics in the original) (as cited in Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield & Karmik, 2009).

Broad cultural principles that can be adapted and modified

In addressing Aboriginal parenting from an Aboriginal perspective utilizing cultural principles, Blackstock (2009) proposes that a physics Theory of Everything is best suited to represent First Nations relational perspectives which can, in turn, make space for her new, 'breath of life theory' that emphasizes a relational and interconnected approach to Aboriginal child welfare. Castellano (2002) argues that past research conducted on Aboriginal families was done from a Western paradigm and used for policy development and implementation and advocates for a movement away from this and into community-based research from an Indigenous holistic perspective that emphasizes balance within the four quadrants of human existence: physical, emotional, spiritual and mental. Moreover, she conceptualizes relational interdependence within a circle formation encompassing: individual, family, community, natural world and the unseen world (Castellano, 2002). Stewart (2009) cautions that generalizing across Indigenous cultures is always wrought with difficulties because of the heterogeneous nature of the various tribes, but there are common threads that exist. Shared value and belief systems include the importance of family, non-competitiveness, non-interference, sharing and individual emotional restraint. As such, "there is a need to understand the worldview and beliefs of a culture prior to applying techniques of healing or helping." (Stewart, 2009, p. 64).

Innes (2010) tells us that Trickster stories, such as the Elder Brother stories, are a means to transmit cultural responsibilities and values across generations and serve as reminders to uphold the laws of the people; thus they are a vehicle for ensuring cultural continuity and maintaining balance and harmony. Innes states that the "stories functioned as a legal institution. Though this institution was unlike those in other parts of the world, it functioned in the same way" (p. 32).

The purpose of Simard and Blight's (2011) article is to provide an analysis of the relevant literature that encompasses an Indigenous, culturally restorative approach to child welfare services from an Indigenous, specifically Anishnaabe, perspective that is strength-based and focused on 'celebrating survival.' Significantly, Simard and Blight (2011) offer a cultural attachment theory as an alternative to Western based developmental theories, such as Attachment theory. Simard and Blight (2011) assert that the Indigenous epistemology, or ways of knowing, as they emerged in the literatures, are 1) transmitted intergenerationally, 2) holistic in nature, 3) collectively oriented, 4) based upon ancestral knowledge, and 5) best accessed and evaluated utilizing Indigenous research designs that honor ancestral knowledge and protocols. Moreover, cross-cultural learning in applied practices can assist in minimizing barriers to understanding and foster "culturally 'relevant' interventions and approaches to service provision geared toward developmental achievement for Aboriginal youth" (Simard & Blight, 2011, p. 30). Simard and Blight's (2011) notion of cultural attachment and the more generalized features of Aboriginal epistemology that they offer above are useful components in creating an Aboriginal parenting framework based on Aboriginal ways of knowing.

From some of the scholarship, we can conclude that broad Aboriginal cultural principles, although context dependent, are premised within the worldview of the respective Aboriginal group that is developing the programming. The freedom to adapt and modify programming according to diverse Aboriginal perspectives is vital in creating relevance and sustainable strategies that foster cultural continuity and honor existing Aboriginal parenting practices. Providing the freedom for Aboriginal parents to rediscover traditional parenting practices and foster these practices in communities offer promising possibilities that will benefit Aboriginal children, parents and communities from a neurobiological standpoint. Below, we briefly

highlight studies that support the notion that traditional Aboriginal parents were instinctively drawn to adopt practices that allowed for the optimal growth and development of children.

Relational Neurobiology

The processes and concepts involved in relational neurobiology are complex and unfortunately, due to space limitations, we cannot fully expand on this topic but we offer a useful, albeit relatively brief, overview that serves to position Aboriginal parenting practices within the larger area of neurobiological foundations of child development. In their chapter exploring the ways to mitigate the effects of early childhood trauma, neuroscientists Ludy-Dobson and Perry (2010) begin by telling us that

> Humans are social creatures. We live, work, and grow up in social groups. For the vast majority of the last 200,000 years, humans have lived in multigenerational, multifamily hunter- gatherer bands characterized by a rich and continuous relational milieu; the concept of personal space and privacy is relatively new. Child mortality during our history was high; children were highly valued by the band and in these groups of 40–60 members, there were roughly four developmentally more mature potential caregivers for each child under the age of 6. This enriched relational ratio helped the group protect, nurture, educate, and enrich the lives of each developing child. (p. 26)

Although the above quotation is lengthy, it is effective in establishing that Western ideals of the nuclear family, and our current education and childcare systems are insufficient in providing an adequate relational ratio that will optimize healthy child development. This is significant in light of the fact that, according to Tuttle, Knudson-Martin and Kim (2012), we cannot understand parenting practices "apart from the larger sociocultural context in which they arise" (p. 76). Today, we may have thirty young children to one adult in any given elementary classroom and

the ratio of adults to children in daycare settings fares no better. In families, we often have two parents, or sometimes one in the case of single parent families, caring for at least three children; inarguably, the number of children tends to be much higher in Aboriginal families (Statistics, Canada, 2013). Indeed, the development of Western society as we know it today, with its entrenched community violence and emphasis on individual rights over the collective good, has been imposed upon Aboriginal culture and created unsafe environments to raise children. These types of childcare/parenting arrangements have caused a vast number of children to experience relational poverty. Significantly, Perry (2014) argues, "The deterioration of public education, urban violence and the alarming social disintegration seen in some of our communities can be linked to the escalating cycles of abuse and neglect of our children" (p. 2). Illuminated by these findings, we are inspired to determine the processes involved in fostering a healthy relational milieu and how traditional Aboriginal parenting aligned with these processes.

Relational cues embodied in caring, compassion and healthy emotional stimuli serve to calm children; thus, signaling to them that adults are safe and provide nurturance (Ludy-Dobson & Perry, 2010). Moreover, Ludy-Dobson and Perry (2010) assert, "These powerful regulating effects of healthy relational interactions on the individual – mediated by various key neural networks in the brain – are at the core of relationally based protective mechanisms that help us survive and thrive" (p. 27), and ultimately form a child's relational template. Relational templates are sets of associations in a child's developing brain premised upon relational interactions with adult caregivers, and resultant stimuli, about the nature of human beings. If a child's relational template is formed from healthy relational stimuli between themselves and adult caregivers, then the child forms an image of adults as being associated with love, caring and nurturance. Alternately, if a child's template is made up of negative associations with his/her

adult caregivers due to neglect, abuse and other maladaptive experiences, then the child comes to perceive adults as unsafe, uncaring and capable of harming them (MacKinnon, 2012). Utilizing the concept of the relational template as a theoretical framework for considering the various interactional mechanisms involved in traditional Aboriginal child-rearing allows us to obtain a more nuanced understanding of these parenting practices in the context of the neurobiology of healthy child development.

As mentioned earlier, optimal conditions for child-rearing occur in a socially fulsome environment where children have access to a relatively large number of parental figures (Ludy-Dobson & Perry, 2010). Simard and Blight's (2011) work is particularly useful in illuminating how the old adage that 'it takes a community to raise a child' rings especially true in the case of traditional Aboriginal culture. They emphasize how child-rearing practices were the responsibility of not only biological parents, but also extended families, tribes and larger nations (Simard & Blight, 2011). Castellano (2002) also perceives Aboriginal child-rearing within a relational framework which is conducive to infants and small children developing a healthy relational template. According to Perry (2014), fostering relational safety involves providing children with choices reflective of a level of autonomy, as well as being consistent and predictable in parenting practices. This approach aligns with the findings in Cheah and Chirkov's (2008) study which establishes that providing autonomy to children is still very much practiced in Aboriginal parenting. Raczka's (1979) exploration also supports the notion that Aboriginal children were given much autonomy in the traditional society. Autonomy, or choice, is an important feature in the restoration of a healthy balance in childrearing, and in offering "some element of control in an activity or in an interaction with an adult, they will feel safer, comfortable and will be able to feel, think and act in a more 'mature' fashion" (p. 10). Moreover,

providing "patterned repetitive rhythmic somatosensory activity" (MacKinnon, 2012) through

activities such as drumming or rocking is also conducive to healthy brain development since

these activities mimic the intrauterine stimuli such as the mother's heartbeat and movements

experienced in-utero. Aboriginal cultural activities such as drumming, dancing and infant

rocking can also serve to restore healthy brain functioning in traumatized children since these

activities repair neural networks in the brain that respond to patterned and repetitive stimuli

(MacKinnon, 2012).

Significantly, the neuroplasticity of the brain means that despite earlier maltreatment,

neglect, loss or trauma, Aboriginal children are able to recover from these assaults. In this

respect, Tuttle, Knudson-Martin and Kim (2012) declare, "we now know that one's relational

abilities can improve despite the early attachment injuries experienced during one's formative

years" (p. 75). In light of the neurobiology of parenting and child development, replacing

Western models of child development, parenting practices, familial perspectives and assessment

frameworks with ones that are created collaboratively with Aboriginal parents and systems'

professionals makes good sense and is a hopeful step in the right direction. Below, we expand on

the possibilities that Aboriginal values and principles can offer in terms of systemic changes.

Future direction and implications for systemic changes

Muir and Bohr (2014) tell us that because of the complex and multi-layered effects of the

colonial legacy, new ways of assessing and interpreting Aboriginal parenting are called for that

draw on a multi-dimensional, multi-disciplinary approach which moves away from traditional

Western ways of defining healthy parenting and is grounded in the traditional and colonial

history and contemporary reality of Aboriginal peoples. Earlier, McKenzie, Seidl, and Bone

(1995) recommended that "that standards development in First Nations communities be viewed

as an evolutionary process that include[s] extensive community input and involvement in the early stages" (p. 638). Schmidt, Broad, Sy and Johnston (2012) assert that future direction must be a move away from a deficit perspective based in problem-solving, and focus instead on existing strengths using these as the foundation on which to strategize from. Carriere and Richardson (2009) contend that the responsibility of child welfare should be to provide Indigenous children with the opportunity to connect with their ancestral roots in order to foster a healthy sense of identity and well-being. In essence, the child welfare system should bend to accommodate, even provide meaningful connection to, the worldview of Indigenous children rather than forcing these children to bend and assimilate to Western ideals of family, child development and models of health. Further to this, the concept of maintaining human dignity and its importance in healthy mental functioning, especially for marginalized groups, needs to be at the forefront of child welfare authorities in terms of decision making and treatment of Aboriginal clients: "Today, dealing with workplace, educational institutions, or government bureaucracies often involves forms of power abuse that result in humiliation for individuals and that harm their personal dignity" (Carriere & Richardson, 2009, p. 61).

McCaslin and Boyer (2009) recommend that utilizing Aboriginal healing practices such as the circle model "offers a structured form of dialogue that engages us in those difficult conversations and builds relationships through common goals" (p. 80). Cheah and Chirkov (2008) propose that the theory of an autonomous-relational self can be applied to Aboriginal peoples in Canada because they are still in the midst of transition to Western society. Moreover, their study confirmed the notion of an Aboriginal cultural model of development in which individuals are autonomous, self-integrated with strong inter-personal skills aimed at maintaining collective harmony (Cheah & Chirkov, 2008).

Smith and colleagues (2006) address issues of discrimination and marginalization as an ethical responsibility within the nursing code of ethics asserting that many of Canada's healthcare policies are derivatives of colonial ideals and are structured to prevent access to adequate healthcare services for marginalized groups. Oppressive power relations, whether intended or not, within the healthcare system have "served to disenfranchise Aboriginal people in the context of healthcare interactions and relationships" (p. 28), which in turn prevents Aboriginal people from seeking preventative pre and postnatal healthcare services. Drawing on results from an earlier study suggest that health services must be provided from the beliefs and perspectives of the cultural group they are serving – in other words, the healthcare system should bend to fit the worldviews of those it serves rather than requiring Aboriginal peoples to conform to policies that were ultimately created from a colonial mindset (Smith, et al., 2006). Effective interventions that contribute to holistic cultural continuity and focus on historical and intergenerational impacts of colonialism need to happen in a prenatal context – pregnancy is considered a time for change and an opportunity to do things differently (Smith, et al., 2006).

Additionally, healthcare must be responsive to the needs of Aboriginal peoples with an emphasis on emotional safety and caring relationships. This involves fostering non-judgemental attitudes in healthcare professionals, supportive perspectives, and safe, culturally relevant and comfortable environments. The authors define responsiveness as "being holistic, being client-directed, and integrating ways of knowing into relationships and care" (Smith, et al., 2006, p. 37) that includes and incorporates many perspectives into healthcare services. Client-direction means the client takes the helm and directs the health agenda – this approach restores power and dignity on an individual level but also honors the collective First Nations culture and ancestral knowledge of clients (Smith, et al., 2006). Healthcare professionals need to reach out and be

visible in communities, provide education that empowers clients through a process of meaningful dialogue in which each individual feels they can learn from the other, encouraging the participation of fathers and extended family members in the prenatal care of children, and fostering food security and literacy. Smith and colleagues (2006) tell us that cultural responsiveness and cultural sensitivity must be differentiated within the context of Aboriginal service provision – responsiveness differs from sensitivity in two major ways in that it is 1) active and orientated towards change, and 2) involves action towards an individual and particular situation as opposed to culturally 'sensitive' approach towards groups and collectives. Additionally "responsiveness positions healthcare organizations and providers as responsible to a) recognize their own positions, b) seek to understand that of others, and c) ethically make the resources and supports available to address their priorities rather than judging differences as somehow wrong or inferior" (Smith et al., 2006, p. 41). Findings from Smith and colleagues' (2006) study suggest for a broader conceptualization of safety wherein issues of discrimination and inequities are ethically addressed in individual and organizational practices.

An example of successful programming is provided in Eni and Prakash's (2009) overview of the 'Strengthening Families' health program in Manitoba. Federally funded, managed by the AFN and designed on a collaborative framework between universities, local and regional governance, provincial and federal governance structures the MCH-SF program undergoes continual evaluation and has the potential to evolve in response to the families and diverse First Nations communities it serves. The collaborative framework "supports self-determination and self-governance discourses, and acknowledges First Nations social and cultural differences" (Eni & Prakash, 2009, p. 29).

In terms of knowledge creation and evidence to support programming, Quinn (2007) asserts that the main differences that emerge between Aboriginal and Western research is around purpose, methods, outcome measurements and control. Moreover, Quinn (2007) states that "healing work needs to be intimately aligned to relationships with Elders and other cultural leaders, as well as ceremonies and protocols designed for personal development" (p. 75). Quinn (2007) also tells us that the success of Aboriginal healing traditions cannot be measured according to Western standards due to ceremonial protocols that serve to preserve the sacred integrity of healing ceremonies. Evidence supporting the efficacy of Aboriginal healing initiatives have been found in qualitative studies and include healing circles that focus on sensation awareness techniques, Legacy education, storytelling, equality in the counselling relationship, sweats, fasting and teachings based on Aboriginal knowledge (Quinn, 2007).

Stewart (2009) offers social constructivism as a theoretical approach that can be appropriately aligned with features of Indigenous relationality because it is an empowering approach in which practitioner and clients' co-construct meaning. The empowering nature of social-constructivism becomes apparent when it is applied in the context of narrative therapeutic approaches in that understanding how a client's story can be used as a juncture for problem-solving during which "people construct their realities as they live them, so the act of telling a story can induce client change because the telling adds to the story itself through the possibility of creating new meaning making" (Stewart, 2009, p. 66). Moreover, this approach allows the therapist to "Gather family histories in a way that is continuous and non-linear" (Stewart, 2009, p. 67), and offers the opportunity for clients to acknowledge the role of colonial impacts on the co-construction of knowledge and how it informs practitioner-client relationships. When working with Indigenous fathers, Ball (2010) recommends the application of a chronoform

system of ecological development, which is a process of tracking "changes over time in the patterning of environmental events that influence an individual's development and life course," (p. 129) to inform programming efforts. Significantly, Walls and Whitbeck (2012) recommend that "one of the keys to breaking the cycle set in motion by historical cultural losses is reconnecting generations, linking lives in a good way to support the healthy growth of the next generation" (p. 1290). Inarguably, breaking the cycle of intergenerational trauma is fundamental in the healing process and as the scholarship demonstrates, the journey towards wellness and healing for Aboriginal families can be found within Aboriginal culture.

The Indigenous Voice

In this section, we offer a general overview of the literature that either originates from an Indigenous perspective, draws on the Indigenous voice, or advocates for Indigenous ways of knowing in programming goals.

When looking at ways to study Aboriginal issues within a child welfare context, it is Indigenous scholar Blackstock's (2009) belief that Aboriginal research methodology alone would not always be the best choice in cases when researching new phenomena – it is best to apply an integrative model. Stewart (2009) suggests that attempting to help or facilitate the healing process for Aboriginal families should come from resources within the community based on Indigenous ways of knowing – this choice should be available for clients rather than solely Western based treatment models. Therapies can be based upon social constructivist approaches but also incorporate Indigenous perspectives on mental health, ceremony, Elder involvement and various other culturally appropriate methods for attaining wellness (Stewart, 2009). Carriere and Richardson (2009) maintain that any assessments undertaken with regards to Aboriginal peoples must first start with a foundation that is built on everything "that is right with people, rather than

what is wrong, and that consider[s] the social contexts and how disrupted dignity can skew the results of assessment" (p. 62). According to Castellano (2002), if given a choice, Aboriginal peoples response to community and individual breakdown and dysfunction is based on community revival of ancestral traditions that are adapted to contemporary contexts. Moreover, Aboriginal cultural revival means that Aboriginal peoples are assuming the ethical responsibility to restore and live by nation laws and traditions to promote cultural continuity and restore equilibrium in Aboriginal individuals and communities (Castellano, 2002). Indigenous researchers Simard and Blight (2011) propose the cultural attachment theory which is based upon the notion that Aboriginal peoples are pulled back to their respective cultures due to the presence of ancestral genetic memories. It encompasses the relational development between children and caregivers and the creation of strong boundaries separating colonial impacts of socialization and the positive experiences woven into the fabric of Aboriginal cultures. It acts as a buffer to minimize the de-humanizing effects of colonization which persist today. Its application involves matching service provision to the values and ways of knowing for each Aboriginal child in care (Simard & Blight, 2011).

Interestingly, Harris, Russell and Gockel (2007) found that single Aboriginal mothers want information regarding child development and the various stages. This is important and indicates a point of entry for delivering culturally appropriate information and parenting strategies that can support cultural continuity and increase young Aboriginal mothers' self-efficacy in terms of parenting.

Utilizing Jordan's Principle as an example, Wien, Blackstock, Loxley, and Trocmè (2007) argue why and how a new child welfare funding formulation is needed and propose ways it could be implemented. They conclude that the reason many Aboriginal children come into the

care of the child welfare authorities is because of neglect which largely stems from their parents

being unable to provide the necessities of life – often a direct result of poverty which is

structurally determined, and its symptoms such as poor housing, addictions, depression, etc.

(Wien, et al. 2007). Additionally, they recommend that, in order to address poverty from a long-

term perspective, funding must be allocated to reserves and economic development efforts

initiated and supported through government support. In the short-term, changes to the Indigenous

and Northern Affairs' funding formula could make a big differences in mitigating some of the

factors involved in child apprehension, especially illuminated by the fact that its main investment

in the child welfare system is in the area of child removal; thus, advocating for First Nations

control of child welfare services (Wien, et al., 2007). As well, it is now established that the on

reserve child welfare services are systemically underfunded (CHRT, 2016) making it hard to

effectively assess, case plan, intervene and support children and families. Even so, off reserve

families will need approaches that take into consideration the approaches that respect the issues

that have been raised throughout this review. Approaches will require child protection and the

courts to gain comfort with discomfort as less intrusive and more supportive methods are used.

      In terms of custom adoption options, Carriere (2015) maintains that for the Yellowhead

Tribal Services Agency and the communities it served, custom adoption involved: "[T]he

biological parents stay in touch with the children and the children benefit by keeping a

connection to their birth family and who they are. The community is involved in supporting and

affirming the important roles of the biological, adoptive and extended families. Traditional

teachings from the Elders are available to the children and families who wish to learn the history

of their respective community" (p. 45). Moreover, she provides a set of criteria that justifies and

formally recognizes the practice of custom adoption that are accepted by the courts, even though

there is a cause for concern when courts become involved with traditional customary Aboriginal

laws owing to the inherent imbalance of power in that the final decision resides within the justice

system (Carriere, 2015). Currently, Alberta, through its provincial welfare agencies, is trying to

recruit more adoptive Aboriginal families but considering the historic distrust Aboriginal peoples

have of child welfare systems, and quite justifiably, the process is slow and lacks adequate

funding to make custom adoption a viable option for First Nations child welfare agencies – this

is not even factoring in the legislative restrictions placed on custom adoptions (Carriere, 2015).

 LaFrance and Bastien (2007) argue there exists a need in child welfare to create new

ways of working with Aboriginal families that is predicated on old knowledge and not

knowledge that can be confined to theory and taught in social work classes, but knowledge that

is alive, active and for those seeking it, fully able to participate in its creation processes. These

comments are reflected in the recommendations from the TRC suggesting new ways of doing

both child protection and social work education (TRC, 2015). This new knowledge is generated

from the values and philosophies contained within tribal knowledges that include "the

importance of shared parenting and community responsibility for children, the importance of

language as a source of renewed culture, knowledge of history and tradition as an essential

element of identity, the importance of kinship and connection to each other and a respectful

approach to the planet" (LaFrance & Bastien, 2007, p. 117). In order to fully appreciate

LaFrance and Bastien's (2007) argument and its relevancy to our study, it is worth quoting them

at length here:

 Human empowerment relies on the ability to (re)invent institutions and practices that

 manifest context revising freedoms. An improved understanding of the artificial context

 that has governed much of Aboriginal life may help inspire the creation of an alternative

and more natural context and reduce the residue of colonialism; domination and

oppression … [T]here is a dearth of 'new' models that incorporate 'old' ways to respond

to an increased understanding of the impact of colonization, residential school

experiences and the 60's scoop on Aboriginal communities and families. (pp. 109-116)

Significantly, out of LaFrance and Bastien's (2007) work emerged two dichotomous cluster of

themes that included the continued importance of practices and values that promoted cultural

continuity such as language, shared childcare and oral education juxtaposed with the lived reality

of the social structural effects of colonization. Makokis (2009) proposes a 'work for welfare'

policy that honors the notion of reciprocity as a core Aboriginal cultural value, serves the

collective good, and could build upon the strengths on Aboriginal communities, thus creating

capacity. Significantly, Makokis (2009) speaks to the idea of cultural relevancy when developing

Aboriginal programming and this can only be accomplished through collaborative efforts with

the Aboriginal communities. Other, voices speak of the power of storytelling as a vehicle for

healing (Fontaine, Forbes, McNab, Murdock & Stout, 2014), and that stories possess the power

to determine tribal membership (Innes, 2008). Here, we can appreciate that Aboriginal oral

traditions still play a significant role in cultural continuity.

Given the perspectives above, it is clear that the solutions to Aboriginal socio-economic

problems can be found within the community. Aboriginal program development must originate

within an Aboriginal perspective, but should also make room for Western approaches that are in

alignment with Aboriginal ones – essentially taking the best of two worlds and converging them

into a framework for family wellness that is adaptable, relevant and honors the diversity within

Aboriginal culture. Below, we synthesize the scholarship that surrounds the theme of Aboriginal

parenting by offering some alternate perspectives in response to some of those found within the literature, highlight areas for future research and identify gaps.

Synthesis

The conceptual lens, developed in the synthesis of the scholarship on this topic, is inspired by LaFrance and Bastien's (2007) work and premised on the idea that creating new models for working with Aboriginal families are best rooted in old knowledge. Thus, in looking back, we allow ourselves to move forward (Wilson & Restoule, 2010). Traditional ways of thinking about our world and our place within it can be conceptualized within a contemporary framework; a notion that is in alignment with the fact that, like all cultures, Aboriginal culture must be given the opportunity to evolve at a pace that still promotes traditional cultural continuity based in Aboriginal ontological and epistemic principles. From a critical standpoint that is informed by our conceptual lens, we propose alternate arguments below in response in some of scholarship discussed in earlier sections.

In the context of Aboriginal identity, Frideres' (2008) contention that Aboriginal peoples do not possess a reified cultural identity is lacking in evidence since many Aboriginal peoples such as Palmater (2013) and Bastien (2004) present entirely stable and strong Aboriginal identities providing compelling justification that identity fluidity does not, in fact, translate to absence of identity. Further to this, he argues that within the last fifty years, Aboriginal paradigms have not been in opposition to mainstream worldviews (Frideres, 2008), despite the fact that some Aboriginal people might disagree (Battiste, 2013; Palameter, 2014) and would instead call any adaptations to mainstream culture as demonstrative of Aboriginal peoples resilience in the face of change.

In an early study utilizing a participatory research methodology that draws heavily on the perspectives of First Nations participants through focus group, Mckenzie, Seidl and Bone (1995) question whether a First Nations model of parenting is relevant in today's context given "over 300 of years of contact" and, interestingly, allege there is no way to determine if traditional parenting models are still in existence. Mckenzie, Seidl and Bone's (1995) perspective aligns with the tendency to place Aboriginal cultures within a historical traditional framework that assumes traditional Aboriginal values and principles exist exclusively in the distant past and are no longer relevant. In spite of the fact that their study is over twenty years old, it remains disheartening that these perspectives still abound.

Although Morrissette (1994) advocates for returning to the teachings of Aboriginal cultures in tandem with Western therapies – a convergence of the two paradigms - his article, at times and perhaps quite unintentionally, assumes an undertone of arrogance and elitist posturing that makes apparent the power imbalances that are systemically entrenched. Given the early year of Morrisette's (1994) publication, the language and terminology used to describe Aboriginal peoples and their experiences in Canada emerges within a 'deficit' framework that persistently victimizes Aboriginal peoples with seemingly little to no personal agency in overcoming their 'parenting difficulties.' Furthermore, the article highlights that IRS contributed to the disruption of traditional Aboriginal family structures and parenting models due to loss of ability to transmit cultural values and practices, lack of role-modeling; especially with regards to loss of Elder knowledge. He furthers claims that Aboriginal parents, consumed with indecision and ignorant of cultural expectations and boundaries are in the grips of self-doubt with no alternatives but to seek Western based counselling "in an effort to protect and provide a better life for their children" (Morrisette, 1994, p. 386). Here, he appears to assume the 'savior' posturing seemingly

suggesting that in order for Aboriginal families to be healthy and overcome colonial trauma, Western-based clinical therapies are the only alternative. There is a small literature outlining a variety of Aboriginal healing approaches which demonstrates that, when alternatives to Western-based clinical therapies are sought, many approaches exist (Waldram, 2008).

Cheah and Chirkov's (2008) application of the theory of the autonomous relational-self, which posits that individuals move towards a transition to Western cultural conformity, still regards Western society as the dominant perspective to which all other cultures are expected to conform, or transition into. Additionally, although the study addresses the fact that interventions need to include parenting techniques, Eni and Phillips-Beck (2013) do not elaborate as to which parenting perspective should be adopted; that of the traditional Aboriginal parenting models or Western models.

Our purpose in confronting opposing opinions is couched in our belief that when approaching the literature regarding this topic, it is vital to adopt a critical lens that is informed by an Aboriginal perspective since much of what we know of Aboriginal peoples has been transmitted through a Western worldview. Our intent is not to disparage the hard work of the scholars, but identify those areas which demand further elaboration and an alternative vision. In the next section, we further identify the gaps in the literature followed by scholarly recommendations that could potentially give voice to these silent areas.

Gaps in the literature

Some of the major gaps in the literature surrounding the theme of Aboriginal parenting arise in the absence of tangible frameworks upon which to build relevant assessment and programming models, as well as in a general lack of evidence to support arguments. Below, we selectively and succinctly identify those gaps.

In spite of the good sense of Cherubini's (2008) recommendations surrounding the protection of Aboriginal identity, he does not offer a framework for how these recommendations should be implemented. Although Carreire and Richardson (2009) advocate for strength-based approach to psychological assessment that can act as the foundation upon which to strategize interventions and programming, they do not provide a specific framework upon which to develop culturally appropriate interventions that restore and maintain human dignity. Castellano (2002), although providing good insight into traditional Aboriginal family structures, gives a broad, sweeping analysis that does not adequately describe the current structure of Aboriginal families in enough detail to inform program development.

Some of the scholarship demonstrated a dearth of evidence supporting claims. For example, much of Muir and Bohr's (2014) analysis was drawn from an Australian Aboriginal and Sami perspective and generalized within a North American context, especially with regards to attachment theory making it difficult to apply ascertain what the Canadian Aboriginal perspective might look like. McKenzie, Seidl and Bone (1995) do not provide any references supporting their claim that out of the 59 First Nations in Manitoba, 45 received "statutory child protection services, consisting primarily of long-term placement outside the community and culture, were provided only when the life of a child was at serious risk" (p. 634), but fails to elaborate on, or define, 'serious risk.'

Drawing on the perspective of one Indigenous participant who felt culture was a liability, Nygaard (20121) concludes that many First Nations' "members succumb to alcoholism despite their engagement in cultural activities" (p. 167). This statement is neither supported with any critical analysis that might account for this view nor is there any elaboration on what type of cultural activities members engage in. Interpretation of her findings suggest she takes a 'blame

the victim' approach in claiming that "First Nation people have to surmount the additional hurdle of cultural disregard within their own communities" (Nygaard, 2012, p. 170); a view that is prevalent among mainstream society (Battiste, 2013). There are personal accounts that show linkages to culture do provide good healing, closer community linkages, stronger family ties and sustained healthy connections for children (see for example Metatawabin & Shimo, 2014).

In proposing a need for a normative parenting model, GFellner's (1990) article does not consider which cultural values will take precedence over others – it does not account for power imbalances or oppression but rather, seems to reproduce them to a certain extent by relegating traditional Indian parenting values and beliefs as belonging to the realm of 'folklore.' In Friesen's (1974) early examination of the value-system between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students and parents as well as value differences between various Aboriginal groups, he attempts to explain the education gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, but fails to explore the values of the education systems and how misalignment can lead to poor education outcomes for Aboriginal students. Although Gray and Cosgrove (1985) offer significant insight in parenting practices, they offer no explanation as to why Blackfeet parents do not show physical affection to children. It could be the result of the parents' years in IRS. Additionally, the themes they offer up lack any in-depth analysis and do not provide any strategies to foster cross-cultural understandings. Although Peters (2012) study is useful in understanding the dynamics of family relationships as Aboriginal homeless family members negotiate kinship relationships, the article does not address the impact of hidden homelessness on host families' dynamics or the level of risk it places them in their own shelter arrangement. Finally, as useful as Raczka's (1979) descriptions are, he does not provide any insight into the reasons why some children in traditional Blackfoot culture were favored as minipokas and kipitapokiks others were not.

Additionally, as a historian working for a museum, Raczka (1979) provides the stories behind historical relics in an attempt to contextualize their existence and purpose rather the focus on the people as the object of his analysis.

The greatest challenge posed in the undertaking of this review has been sorting through the wide variety of topics that surround the theme of Aboriginal as well as the many differing opinions that, at most times helpful, lacked deeper analyses of their subject areas, as well as the tendency to generalize across Aboriginal cultures. Even so, keeping a critical eye open to the missing pieces has been a useful exercise in preparing us to attend to those areas that require further examination.

Areas for future research and follow-up studies

The purpose of this section is to highlight recommendations for further study put forth in the scholarship that encompasses a variety of Aboriginal issues that were addressed in this review. Thus, some of these issues will be entirely applicable to an Aboriginal parenting context while others will remain on the periphery but are, nonetheless, still important to identify.

Muir and Bohr (2014) contend that the child welfare and other systems involved with Aboriginal children and families need to ascertain the role of extended caregivers in the child's life as well as the role of fathers in Aboriginal childrearing. As is, scant literatures combined with the difficulty in researching this topic make it difficult to ascertain why there is such little father involvement which extends beyond intergenerational disruption of traditional fatherhood roles due to colonialism (Muir & Bohr, 2014). Additionally, more research needs to be conducted on developing a culturally appropriate theory on attachment (Muir & Bohr, 2014).

Cherubini (2008) recommends that mainstream society needs to be more aware of the importance of the history, culture and language of Aboriginal peoples. Moreover, Aboriginal

communities should be directly involved in the development of educational programs for Aboriginal children and involvement of Aboriginal leaders, Elders within political entities such as Indigenous and Northern Affairs should be increased in order to protect Aboriginal identity. Thus, more research needs to be conducted that draws on Aboriginal knowledge and principles as a means to protect Aboriginal identity (Cherubini, 2008).

Carreire and Richardson (2009) recommend closer analyses of court documents and psychological assessments to provide a correlation to deficit conceptualizations of Indigenous peoples and resultant interventions designed to strengthen Indigenous families to meet Western standards. We suggest that greater attention needs to be paid to how strengths can be identified by focusing less on the "biological" parent(s) as the focus of assessment and more so on the ecological systemic supports available to both the parents and the children. Broader definitions of family, caregiving and supports will be needed and accepted. Equally, parenting that may be culturally appropriate, such as the need for several caregivers, needs consideration. However, in this review, we have identified that there is a dearth of research of research in this area. What is known is that assessment of parenting is not researched in this population but many Aboriginal families coming into contact with child protection do so facing obstacles that child protection cannot fix such as poverty which may lead to neglect (Bennett & Auger, 2013). Child protection can assist through culturally relevant pathways with the intergenerational challenges leading to domestic violence and substance abuse. Efforts are underway to find effective substance abuse interventions blending Aboriginal ways of knowing with Western ways that builds upon the science that supports recover (Hall, Dell, Fonsler, Hopkins & Mushquash, 2015). This illustrates a challenge for the PCA process of incorporating emerging knowledge about effective interventions while also building different assessment protocols.

Additionally, more research is needed in order to better understand the connection between human dignity and child welfare interventions in order to design culturally appropriate strategies that will benefit all stakeholders (Carriere & Richardson, 2009). Kline (1992) maintains that it is vital to locate child welfare systems within a legal structure that continues to operate under colonial ideologies; primarily racism. In the context of this project, we believe this to be particularly salient when Western definitions of successful parenting are used to determine success for an Aboriginal parent. Additionally, Kline asserts there is a need to determine how addressing the larger socio-economic challenges of First Nations communities will impact First Nations children in child welfare (Kline, 1992). Gerlach (2008) contends that therapists working in First Nations communities and with First Nations children with developmental disabilities must understand, acknowledge and act within accordance of the differences in worldviews of First Nations communities and their own personal beliefs and values with regards to child rearing practices. Findings from Nygaard's (2012) study suggest future research needs to be conducted on the role of employment and creative expression in recovery maintenance.

Gfellner's (1990) early study offered significant insight into areas for future research in that there is a need to develop a 'traditional' normative parenting model that can be applied across cultures and incorporates the cultural ideals and practices of both Indian and white parenting styles. Moreover, further research needs to be conducted into the "influence of ideal-actual child-rearing discrepancies in relation to parents' adjustment to the parenting role and the development of their children" (GFellner, 1990, p. 442) as well as a comparison to analyse the differences in parenting styles between reserve and urban based parents. Finally, GFellner (1990) recommends that this study should be applied in multiple cultural milieus, presumably using White parenting styles as the measurement trope.

Anderson and Nahwegahbow (2010) propose that more research needs to be done on preventing family violence in First Nations communities from a cultural perspective employing trained Indigenous researchers. McCaslin and Boyer (2009) tell us that more research needs to be done surrounding the intersection between Aboriginal models of healing and Western treatment methods. Peters (2012) study reveals that more research needs to be done in the area of Aboriginal hidden homelessness in terms of providing culturally appropriate services to ameliorate their impact on host households. King (2012) recommends that more research needs to be done around the ways First Nations have rallied together in response to the government's failure to implement Jordan's Principle.

Significantly, Ball (2010) suggests that further research needs to be done surrounding the parental role of Indigenous fathers. Cheah and Chirkov (2008) recommend that, because the Aboriginal mothers in the study were more acculturated to Western culture than their own, follow-up studies should include the parenting beliefs of reserve-based Aboriginal peoples to determine if culture plays a larger role in parenting beliefs. Additionally, they recommend follow-up studies should be done with Aboriginal fathers to determine their beliefs around parenting (Cheah & Chirkov, 2008).

Conclusion

This review has served to position our argument, which advocates for a culturally relevant parenting capacity assessment, within a broad scholarship that includes both Western and Aboriginal perspectives on family, parenting practices and child-rearing. Significantly, we have established that any approach to developing program or assessment models must be considered within a historical colonial framework; a reality which remains relevant for Aboriginal parents and children today. For our purposes, most importantly, this extensive

literature review shows that there has been no work done on culturally relevant parenting capacity assessments for child protection.

Themes arising from conversations with Elders

"We can't wait for anyone else. We have to do it"

A meeting with Elders was held where they spoke about parenting issues that would be relevant to assessment. The conversations were recorded and transcribed. A thematic analysis was conducted and the shared with the Elders for feedback and clarification. The Elders noted that they spoke as members of sacred societies within the Blackfoot Confederacy. *"You have to be careful not to use a… pan-Indian approach because there is very specific teachings that Blackfeet have, that Lakota people have, that Anishnaabe people have, and I think we have to respect those instead of saying you all do this."*

When thinking of the child, the discussions are placed within a series of inter-connected domains, none of which can be seen as distinct from the others (Figure 1). Parenting exists within these links. Euro-centric approaches to thinking of and assessing family would not typically include these.
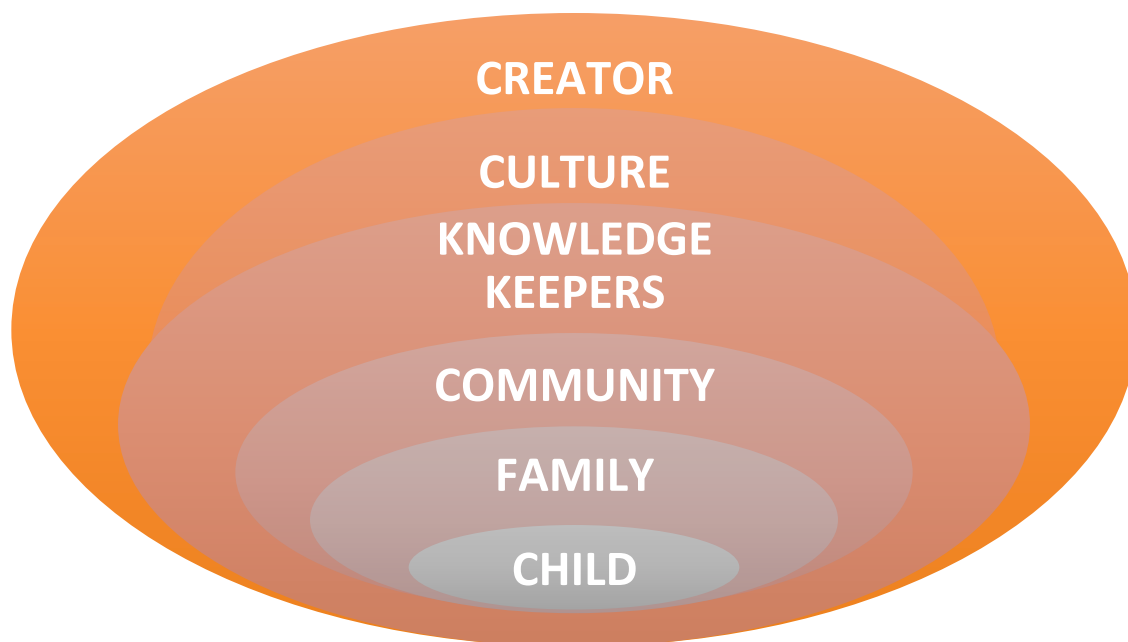
Table 1 – Interconnected Domains for Developing the Child

Theme One – Family cannot be defined homogeneously

First Nations families are seen as part of a larger network that is not bound by specific relationship or role definitions. Thus, those who perform parental duties such as nurturing, education, discipline and modeling can be done by biological parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles but also others within the communal social network. Primacy of parenting does not necessarily rest with the biological parents.

Cousins can be seen as siblings. Living arrangements can shift based upon family or child needs. The child exists within the caregiving system as opposed to just within a parent-child dyad.

This means that the notion of nuclear family is not a presumed element of First Nations families although such patterns may exist.

Theme Two – The child as a gift

A child is seen as a sacred gift from the Creator and has membership in the larger community. The child has meaning that is rooted within this spiritual domain and has roots within the larger community and culture.

"my mother explained to me the word child, "wakanyeja" in Lakota, meaning "sacred one". The first part of word "wakan" means "sacred" from Creator, Wakantanka. The second part of word comes from the verb to stand "najin". You put the two words together and child literally means a "sacred being standing here on earth". And so. we are all "wakanyeja", "sacred beings". It is our sacred responsibility to nurture the child."

This spiritual sense of the child connects to how a parent should act. It speaks to the kinds of behaviors that a parent should offer a child.

"...if our children are raised with love and understanding, patience, they'll have that belonging, and the trust, and the consistency of home, and love, and bonding, and belonging."

As part of raising the child, there are also "Rights of passage" which are often missing, especially for children being raised in urban communities.

Theme Three – Caregiving is seen broadly

Consistent with the prior two themes, caregiving of a child is done by a variety of persons within the larger family system but also by the community. A child has differing needs that can be met in differing settings and differing people. An elder, for example, may be seen as the person to offer a specific teaching. Thus, learning that a child needs is not seen as specific to a person or a role but to the person(s) who are there for the child. The family welcomes a variety of community members to perform roles that in a Euro-centric situation would be seen as belonging to the parent.

> *"...so we bought hammocks and we had a special day where we put all the children in hammocks and made them feel like the traditional swings."*

For example, a grandparent may have a conversation with a child that may be difficult and challenging. This is done so as not to disrupt or damage the nurturing relationship with the child.

Nurturing is an obligation of the community and the culture. It is limiting to see this as belonging just to parents or "immediate" family. The child is also seen as the way in which culture is nourished so that it continues in ongoing generations. That too is a responsibility of the community, as the child needs presence in the culture.

"...when you come to teach in our community, you're not just a teacher, you
become a surrogate parent, you become an aunt, a uncle, a mother, father, older brother,
older sister…"

The parent is not seen as being in control of the child. The older generations are seen as responsible for guiding generations that follow. This includes developing a sense of pride in being First Nations. It also means helping to recreate within family, community and culture that which was lost to colonization. The child needs to be guided to see the strengths in being First Nations replacing the deficits based understanding that flows from colonization.

Within caregiving, tradition is not in the past but brought to the child through knowledge keepers who would include many beyond biological parents. This accesses pre-colonial knowledge bringing it into the present but ongoing colonial period. In this way, parenting is not seen as linear.

Many persons may provide safety but within the child's world, there may be one person.

"the home represents love and shelter and protection and all of that. So children need to
have that consistency, and even if it is just from one parent, one teacher, one grandmother, one
grandfather, one uncle, one auntie, one cousin"

Theme Four – Relational grounding within culture

The development of the child is linked to a relationship that is rooted in trust, which is rooted in being grounded in culture, place and community as well as family. This combination

allows the child to know self or who they are. A parent on their own, is not seen as the only or the sole source of guiding the child to this internal knowledge.

There is also strength in connection, which runs counter to the pattern of colonization, which is about isolation and separation. The strength built for the child across the domains of family, culture and community is the strength of knowing who "we" are in knowing who the child is.

> *"...our cultural ways, traditional ways, when you ground somebody like that, they*
> *can tackle just about anything…"*

The neurobiological effect of safety found in parenting comes from the relational safety of traditional ways or, as seen slightly differently, cultural pathways talk to the neurobiology. Children need a variety of experiences found across family, culture and community domains that are experientially based and all "parent" the child in an interconnected way.

Theme Five – Healing is done in a broader context

No consideration of parenting within First Nations can take place without consideration of the intergenerational traumas that have been experienced as a result of the Residential Schools and later involvements with systems such as child protection, justice and health. The TRC has detailed those stories. Family life across generations is impacted and forms part of the present work. The legacy can mean that people can be *"afraid of even our own ways"*. Intergenerational impacts must be considered when speaking of family.

"they were raised by grandparents that were also full of rage, so it's a vicious cycle. So they have to deal with that now, and now you have FAE on top of that, the addictions."

The TRC has noted the need for healing but also the impact across generations. Parents and children involved with child protection are impacted and in need of healing. This occurs within family but is not restricted to family. It includes holders of culture, ceremony as well as community. It also includes knowledge of such connections as clan, which creates a sense of belonging, so fundamental to the development of a child.

"And I think our people are also beginning to realize that the clans are really important, the families are really important. And in our language we didn't have a word for aunt or uncle, they were your parents, your aunts and your uncles were also your mom and dad. We didn't have a word for cousins, those people were your brothers and sisters. So I think people are again realizing I do have a big family, and I do have a support network out there that I can reach out to."

Healing is also done by systems that change the modeling and connection to change the outcome in the child's generation knowing it will alter the next generation. Patterns change in this way:

"…the education system, was one of those original institutions that ruined us as a people, and that was the source of a lot of the original dysfunction, but as time has gone on it has become that the school is not the enemy so much anymore, and this is where the positive is coming from".

"I get to see these young parents who sit with their kids and read with them…but like for me what I saw in '93 to what I'm seeing today in 2015/16 it was a shock to me. I was like wow! And they come with homework and the come with winter clothes prepared for recess outdoors, and so it's a real thing…"

The healing done through this broader context connects to parenting but it breaks down the barriers to connecting with institutions that in the past have represented colonization. The connections now strengthen the child and the parenting using culturally based approaches.

"They're coming for parent-teacher interviews, they're not scared to come into the school, they're not scared to talk to teachers."

For families involved with child protection, that healing requires systems that are meant to support through cultural connection must truly do so. They need a belief that it will make a difference as part of the change process for families who see cultural processes as part of their journey. This impacts assessment of families.

"But it frustrates me when I come to these things that yeah, we can develop the best model but once it's done will those workers will they practice it? One thing is, you know, you can say all of the right things, write all of the best things so you can get proposal money, but then when you do … and then you're trying to implement it, it's over their heads, so how are these people or children going to benefit if they refuse our traditional ways."

Theme Six – Reconnection

This was the most extensive theme arising from the meeting with the Elders. They spoke of the power of reconnection to traditional ways of knowing, ceremony and spirit. Healing comes from reconnection be it to culture, community or family. There is a yearning for this as part of

knowing self. The broader notion of parenting accepts that this will happen for many. Some will do so as parents while others will do so within care or transitioning from it. This relates to preparing for the role of parent within the larger context.

"And basically they want their mothers. No matter how much foster parents could care and love them, they all want their mothers. And when they find out they're adopted they want to find out who their mother is"

Within this theme is coming to accept that being First Nations is a positive identity.

"They get connected to their heritage, their ancestry, and it's just like they wake up and it gives them self-esteem. It's like all of the sudden they have identity and they have pride."

Thus, there is the question of the degree to which the parent finds connection to this identity. This can be in how they approach the role of parent and also the ways in which tradition and culture guide the parent including the connection to community and the larger sense of family.

"...when the mother knows that we're going to have a child there's a group of grandmas and mothers that will surround the mother, and guide and direct for a healthy birth, and at the same time the father will be getting guidance from the Elders, ... they're all fathers, they're all grandmothers, grandpas..."

Spirituality and ceremony form an important part of the reconnection and the establishment of cultural identity and meaning in the family system whether on or off reserve.

"And that is the big dilemma is if you left the First Nation and are successful in the urban setting obviously you've got some good qualities and a good grounding, but to maintain that off reserve and to bring that down to your children it's like, to me, going back to the sun dance, going back to where the ceremony is, going back to the family that has the cultural value system".

The Elder is an important source of connection for families. Elders carry the oral history and traditions across generations but they also act as a way to counter the impact of colonization. For families, this acts as a way to reverse the assimilation process. Such efforts counter the fear that grew throughout communities and families as a way to see and experience the world, impacting day-to-day family life. The fear created losses:

"I seen it right from the Elders, and some of them have passed on, they grow up with fear. Fear, um, a lack of, I guess, spirituality, somewhere they lost it…"

Overcoming the legacy of fear is a means to reconnect to identity, which gives families a different way to interact with each other as well as the support systems for children.

"…it wasn't until we overcame fear, and we really realized what was happening to us because of the oppression and that was all part of colonization, that we understood that there's nothing wrong with this. We're going to go to a ceremony, and we're going to participate…"

"During my time we realized pretty quickly that ceremony was a pretty important part of our lives, and we got involved. And our children were all raised with the ceremonial ways. And I think reconnecting in that way was important."

Reconnection also changes pathways for children that may add to positives within the family or help to counter the impact of deficits. They are also ways to begin to see strengths within the child as the connections grow.

Theme Seven – Successes Existed and Continue to Exist

Colonization and its effects are dominant stories within First Nations but they are not the only stories. There were other stories in family systems that acted as the basis for healthier family systems.

"So going back to my dad and that era, well, they were taught to make money, have a lot of children so you can cut down on your labour; so we were kind of brought up with that. But my saving grace for myself, and my two other brothers was our grandparents. They didn't buy into it, they didn't go to residential schools, they didn't go to industrial schools, and so that nurturing was always there…"

This has meant that there is also a foundation to provide safety, nurturance and cultural connection along with expectations of success. Families that are linked to these stories have a different value system that can spread and act as a foundation. The Elders expressed that the successes that does exist are not only a different story than has become the dominant one that many hear, but it is also a story that shows the foundations in community that can be built upon. They are the role models that can be used to create pride in family and children.

"...we have in our communities, and right now I have to use the term thousands of us within the Blackfoot confederacy that are professionals, university graduate professionals, they came from that place of being in poverty. They came from that place of being in distress, but today I'm really proud to have my brother as a sitting judge, he probably owns the biggest percentage of one of the biggest law firms in Calgary or Western Canada. And I have another nephew that is a leading researcher at the University of Calgary at Foothills Hospital, and he's taking the lead. I have another nephew at the University of Calgary who's an astronomer who has discovered another universe out there. There's educators, there are lawyers...we have every profession covered.

Another Elder added to this point noting, *"Because in bettering yourself like you influence your home, you influence where you work, and then you influence your community, and that's what those kids have taught me."*

Implications for Parenting Capacity Assessment

This work has identified several implications for PCAs, which range from activities that should be discontinued to exploration of new directions. It is worth noting that this work draws on the knowledge of elders from the Blackfoot Confederacy. Other First Nations will find value in the work but will need to consider the issues from their own perspective. There is no universal approach being suggested.

A. Activities that should be discontinued

i. The use of Euro-centric definitions of family as they do not capture the reality of First Nations peoples.

ii. The use of psychometrics as they are not culturally appropriate nor are they representative of the population being assessed.

iii. The genogram as it is a narrow tool that does not consider the broader definition of family that can extend beyond biological ties.

B. Activities that need exploration

i. Introduction of wider assessment parameters that include the "extended family" support systems.

ii. Use of "family" mapping tools that would replace such tools as the genogram and would consider linkages that serve family type purposes without being biological.

iii. Use of community support mapping that considers how such linkages can add strengths and also diminishes the impact of identified deficiencies.

iv. Addition of resiliency based approaches.

v. Finding ways to include cultural connection within the assessment data as a source of meaningful and informative to the case formulation.

vi. Consider the impact of inter-generational trauma and the ways in which the present generation is addressing or mitigating the impacts.

vii. The inclusion of an Elder in the assessment conversation.

viii. Expanding home visits to include the primary support system.

C. Limitations

i.   First Nations people who are not connected to their culture may be appropriately assessed using current PCA methodology.

ii.   Families still need an individualized approach. For example, some families may be connected to culture but not to spirituality because they draw upon non First Nations spirituality.

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