UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK

"We Don't Have a Job, We Have a Way of Life"
Perspectives on Effective Aboriginal Social Work Education and
Addressing the Impacts of Generational Trauma

ABSTRACT

The aim of this research paper is to investigate how Aboriginal social workers apply the knowledge they've gained as part of their formal social work education to working with Aboriginal clients dealing with the effects of generational trauma. This includes looking at which aspects of their education they considered to be the most useful, when they felt the need to rely on traditional knowledge, and discussing any dilemmas they encounter in transferring knowledge from one community to another. Ten social workers of Aboriginal heritage were interviewed as part of the qualitative study. A thematic analysis was then applied to the interviews to determine consistent themes and subthemes. The results were analyzed using two theoretical concepts, professional imperialism and the indigenization of social work. These theories criticise the appropriateness of importing Western social work education and values into non-Western communities, and promote the authentization of social work practice using a bottom-up approach where indigenous worldviews are used as the primary knowledge source. Findings from the study are that, for the Aboriginal social workers in the study, providing services to their Aboriginal clients is more than just a job. For them it is about healing themselves, their Aboriginal peers, and acting as support and advocates for their own communities. The research also concludes that Aboriginal knowledge should be respected as legitimate and important by mainstream social work education and practice, and that non-Aboriginal social workers should adopt an appreciation for Aboriginal cultures and worldviews. The results also suggests that both Western and indigenous social workers can learn valuable skills from each other.

Title: "We Don't Have a Job, We Have a Way of Life" – Perspectives on Effective Aboriginal Education and Addressing the Impacts of Generational Trauma

Author: Annalisa Rasmussen

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INTRODUCTION

The indigenous people of Canada are disproportionately represented in terms of all major social issues when compared to the rest of the national population. One might expect that this is an area in which social workers would excel at advocating for Aboriginal social justice and Aboriginal community development. Unfortunately, social workers have historically played an active and coercive role in the attempted assimilation of Aboriginal people. Social workers played a significant role in the events that culminated into what we now understand as generational trauma, which still affects Aboriginal individuals and communities today.

Generational trauma refers to the on-going mental, psychological, and spiritual distress affecting a collective group following a series of overwhelming and devastating events. For the Aboriginal people of Canada this was the forced assimilation policies of the federal government and destruction of their cultural security. The impacts of the trauma, specifically the legacy of the residential schools, have been passed down from parent to child for many generations. The negative effects manifest themselves as high unemployment rates, poverty, lower life expectancy, high rates of incarceration, and negative social stigma, to name just a few examples.

Education plays an important role in preparing social work students for the work they'll be doing with clients in the future. Mainstream education continues to be dominated by Western ideas, values, and knowledge. Critics of Western dominance question the relevancy this kind of education holds for minority and indigenous groups in Canada. The concern is that the possible lack of Aboriginal-specific knowledge in education, and the possible lack of respect for Aboriginal worldviews in the social work profession, perpetuates oppressive colonial social structures.

The aim of this study is to investigate how social workers of Aboriginal heritage apply their formal education to working with Aboriginal service users dealing with the effects of generational trauma. Questions included what aspects of their formal education did Aboriginal social workers find most useful, in what kind of scenarios did they find themselves relying on traditional knowledge, and what kind of dilemmas did they find in moving between the mainstream and Native communities.

BACKGROUND

Terminology

An appropriate place to begin this paper is to define who are the indigenous people of Canada. The debate in Canada continues around who should or should not be entitled to legally identify him or herself as Aboriginal. Legal status relates to land claims, tax exemptions, and employment equity, to name just a few examples, and can therefore sometimes be a contentious issue. There are also varying opinions about what is appropriate terminology – what is offensive and what is politically correct. The following definitions provided are part of the terminology used by Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, the federal department responsible for meeting the government's commitments, obligations, and constitutional responsibilities to Aboriginal people and the North (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada 2013).

The term "Aboriginal" is an umbrella term that refers to the descendants of the original inhabitants of modern-day Canada; they are 'native' or 'indigenous' to the land. Aboriginal people are comprised of three distinct groups: Indians, also known as First Nations; Inuit; and Metis. "Indian" is the legal definition for members belonging to the largest group of Aboriginal

people, and includes both status and non-status Indians. There are 617 different First Nations communities in Canada, which represent more than fifty nations and fifty languages (AANDC 2013). Status Indians are registered under the Indian Act; this legal identification relies not on an individual's personal self-identification, but rather on a specific set of criteria determined by the Government of Canada. The term "First Nation" is more commonly used due to the wide perception that the term "Indian" is offensive (AANDC 2013). This writer's preference is to use the term First Nation.

The Inuit are the Aboriginal people of Arctic Canada who live in Nunavut, the North-West Territories, Northern Quebec (Nunavik), and Northern Labrador (Nunatsiavut). The term "Eskimo", originally applied by European explorers, is no longer part of Canadian discourse. Finally, the Metis are people of mixed First Nation and European ancestry whose culture draws from diverse origins. All three groups have distinct cultures, languages, and spiritual beliefs (AANDC 2013). For the purposes of this paper, "Aboriginal" refers to all three distinct groups collectively, unless otherwise specified.

Aboriginal Demographics of Social Issues & Theoretical Explanations

According to the most recently available Canadian census data, the total Canadian population was 31,241,030 people (Statistics Canada 2006). The total population for Aboriginal people was recorded as 1,172,790; of this, 698,025 were First Nations, 389,785 were Metis, 50,485 were Inuit, and 34,500 identified as some combination of each (Statistics Canada 2006). Aboriginal people represent 3.1% of all adults aged eighteen years and older, and are projected to represent 4.1% of the total population by 2017 (Statistics Canada 2006). The following statistics help to clearly illustrate the position of Aboriginal people in relation to major social structures. They demonstrate, in concrete terms, how Aboriginal people are not equally represented in all aspects of Canadian life.

The 2017 life expectancy projection for First Nations and Metis men is five years shorter than the average population, and for Inuit men the life expectancy falls a full fifteen years below the national male average (Statistics Canada 2006). The employment rate for eligible Aboriginal adults aged 25-54 years is 65.8%, compared to 81.6% for the same non-Aboriginal age group (Statistics Canada 2006). In terms of family composition, Aboriginal children under the age of six are nearly four times more likely to live in families with four or more children, compared to their non-Aboriginal counterparts. Aboriginal children are also approximately six times more likely to live full-time with their grandparents than are non-Aboriginal children (Statistics Canada 2006). Finally, while Aboriginal adults represent 3.1% of the total population of Canada, as stated above, they are grossly over-represented in the criminal justice system. Aboriginal adults account for 25% of the provincial and territorial prison population, and 18% of all individuals admitted to a federal institution. 319 for every 1000 Aboriginal adults are victims of violent offences, compared to 101 victims for every 1000 non-Aboriginal Canadians (Statistics Canada 2006). Aboriginal people are also disproportionately affected by issues such as depression, substance abuse, and poor health (Brave Heart et al 2011). Suicide rates are higher among Inuit and First Nations communities than any other group in Canada (Korhonen 2006).

These observable trends suggest that the Aboriginal population in Canada faces a set of social issues with which many non-Aboriginal Canadians are not familiar. The disadvantages and oppression associated with the social challenges experienced by Aboriginal people in Canada can be explained in several different ways. Negative stereotypes and racism have pathologized Aboriginal people as lazy, dumb, violent "dirty Indians" who have no one to blame for their circumstances but themselves. This kind of labelling can be hazardous to their wellbeing (Weaver & Congress 2009; Getty 2010). As Weaver and Congress (2009) outlined it, those who

hold these views consider Aboriginal people's issues to be individual deficiencies and nothing more. A more reasonable debate might include the question of possible financial mismanagement and corruption on Aboriginal reserves as perpetuating oppression. The recent audit conducted on Attawapiskat First Nation's finances, for example, found incomplete records, an absence of documentation, and systematic deficiencies within the organization (Schwartz 2013). The opposite side of this debate is that the federal government does not adequately understand the needs of Aboriginal people and therefore does not provide adequate or appropriate funding.

Theoretical concepts that could be applied to explain Aboriginal oppression include the culture of poverty. The culture of poverty refers to the way of life of some poor people; the theory claims that poor people realize the improbability of achieving success in the larger society and subsequently absorb that attitude as part of their culture (Boxill 1994). Vickers (2009, p.18) mirrored this thought when she said that Aboriginal people are faced with the "suffering we are inflicting upon ourselves due to our self-deprecating beliefs". Another possible explanation is the feelings of guilt and/or shame felt by the mainstream population in Canada. According to Allpress et al (2010), group-based guilt due to colonial injustices are likely to result in support for government apologies and restitution policies, but has little effect on actual behaviour. For example, "non-Indigenous Australians' guilt predicted attitudinal support for compensation, but did not predict intentions to act on these attitudes after accounting for respondents' prejudice and anger" (Allpress et al 2010, p.78). It may be that non-Aboriginal Canadians feel guilt over their colonial history, but feel little shame, and therefore feel no responsibility to assist Aboriginal groups in a meaningful way other than with monetary reparations. Whatever the model used to explain Aboriginal disadvantage, they all relate back, in one way or another, to the historical treatment of Aboriginal people at the hands of the Government of Canada.

Colonial History and Residential Schools

From the moment European explorers arrived in North America, their influence has had a major impact on Aboriginal groups. Modern weaponry made for mass physical casualties in times of war. Similarly, the introduction of new diseases such as smallpox resulted in thousands of deaths (Woolford 2009). The government appropriated Aboriginal land, thereby forcing First Nations communities onto reserves (Woolford 2009). The expansion of Canadian federal police into the North of the country forced the Inuit to accept new hunting and fishing regulations, which were unlike their traditional ways (Whitbeck et al 2004; Woolford 2009).

Just as devastating as the introduction of foreign regulations and physical displacement was the establishment of residential schools in the 1880s (MacDonald & Hudson 2012). The purpose and relevance of residential schools is ambiguous. By some accounts, the original intention of residential schools was to help Aboriginal people find a balance between European influence and Native traditions (MacDonald & Hudson 2012). According to these perspectives communities would be assisted in adapting to the new, dominant ways of life, and were "civilized" in the process. This "re-socialization" would prepare Aboriginal children for their re-introduction into society, where they would then become productive members of the majority society (Elias et al 2012). Other researchers argue that there is clear evidence of Canada's "intention to commit cultural genocide… using residential schools as an expedient" (MacDonald & Hudson 2012, p.445). Regardless of the intention, any anticipated benefits of residential schools soon gave way to a much more coercive system that aimed to both assimilate and eliminate Aboriginal cultures (Woolford 2009; MacDonald & Hudson 2012).

Schools were off reserve and children were separated from their families; attendance was mandatory for children aged five to sixteen, despite protestations from their families (MacDonald & Hudson 2012). Schools preached Christianity and prohibited traditional spiritual practices.

Native languages were similarly forbidden and residents were forced to speak English. Children regularly suffered severe verbal, physical, and sexual punishment and abuse. Diet and medical care were inadequate, and disease was common, especially tuberculosis. Schools were under-funded and over-crowded, and many children were neglected and lived in unsanitary conditions (Woolford 2009; MacDonald & Hudson 2012). The Aboriginal culture was constantly insulted and assaulted by those running the residential schools.

Regardless of any original good intentions, the church- and government-run schools succeeded in leaving deep physical, emotional, and psychological scars on the more than 150,000 children (MacDonald & Hudson 2012) who passed through. Even traditional grieving practices were prohibited (Spiwak et al 2012). So as traditions were stripped away from Aboriginal individuals and their communities, they were forbidden from mourning these losses as they normally would have. This disruption to the healing process made recovery that much harder. The last school closed in 1996 (Elias et al 2012).

Generational Trauma

Some scholars have referred to the devastation caused to Aboriginal people by colonization as genocide, using a definition introduced by Richard Lemkin in the 1940's (Woolford 2009; MacDonald & Hudson 2012). Using this definition, they argue that genocide took place in Canada due to the "destruction of the group's ability to continue its cultural existence" (Woolford 2009, p.86). Similar theoretical ideas, such as the "discourse of crisis", were developed in the mid-twentieth century. This eventually evolved into the concept of trauma in the latter half of the twentieth century (Sztompka 2000). According to Brave Heart et al (2011), the concept of trauma among Native groups first appeared in clinical literature in 1995.

The concept of "generational trauma" refers to the unexpected and over-whelming emotional and psychological suffering felt across generations as a result of large-scale trauma inflicted upon a cultural group (Sztompka 2000; Brave Heart et al 2011; Eyerman 2013). Alexander (2004, p.1) provided a clear definition when he wrote that this kind of trauma

> "occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways".

The same phenomenon has also been referred to in academic literature as inter-generational trauma or multi-generational trauma, historical trauma, and cultural trauma.

As a result of this large-scale trauma, cultures lose their stability, normalcy, and routine, elements of the society that are often taken for granted. The security of a collective society is built upon its social structures, and when those foundations are disrupted, the stability of the collective identity is put at risk (Alexander 2004). Trauma to the individual and to the collective can be mutually re-enforcing since personal identity requires a cultural context (Eyerman 2013). The closer the trauma is to the core of the collective values, the more intense the traumatic experience becomes (Sztompka 2000). The more radical, unfamiliar, and disorienting the new cultural environment is from the previous way of life, the harder it is for a cultural group to respond and over-come, instead finding themselves lost in a crisis of social dislocation. As Alexander (2004, p.11) wrote, "trauma is not the result of a group experiencing pain − it is the result of this acute discomfort entering into the core of the collectivity's sense of its own identity".

As noted by Whitbeck et al (2004), the events that precede generational trauma are not isolated to a single catastrophic moment, but are cumulative and on-going. Trauma is a dynamic and evolving condition (Sztompka 2000). For instance, survivors of residential schools learned few positive parenting skills and their loss of identity resulted in a wide range of social problems (Brave Heart et al 2011; MacDonald & Hudson 2012). Parents cannot be present and effective without having learned basic parenting skills, which most people learn from having positive role models. Children at residential schools were denied that opportunity, and as a result bring their anger, fear, and confusion into the lives of their children.

According to one study, frequent emotional responses to generational trauma among Aboriginal people were "sadness and depression, anger, intrusiveness of the thoughts, discomfort around White people, and fearful and distrustful of intentions of White people" (Whitbeck et al 2004, p.125). Woolford (2009, p.85) explained the phenomenon clearly when he said:

> "Continuing cycles of emotional, physical and sexual abuse, as well as addiction, suicide and other markers of inter-generational trauma, within Aboriginal communities are considered residual effects of the residential-school experience".

This means that individuals who did not attend residential schools, and even those born after the schools closed, are not immune to the sense of cultural loss.

This phenomenon is not unique to Aboriginal communities in Canada and has affected many cultural groups throughout history. Depending on the framework employed, examples may include survivors of the Holocaust, post-Apartheid South Africa, and descendants of African slaves (Alexander 2004; Eyerman 2013). For Aboriginal people, hundreds of years of forced assimilation and systematic discrimination have had a severe, detrimental effect on the culture as a whole. This is not to suggest that every Aboriginal person attended a residential school, or that every student was abused in some way. But collectively as a culture they faced severe hardship. Indeed, one study found that the direct and indirect effects of generational trauma operated at the individual, family, and community level (Elias et al 2012).

Residential schools have been shut down. The churches have apologized for the roles they played, and the Government of Canada released $350 million in 1998 as part of a "healing fund" (MacDonald & Hudson 2012). In 2008 Prime Minister Stephen Harper formally apologized to the Aboriginal people on behalf of Canada for the residential schools, though he failed to comment on the wider colonial contexts (MacDonald & Hudson 2012). However, despite these attempts at reconciliation, life has not begun a-new for Aboriginal people. On-going discrimination, prejudice, and cultural loss are an ever-present reminder of what has been taken away from the Aboriginal people and how they continue to suffer as a result. In the Canadian context, generational trauma exists whether it was intentional or not, and this is illustrated by the statistics provided above.

Despite this evidence, some individuals are more comfortable denying the impacts of generational trauma since denying the suffering of others allows them to absolve themselves of responsibility for others' suffering (Alexander 2004). Then there are those who view cultural upheavals as an opportunity for growth, innovation, and progress (Alexander 2004). For an extreme example, an American lawmaker referred not long ago to slavery as a "blessing in disguise", claiming that African Americans were better off for being captured and taken to North America than they would have been in Africa (Associated Press 2012). Again, however, it seems clear that in the Canadian context it is generally understood that generational trauma was real and catastrophic, not to mention a violation of human rights, the creation of the Truth and

Reconciliation Commission of Canada in June 2008 being evidence of that belief (MacDonald & Hudson 2011; TRC 2013).

Aboriginal People and Multiculturalism

The Canadian Multiculturalism Act was passed in 1988. The purpose was to recognize the contributions of ethnic minorities in Canada, increase understanding among different groups, and address discrimination (St. Denis 2011). The Act also affirms Canadian society as one that celebrates and respects diversity, and one where every Canadian is treated equally regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, etc. The goal was to encourage cross-cultural communication, to broaden society by preserving cultures and languages, develop a shared culture of interaction, and bring more diverse voices to the forefront of national debate (Syed 2010; Taylor 2012).

Aboriginal groups find themselves faced with their own challenges due to multiculturalism. Primarily, they find themselves lumped together in policies with other immigrant minority groups. Syed (2010, p.79) explained that:

> "while minorities often seek similar economic, social, and cultural achievements to larger nation-states, indigenous people usually seek something rather different: the ability to maintain certain traditional ways of life and beliefs while nevertheless participating on their own terms in the modern world".

To some Aboriginal people, multiculturalism is simply an extension of colonialism and distracts from their unique rights (St. Denis 2011). It lumps them together as part of a larger group to which, in reality, they neither belong nor identify with. Including Aboriginal groups as part of multicultural policy also minimizes the historical maltreatment by focusing solely on their status as a cultural minority. Beyond that, much of the debate surrounding multiculturalism in Canada has been focused on the protection of Quebec culture and teaching both national languages (English and French) at school (Taylor 2012), thereby marginalizing Aboriginal issues.

For some Aboriginal people, pride in their culture and distrust in Canadian authority has turned into "chauvinism", their allegiance to their roots being so strong that they isolate themselves away from mainstream structures (Syed 2010). This is not to suggest, however, that Aboriginal people have collectively discarded multiculturalism as a theory. Many want to bring their perspectives forward to find common ground with mainstream Canadians and avoid becoming detached and extremist in their own right. Many believe that formal and traditional environments combined can produce well-rounded individuals who find balance between mainstream success and cultural appreciation (Syed 2010). According to Appiah (1994, pp.156-157), however, in order to achieve that balance, Canadians "should not accept both the insistence on the uniform application of rules without exception and the suspicion of collective goals".

Role of Social Workers

Over the years, social work approaches to dealing with Aboriginal issues and generational trauma have shifted. As noted above, one of the first sociological theoretical concepts for historical change in the Western world was that of progress – the triumph of modernity at all costs. From this perspective, the approach of social workers was one of assimilation, attempting to guide Aboriginal people, sometimes considered wards of the federal government, into the modern world no matter what (Weaver 2010). Later policies were insistent upon equality, and an absence of diversity was the norm – "colour-blindness", so to speak (Yellow Bird 2010). Using this framework, the same approach to social work was applied to all service users regardless of

cultural differences (Yellow Bird 2010). Once it was recognized that trauma could be experienced outside the realm of physical and mental health, it became apparent that those approaches were insufficient.

Social workers can also play a role in the Aboriginal healing process. Because the effects of generational trauma linger and are so persistent, some Aboriginal people feel as though they continue to suffer the effects of colonialism (Woolford 2009). In response to this, one could come to the logical conclusion that an infusion of cultural specificity and particularism in social services may be a beneficial addition to attempts aimed at healing Aboriginal communities. As one researcher noted, "understanding the role of healing and bereavement in Aboriginal populations necessitates the inclusion of cultural and healing traditions" (Spiwak et al 2012, p.207). From this perspective, reconnecting Aboriginal people to the parts of their culture that they lost is the first step towards healing.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature review was conducted in accordance with the general aims and goals of the study. This included researching terms such as: Aboriginal knowledge; social work education; conceptions of generational trauma (and variations on the term); Aboriginal social workers; and social work interventions for generational trauma. The results are presented below. While many of the articles discussed similar themes, they have been organized according to generational trauma and interventions, Aboriginal social work education, Aboriginal social work practice, and best practices for working with Aboriginal people. These topics are revisited as part of the analysis.

Generational Trauma and Interventions

Brave Heart et al (2011) outlined the impact of historical trauma on indigenous groups and reviewed research and interventions aimed at addressing the emotional distress caused by this trauma. This review included: previous studies linking post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) to Native communities in the United States; grief among American Indian and Alaska Natives; the impacts of discrimination; and the tools developed to measure cultural loss, including the Historical Loss and Associated Symptoms Scale as well as the Indigenous Peoples of the Americas Survey. In their review they noted that historical trauma and historical trauma response are strongly related to individual unresolved grief, prolonged grief, PTSD, and depression, as well as substance abuse. Similar to this, it was found that children who experienced harsh parenting both at home and at boarding schools continued to experience difficulty with trust, relationship building, and communication in adulthood. They further noted that: "interventions that reframe symptoms in terms of collective responses have been observed to alleviate a number of the symptoms, at least on a short-term basis" (2011, p.284), the intent being to foster healing by providing service users with a context for their extreme emotional distress. The authors spoke of one intervention in particular, the Historical Trauma and Unresolved Grief Intervention, which explores traumatic experiences and self-assessments of these experiences. Results referenced by Brave Heart et al (2011) indicated that participants' self-perception of personal competencies, and their familial relationships, improved following intervention.

The importance of incorporating concepts of historical trauma and historical trauma responses was also reflected elsewhere in their research. The researchers noted that official recognition of trauma is an important aspect of the healing process, as is validating the existence of continuing oppression. Brave Heart et al (2011, p.288) maintained that: "healing must begin

within a cultural specific context both at the family and community levels". Despite multiple cultural differences within Aboriginal communities, the authors listed several common cultural features, including: focus on a collectivistic culture; indirect communication styles; emphasis on harmony and balance; and an attachment to all of creation. In their conclusion, Brave Heart et al (2011) advocated for interventions to be grounded in indigenous worldviews, engaging communities in the healing process, and the implementation of culturally appropriate approaches.

Inclusion and Delivery of Aboriginal Content in Social Work Education

Westhues et al (2001) conducted a SWOT[1] analysis of social work education in Canada. The authors partnered with four social work associations to create a steering committee, and referenced census data to conduct an in-depth analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The approach also included conducting interviews with social work employers and graduates, and reviewing the content of university curriculums. The results of the research indicated that strengths included: a holistic practice orientation, meaning an approach that can be widely applied to various situations; social workers' possession of a wide range of knowledge and skills; and the increased cultural relevance of social work education, its attempts to adopt cultural diversity and develop anti-oppressive practices. Conversely, weaknesses included: a conflict of values between social justice and bureaucratic requirements; a lack of professional definition (though this did not appear to be an issue among Aboriginal respondents); a lack of minority membership; and social work as an on-going colonial presence.

Consistent with what has been noted in previous sections of this paper, Westhues et al (2001) also indicated that Aboriginal people are disproportionately over-represented as social service users, but only 4.6% of social service providers were of Aboriginal heritage. The impact of colonialism was understood by the Aboriginal respondents, but was not mentioned by the Anglophone or Francophone respondents. The authors argued that social work is "infused with a dominant world view that can be seen as oppressive by Aboriginal people and other minority groups" (2001, p.41). Westhues et al (2001) recommended that schools of social work adapt their programs to better reflect the increasing needs of the people with whom they work, and actively recruit Aboriginal and other minority students.

A more recent article also recognized the value of indigenous knowledge. In their study, Dumbrill and Green (2008) presented a framework for the inclusion of indigenous knowledge in education by using an anti-racist approach and drawing on Whiteness theory, Indigenous story-telling, and the Medicine Wheel. Based on their own social locations, one being Native and the other being white, the authors discussed how Euro-centric, or Western, knowledge dominates the social work academy and how this dominance is oppressive and excluding of other forms of knowledge. They highlighted the importance of "inclusion, interconnectivity, and holistic ways of being" (Dumbrill & Green 2008, p.491), which, according to Westhues et al (2001), is already a strength of Canadian social work education. Similar to the Brave Heart et al (2011) article, Dumbrill and Green (2008) also reflected on how the destruction associated with colonialism cannot be extricated from Western knowledge systems. The authors noted that on-going colonialism can be unintentional as Western traditions become so engrained they begin to feel natural, or regarded as the norm. As a result, Dumbrill and Green (2008) suggested restructuring academic environments to include non-text based resources and avoiding categorical and hierarchical ways of thinking.

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[1] A SWOT analysis outlines the strengths and weaknesses, connected to the internal environment, and the opportunities and threats, associated with the external environment, of an organization.

Barriers to the successful integration of Aboriginal knowledge in social work education have been discussed in a variety of articles, including Dumbrill and Green (2008), Zapf (1999), and Lambe (2003). According to these authors, barriers have included: styles of learning and evaluating; mainstream education's need to accept teachers and professors as absolute authorities; and ignoring the historical role of education in attempting to eliminate Aboriginal cultures, traditions, and languages (Zapf 1999; Lambe 2003; Dumbrill & Green 2008). Lambe's (2003) study of education delivery focused on the forms and methods of knowledge delivery, both indigenous and Western, highlighting general beliefs, philosophies, practices, and challenges. In his exploration of indigenous education, mainstream education, and native studies, the author came to the conclusion that academic differences can be accommodated so that Western and Aboriginal knowledge can co-exist. There have been several successful attempts at doing just that.

In one such instance, instructors were asked to provide a social work practice method course as part of a Canadian college-level Aboriginal Social Work program. Zapf (1999) described his experience of co-teaching the course as a white man alongside a Native academic and practitioner. Zapf and his colleague chose to combine their respective sections of the course and present the material side-by-side, allowing each to critique and assess the other in real time. According to the author, the approach was also intended to help the students gain confidence in their abilities by melding their Western and Native knowledge, rather than forcing them to focus on one perspective exclusively. Quoting his co-facilitator, Zapf (1999, p.336) wrote that their teaching "represented the convergence of Western linear thought and its hierarchical pedagogical form with the holistic, processual knowledge system of the global indigenous family". Both instructors found the experience to be positive for both them and the students.

Similarly, Rice-Green and Dumbrill (2005) discussed their development of a Canadian university-level, web-based child welfare course for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. They approached their course development from what they referred to as a radical, structural, feminist, anti-racist, and First Nations perspective. As with the previous article, one instructor was Aboriginal and the other was white. Rice-Green and Dumbrill (2005, p.167) designed the course to "situate Western knowledge as *a* way of knowing rather than *the* way of knowing". In delivering the material, the authors approached the course content believing that the students needed to understand the links between personal issues and broader societal inequalities, and with the belief that social workers "need to know what they are doing and why they are doing it" (2005, p.173). The course was provided to two cohorts, one taught in a classroom setting and another taught online. Rice-Green & Dumbrill (2005) found that both groups indicated that they had learned the importance of understanding colonial and historical contexts when considering child welfare situations.

Weaver and Congress (2009), using a social justice perspective, provided examples of specific tools for teaching about indigenous groups. They did this by first providing a historical outline of social workers' participation in social injustices committed against indigenous people, and reviewing positive contemporary developments in addressing indigenous issues. Similar to the information presented by Westhues et al (2001), Weaver & Congress (2009) encouraged the recruitment and presence of Aboriginal social workers in social agencies, associations, and academia, as their presence may help to influence change. Weaver and Congress (2009) also spoke to the importance of Aboriginal literature. They stated that, while literature produced by Aboriginal researchers is gaining support, students are still more likely to read mainstream anti-oppressive literature than they are more marginalized ideas. Weaver and Congress (2009) also applauded field placements as an important learning experience for social work students, developing within them a strengths-based approach to service delivery.

Weaver (1997), drawing on her own experience as a Native educator and on the existing literature, discussed how to best prepare social work students for working with Aboriginal service-users and clients from the perspective of cultural competence. She provided recommendations as to what should be taught, how it should be taught, and where it should be included in the curriculum. Cultural competence refers to an "ability to build on the sensitivity or knowledge about different populations and incorporate specific skills" (Yellow Bird 2010, p.283). It also involves self-awareness and reflection on the part of the social worker, acknowledging bias, building respect, and sensitivity to diversity (Weaver 1997; Yellow Bird 2010). As Weaver noted (1997), Native-specific content should be included in social work and related curriculums in order to produce culturally sensitive and competent social workers. She also commented on the importance of viewing Aboriginal people not as victims, but as part of strong communities that can provide their own solutions.

Effective Social Work Skills and Knowledge in Aboriginal Practice

In terms of the role of the social worker, Weaver (1997) stated that, considering historical exploitation and mistrust, social workers must respect Aboriginal people's values of non-interference, inter-connectedness, and inter-dependency. Social workers should also support their clients in seeking out Aboriginal healing resources, but should not attempt to perform Native rituals themselves. As Weaver (1997, p.106) said, mainstream social work interventions which conflict with Native cultural norms can be "at best ineffective and at worst detrimental to the client's well-being and a violation of client self-determination". However, in an article written in partnership with another researcher (Weaver & Congress 2009), the authors noted that social workers can play an important and significant role in advocating and instituting positive social change for indigenous people. According to Weaver and Congress (2009, p.169), it is possible for social workers to overcome their reputation as being "coercive agents of social control".

Bennett et al (2011), conducting research in Australia, interviewed 19 social workers, of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal heritage, including three Elders, working in Aboriginal communities about how they integrate a range of knowledge, values, and skills into their work. The key research questions included how Aboriginal social workers work in Aboriginal communities, how non-Aboriginal social workers work in the same communities, and what both groups recognized as being culturally sensitive and appropriate social work practice.

The researchers found that there were very few differences among social workers as to what was considered to be important practical skills. A social worker's understanding of themselves was considered to be crucial by all the respondents. This included: the role colonialism has had on their own identities; self-awareness of bias; and the ability to be self-reflective and respond to client anger with "humility and genuineness" (Bennett et al 2011, p.26). Relationship building with clients was also deemed to be an important skill, as was listening. One respondent to their research stated: "The best way to communicate with Aboriginal people is to keep your mouth shut… to listen to what people are saying" (Bennett et al 2011, p.28). According to Bennett et al (2011), the boundaries of relationships with Aboriginal people are much wider than in typical mainstream relationships because the personal and professional are not separate in the same way.

Respondents in Bennett et al's (2011, p.30) research stated that providing social services "involved the ability to integrate Aboriginal knowledge alongside Western paradigms". An Aboriginal respondent believed that having a "foot in each world" meant he or she could empower clients, advocate for them, and give guidance in accessing services. Another element of practice found in Bennett et al's (2011) research was the need for social workers to move away from an individualized perspective and instead include families and collectives in the healing

process. According to the authors, social workers need work in ways that are "culturally respectful, courageous, and hopeful" (Bennett et al 2011, p.34). The research also showed that social workers play an important role in supporting community initiatives and the process of decolonization.

Harms et al (2011), also conducting research in Australia, discussed many of the themes included in previously mentioned articles. As part of their research, Harms et al (2011) established a reference committee made up of Aboriginal community members, social work practitioners, and academics, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. The researchers also organized four focus groups made up of thirty Aboriginal community members who had been either direct or indirect recipients of social services at some point in their lives. The focus groups were asked about their perceptions of effective social work practice, including their opinions on what knowledge was required and ways this might be learned.

Respondents identified attentiveness, availability, respect, honesty, open-mindedness and practical involvement as being traits of good social workers. Service providers who were seen as being rigid, judgmental, and culturally excluding were considered less effective by their clients. Respondents also noted that the most successful interventions were community driven rather than individually focused. In order to best facilitate this, according to Harms et al (2011), social work programs at post-secondary institutions should include instruction on: Aboriginal family structures and functions; Aboriginal history and the impacts of inter-generational loss; cultural knowledge; and the impact of social work interventions. The researchers noted that students would be better prepared for working with Aboriginal clients by attending internships and placements at Native organizations, as well as receiving mentoring from respected Elders. Respondents did not believe that a textbook-based education would be sufficient to prepare students for social work practice (Harms et al 2011).

Best Practices for Working with Aboriginal People

Best practices are the "methodologies, strategies, procedures, practices, and/or processes that consistently produce successful results" (Wesley-Esquimaux & Calliou 2010). In reviewing the literature, several consistent best practices with Aboriginal communities in Canada were found, including the use of Elders, community involvement, and Native traditions. Elders were referred to by both Korhonen (2006) and Martel et al (2011) as being an important part of Aboriginal social structures, as knowledgeable guides, moral leaders, and experienced, trustworthy members of society. Martel et al's (2011, p.237) study of the management of Aboriginal offenders in Canadian correctional institutions noted the important role of Elders in offering "guidance and leadership in correctional planning" for inmates requesting a traditional healing environment. Korhonen's (2006) study concerning suicide prevention among Inuit communities, found that involving Elders in schools was a positive way to "encourage resilience and coping" among young people.

Another important aspect of social care among Aboriginal communities is the importance of community involvement and the feeling of connectedness to one another. In van Gaalen's (2009, p.10) article concerning mental health and Aboriginal communities, it was explained that, "individual, family, and community wellness must be understood as essentially interwoven". Korhonen (2006) echoed this concept by noting that the communities are themselves a resource for people in need. Harper's (2006) research involving Aboriginal domestic violence shelters across Canada found that the more accurately social services reflect Aboriginal norms and values, rather than Western or mainstream values, the more likely they are to receive support from the Aboriginal community at large. The same report indicated that Aboriginal women staying at

non-Aboriginal domestic violence shelters should have access to an Aboriginal counsellor to help them maintain that connection to the community (Harper 2006).

Finally, adhering to timeless traditions was also seen to have positive benefits for service users. In discussing suicide prevention, Korhonen (2006) found that, while not discounting the value of a formal education, some Inuit groups believe that being taken out onto the land and taught survival skills can be a powerful healing tool. It also helps to connect individuals to their ancestors and the older way of life (Korhonen 2006). Martel et al (2011) found that using cultural teachings to fill the voids left by cultural loss helps the healing process itself. According to Harper (2006), the use of traditions also helps with identity development and encourages positive life choices.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

What is a Theory?

A theory is "an organized statement of ideas about the world" (Payne 2005, p.5). The perspectives of professional imperialism and indigenization of social work express a certain view of the world. Primarily, they criticize how Western values and ideas have dominated social work knowledge in a post-colonial context (Payne 2005). These are theoretical perspectives chosen to explore the research questions.

Professional Imperialism

The concept of "professional imperialism" was first introduced by Midgley in 1981 (Faith 2010; Midgley 2010) and refers to "the way in which professional models that emerged from the industrialized nation states were imposed and imported globally" (Faith 2010, p.248). The theory was developed as a response to global development and social modernization, including the promotion of Western social work knowledge and practice in developing countries. Critics, including Midgley, questioned the assumption that the values found in a Western worldview were universally applicable (Midgley 2010). In his discussion of imperialism and social welfare, Midgley (2011) does not refer to Canadian Aboriginal people specifically. He does, however, recognize that the indigenous people of Canada were colonized and that welfare regimes in North American settlements were based on English policies.

Colonial powers ignored the validity and existence of indigenous methods of social care and instead introduced foreign and ethnocentric values, which were largely ineffective to deal with indigenous or non-Western concerns (Forrester 1974; Faith 2010; Midgley 2011). According to Forrester (1974), development theories justify manipulation because it is the most powerful societies that have the ultimate decision-making power in what is to be developed and which objectives are to be met. Within the framework of professional imperialism, the assumption of Western superiority is sometimes implicit – triumph in political and economic domains should also translate to social and cultural domains as well. In other ways it is explicit – researchers searching for universalism do so with a simple disregard for "the particular and the idiosyncratic" (Forrester 1974). Either way, the theory of professional imperialism rejects the notion that it is the responsibility of the West to promote social and cultural modernization (Midgley 2010).

In 1981, when Midgley first published his ideas about professional imperialism, he was met with some criticism. Some social workers felt the title minimized their sincere intentions, while other colleagues even referred to Midgley as being "anti-American" (Midgley 2010). Many researchers today, however, agree that developing nations and indigenous populations are

not a "tabula rasa" to be taken care of by self-designated experts since Western influence has, in some cases, worsened local situations rather than improved them (Forrester 1974; Gordon 2010). However, as reflected by Lambe (2003), Midgley (2010) agrees that an acknowledgement of professional imperialism does not require a total rejection of Western social work knowledge, but Western social workers need to be willing to learn from their non-Western counterparts.

Askeland & Payne (2006) discussed similar ideas in their article about how forces of globalization allow the domination of powerful cultures over the less powerful through social work education. The authors indicated that the assumption remains that universal knowledge would be able to bring order to chaos. However, according to Askeland and Payne (2006, p.735), "cultural diversity is needed just as much as biodiversity". When revisiting his earlier work, Midgley (2010) notes that the decolonization of empires has, by most definitions, been completed. But while the economic, political and social landscape has shifted, imperialism persists. To counter this, theorists have recommended allowing the minority experience to influence dominant cultures and educating students using resources from diverse cultures (Askeland & Payne 2006). Going a step further, producing local knowledge in marginalized communities allows them to disconnect themselves from the dominant literature and knowledge (Askeland & Payne 2006).

Indigenization of Social Work

The term 'indigenization' was first introduced in 1971 by the United Nations, commenting on the inappropriateness of American social work theories for non-Western societies (Huang & Zhang 2008; Gray & Coates 2010b). According to Gray and Coates (2010a, p.615),

> "indigenization holds that social work knowledge should arise from within the culture, reflect local behaviours, and practices, be interpreted within a local frame of reference and should address locally relevant and context-specific problems".

The concept grew from the same roots as professional imperialism, and proponents of indigenization reference Midgley and his belief that social work must be appropriate to different countries' needs and demands (Gray & Coates 2010b). Indigenization is also about adapting and modifying Western processes to the importing country's unique needs and concerns (Huang & Zhang 2008; Gray & Coates 2010a). However, indigenization also goes a step further than professional imperialism to advocate for the authentication of social work education and practice.

Yip, as referenced in Gray & Coates (2010b), described indigenization as a three-step process: the first is the unquestioning transmission of Western knowledge and values to a developing nation; the second being the indigenization phase, where the realization is made that social work concepts need to fit local needs; and the third stage being that of authentization by involving local practitioners to develop strategies best-suited to their own communities. The indigenization of social work calls for a bottom-up approach, in which Western discourse and structures are de-centred and indigenous information is used as the primary knowledge source (Gray & Coates 2010a; b).

Some researchers suggest that indigenization is a complementary rather than contradictory approach to Western social work (Gray & Coates 2010a). They argue that traditional practices can be incorporated into mainstream discourse, emphasizing the skills belonging to indigenous communities, while still being active participants in a modern and diverse society (Dominelli 2010; Gray & Coates 2010a). Being part of mainstream society does

not necessitate abandoning culture; instead mainstream knowledge is moved away from the core of social work discourse, allowing indigenous groups to reshape the conversation.

Many proponents of indigenization also readily admit that the theory is ethnocentric, not unlike Western social work. Indigenous social work highlights specific minority particularities and focuses on culturally specific practices (Gray & Coates 2010a) with the explicit belief that this is the most appropriate response. According to Huang and Zhang (2008, p.617), proponents of indigenized social work insist that "social problems and people's needs should be understood and addressed in the unique locality-specific social, cultural, historical and political contexts", while arguing that mainstream social workers do not take this approach.

Critics of indigenization question the need for cultural relevancy at all. Tin (2011) argues that universal values are only exclusionary if one disagrees with them. According to him, cultural diversity does not automatically imply moral opposites, as the value of moral principles is associated with their rationality, not their place of origin. Tin (2011, p.88) also states that the fact that "divergent cultural practices and moral beliefs exist does not disprove universally valid moral knowledge". He finalizes his argument by saying that cultural diversity does not require diverse value bases for social work, but an acknowledgement of diversity within existing social work frameworks.

METHODOLOGY

Research Strategy

A qualitative design was employed for this particular research. Qualitative research, unlike quantitative research, emphasizes the expression of words rather than quantification (Bryman 2008). Qualitative research emphasizes recording the ways individuals interpret their social world, allowing the research to listen to people's experiences and take them seriously. This approach was deemed most appropriate, as it would allow participants to freely express their opinions and perceptions. Some of the design, such as the theoretical framework, was established prior to conducting the interviews, suggesting a deductive approach. However, as the research progressed, the design shifted to suit the resulting data. As a result, a more inductive approach to the research was utilized. Inductive theory, as opposed to deductive theory, calls for research findings to guide theoretical conclusions. In other words, "the process of induction involves drawing generalizable inferences out of observations" (Bryman 2008, p.11).

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, a non-probability form of sampling (Bryman 2008). This means that participants were chosen strategically based on pre-determined criteria. Initially, the criteria for participants were that they should be of Aboriginal heritage, have studied social work at a Canadian college or university, and work with Aboriginal clients. Due to unexpected challenges, the final criteria did not require a specific social work education. Participants were recruited using snowball sampling (Bryman 2008). This writer first contacted Aboriginal social service agencies and personal contacts, many of which then referred this writer on to other potential participants.

Participants & Interviews

To participate in this study, participants were not required to be legally recognized as Indian, or Aboriginal, by the federal government. Instead the focus was on the individual's self-identification as Native, and the self-identification of their clients as Native. Ten semi-structured interviews were conducted with working social workers of Aboriginal heritage across the provinces of Ontario and Quebec. Of the ten participants, eight identified as First Nations, some

with European roots as well, and two identified as Inuit. This was partially due to the geographical location of this writer as being primarily in southern Canada. Participants included both male and female social workers, with one participant identifying as two-spirited, meaning that they identified with multiple gender roles.

Nine of the participants had degrees from institutions of higher learning, ranging from college diplomas to Masters degrees. Fields of study included criminology, sociology, psychology, child and family studies, women's studies, Indian studies, and social work. The participant who had not studied at an institution of higher learning was employed based on their experience and traditional knowledge. All ten participants were employed in fields as varied as addictions, criminal justice, mental health, abuse counselling, youth and family services, sexual health, and child welfare. Seven participants were employed by Native-specific services. Of the other three, two worked for mainstream services but served Native clients exclusively and the last served both communities equally.

The interviews were conducted at a time and place chosen by the participant. Eight of the interviews were conducted in person and two over the phone, due to geographical constraints. Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were deemed to be the most appropriate because it gave the interviews direction without excessive rigidity. All the participants were asked nearly identical questions, and this writer allowed their answers to guide the direction of the interview, often stumbling across previously unconsidered issues. Participants were free to provide as little or as much information as they felt to be appropriate. As a thank you for giving their time, this writer brought with her home-baked cookies to the in-person interviews. Telephone interviews, while insightful, were more problematic to conduct compared to in-person interviews. For instance, the sound quality was sometimes less than ideal. Also, without being able to see the other's facial expressions and body language, the process is less intimate. This lack of face-to-face contact may have limited the level of trust established between the researcher and the participant, and may have consequently hindered the amount of information the participant is willing to disclose. However, this writer felt that the participants interviewed over the phone were very open, considering the circumstances.

Ethical Considerations

Ethics were strongly considered when designing and conducting the interviews. While the purpose of this paper was not meant to be political or controversial, or to make people feel uncomfortable in any way, discussing Aboriginal issues can sometimes be a sensitive topic. Ethical considerations were consistent with Wiles' (2012) recommendations, including informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality. Consent forms provided to participants were based on a template provided by the University of Gothenburg.

Participants were provided with a brief description of the research project at the initial contact. At meeting, participants were provided with a written informed consent form to review, ensuring that they understood the aim and purpose of the study. For the interviews conducted over the phone, the participants were sent copies of the informed consent via email and agreed verbally to the information found therein. Participants were also provided with this writer's contact information as well as the contact information belonging to her supervisor.

Anonymity and confidentiality was guaranteed. As such, no names, places of employment, or city of residence are referenced in the body of this paper. Similarly, some quotes have been modified slightly to ensure that participants cannot be identified. As admitted by the participants, Aboriginal communities are small and tight-knit, with everyone knowing everyone. Participants were also informed that they could refuse any questions asked of them or end the interview at any time, although no participants exercised these options. Participants were also

informed that they could withdraw their consent at any time and the interview would be discarded, though this also did not appear to be a concern. Finally, all the participants agreed to be recorded; one participant was initially hesitant, but agreed after this writer assured them that it would not be released in any way. The recordings and the written transcripts will be destroyed once the study has been finalized and submitted.

Indigenous Methodology

At the recommendation of one of the participants, this writer explored indigenous research methodology after all the interviews had been completed, but prior to conducting the analysis. Indigenous methodology was created as a response to colonial research management and mirrors Aboriginal values of reciprocation and relationship (Schnarch 2004). The ethical principles related to this are: ownership, referring to the idea that Native communities share ownership of information collectively; control, allowing the community to assert rights over the information gathered and disseminated; access, allowing communities access to all information regardless of its place of storage; and possession, ensuring data is not misused (Schnarch 2004). The desired outcome is that research should provide benefits to Aboriginal communities, should support their self-determination, and should support cultural preservation and development (Schnarch 2004).

Indigenous methodology also puts emphasis on the researcher's social location (Getty 2010), in this case, this writer's situation as a white person and the position of power and comparative privilege that often accompanies being a member of the dominant group in society. The model is also considered to be one of partnership, where researchers and members of the Native community share equal interest in and responsibility for the project (Loppie 2007; Getty 2010). Without being familiar with indigenous methodology, this writer did enter this research from a position of deep understanding of what respect for Aboriginal people meant, an awareness of power relations and of how Aboriginal communities have been taken advantage of in the past, specifically attempting to avoid that. The writer also intended, from the beginning, to provide participants with a final copy of the research.

However, there are ways in which this writer could have approached the research differently. The design of the project was done in consultation with the supervisor only and without any outside input from the Aboriginal community. Similarly, the resulting information rests in this writer's hands alone and the participants will not have an opportunity to comment on the findings until after the research has been finalized and submitted. Other aspects were beyond this writer's control. For example, the limited time available to conduct and analyze the research, as well as the physical distance between the researcher's university and the participants, prevented the researcher from fostering and building relationships that would have been more conducive to an Aboriginal worldview and an indigenous research framework.

Analysis Approach

The findings were analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a way of identifying and coding information (Byrne 2001; Bryman 2008). The interviews were transcribed and printed out. This writer read and re-read the transcripts until themes began to emerge. These themes were then tracked and organized on a chart. Relevant passages were colour-coded and highlighted, with sub-themes numbered in the margins. Key themes were identified using words, concepts, and philosophies mentioned repeatedly by the participants. This required looking at repetitions, metaphors and analogies, similarities and differences, indigenous typologies, and theory-related material (Bryman 2008). As Bryman (2008, p.555) notes, thematic

analysis does not have identifiable roots and therefore lacks a "clearly specified series of procedures, in spite of its prominence as a means of conducting qualitative data analysis".

According to Bryman (2008), the reliability and validity of qualitative research refers to the trustworthiness and authenticity of a study. In this case, this writer feels that the aims and goals were met. To gather the most accurate meanings of what participants expressed, interviews were read multiple times and quotes copied as closely as possible, while still ensuring anonymity, so that the participants' feelings were accurately conveyed to the reader. The participants were of varying age, gender, cultural heritage, educational background, field of employment, personal experiences, and geographical location, and still provided many consistent and complementary responses to identical questions. Considering this, the external validity of the study appears to be promising, as it refers to "the degree to which findings can be generalized across social settings" (Bryman 2008, p.376).

However, the results described below are not meant to act as generalizations of all Aboriginal service providers or Aboriginal service users. Nor is it meant to be a commentary on, or evaluation of, existing social work programs at institutions of higher learning. Hopefully the findings spark debate and thought about ways of thinking about social work education and practice in Canada.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Based on themes found in the ten interviews, the following findings have been organized under six distinct thematic sections: major social issues; generational trauma; what has been useful in formal social work education; what is lacking in formal social work education; relying on traditional knowledge; and educational and professional dilemmas. The findings and the analysis have been combined to allow for more easy reading. To ensure their anonymity and confidentiality, participants have not been identified by name or gender. For the purpose of the analysis, each participant was assigned a number (ie Participant 1, Participant 2) at random to identify which participant is associated with which quote.

Major Inter-Connected Social Issues

In order to provide a context to the work they do, the participants were first asked about what they perceived to be the most common social issues facing their clients. Responses closely matched the statistical data presented above by Statistics Canada (2006). Participants mentioned issues of poverty, domestic violence, mental health, alcoholism and drug addiction, suicide, lack of housing, education, and/or employment, and trouble with the criminal justice system as some of the most common social challenges their clients area dealing with. Service users were also likely to be dealing with multiple inter-connected social issues at a time.

> "It's all the social determinants of health. It's racism and poverty and housing. Inter-generational trauma, which impacts parenting, parenting capacity, a lot of CAS [Children's Aid Society] involvement. Substance use is another huge one. They're all pretty much connected so sometimes it's hard to pinpoint them. It's very rare that you're meeting with a client that doesn't have so many of these multiple issues impacting them in one way or another. One of these issues impacts the other." (Participant 10)

An analysis of the interviews revealed that the participants had various explanations as to why Aboriginal people struggle with so many social issues. All the participants recognized colonialism as having had a negative impact on their clients. For example:

> "Aboriginal people are at a higher risk of almost every disease and disorder that is out there than the general population. Mostly because of the social determinants of health, the impacts of multi-generational trauma, and the process of colonization. That's the simple answer." (Participant 5)

> "Because of colonization, our communities are at the state that they are right now – the highest rate of suicide, the highest rate of incarceration, male and female, federal and provincial. The highest rate of sexual abuse, the highest rate of murder and suicide, the highest rate of children in CAS [Children's Aid Society], the highest rate of poverty, and the highest rate of lack of housing." (Participant 9)

This perception is consistent with Dumbrill and Green's (2008) reflections on the destruction associated with colonialism, as well as Weaver's (1997) comments about the historical colonial exploitation of indigenous communities. It can also be understood using the theory of professional imperialism, that colonial powers caused more harm than good. The unilateral imposition of Western values was not in the best interest of minority groups, according to the above statements by participants.

Crisis of Identity

A few participants identified clients' confusion about their identity, which typically started early in their lives, as contributing to their social issues. One described how many Aboriginal children were stripped of their identities in residential schools:

> "You'd have no communication [with family], not be able to speak your language, you'd have your hair cut off to be short, and you'd be placed into clothing that was foreign to your area. You'd all look the same. You got new names if they couldn't pronounce your names". (Participant 8)

Other participants spoke to how this crisis of identity would follow an individual into adulthood:

> "You no longer identify with your family. Some lost language, some lost a connection with their families. How are you supposed to connect with family when you're released from the institution?" (Participant 9).

> "I believe that's where the anger, depression, anxiety, and all those negative feelings are really the background to a lot of offending. I think that's where it comes from because internally they're confused and not sure of who they are. They lost that somehow." (Participant 1)

This kind of emotional suffering related to cultural loss is what theorists such as Alexander (2004) and Sztompka (2000) were referring to when they were describing generational trauma. An individual's identity relies on a cultural focal point, and to lose that sense of belonging can be very emotionally and psychologically damaging. Both Brave Heart et al (2011) and MacDonald

& Hudson (2012) identified loss of identity as contributing to an individual's wide range of social problems. Some of the feelings described by the participants also matched the emotional responses to generational trauma recorded by Whitbeck et al (2004).

Lack of Parenting

A lack of parenting as a contributor to social issues was also a sub-theme noted by participants. There was a clear consensus that when individuals do not receive love and support from families, they struggle in their own development and inevitably pass negative parenting skills down to their own children. This is consistent with previously mentioned literature, including Brave Heart et al (2011) and MacDonald & Hudson (2012). Participants expressed this in different ways:

> "When you look at what happened to the individuals who were in residential school and not having that mother, that father figure, so they don't know how to parent. Their learned behaviours – it was very stern, not a very loving, nurturing environment. And to be away from your family where they would be nurtured and loved, that's what they've learned." (Participant 3)

> "They've never been held, never been told they were loved, never been acknowledged for being a human being. If they'd been held there was sexual abuse coming. They grew up in this and became parents themselves. If they weren't given that as a kid, how can they give it to their kids?" (Participant 9)

Shame

Finally, the notion of shame was probably the most common theme among participants when discussing Aboriginal social issues. This presented itself in two ways: the first being shame as a result of their clients' experiences and subsequently absorbed by the culture; and then as the on-going feelings of shame acting as a barrier to accessing services. Some Aboriginal service users feel shame over what they experienced in the residential schools and for the destruction of their communities. In many ways they have absorbed the verbal abuse they received as children, that they were worthless. They feel embarrassed, and often feel alone in their own pain. They see themselves as being "less-than" (Participant 6), no longer the "strong, proud people" (Participant 9) they considered themselves to be.

Some service users have internalized these feelings and the shame prevents them from accessing services. One participant described the chain of events with their clients like this:

> "While I come from a non-judgmental, harm reduction approach, I've had instances where I've encountered clients who've been absolutely wrecked on something [under the influence of substances]. Who, in that moment, will tell me about how they need to access a grandmother or whatever, and how glad they are to see me. Then the next time they see me, and they're not under the influence of substances, they feel so much shame they can't even stay in the room with me. And that's because of that message of abstinence and judgment, that they have failed, that they get from, I believe, racism, colonization, and multi-generational trauma." (Participant 5)

Another participant stated that shame prevents clients from accessing services, even cultural celebrations, because of public judgment and stereotypes. They don't want to be associated with the stigma, and so avoid resource centres.

> "The urban Aboriginal middle-class didn't want to come to the friendship centres because the friendship centres have a stigma that we're just dealing with the poor and they didn't want to mingle." (Participant 3)

Aboriginal social workers are trying to combat potential service users' hesitation and lack of attendance by creating safe environments and employing a traditional Aboriginal worldview within their work, which is further discussed below. According to Bennett et al's (2011) study, offering culturally appropriate programming gave service users hope. Harper (2006) noted that healing in traditional cultural environments helps to foster positive identity development. Looking at shame through the lens of professional imperialism, the systematic removal of indigenous value systems, through colonization and the residential schools, left communities with the feeling that their way of life was in some way inferior to the dominant powers.

One participant stated that some non-Aboriginal social workers still perpetuate the shame in the work they do with their Aboriginal clients. Participant 4 suggested that mainstream social workers they worked with were "shaming their own clients" by imposing Western values and attempting to address what they considered to be their clients' personal deficiencies, making their clients feel bad about themselves in the process. This quote from Participant 4 is referenced again below as part of the debate of education versus experience. The importance of a social worker's heritage, as well as the effectiveness of mainstream social work, is also further discussed below.

Generational Trauma

All ten of the participants were familiar with the concept of "generational trauma". One was not familiar with the academic terminology, but their assumption as to what the term likely meant was similar to other participants' understandings of the concept. Participants described generational trauma in ways that corresponded to the definitions provided above by Alexander (2004) and Woolford (2009):

> "I think it means when the family has a broken connection with their parents. Their connection is broken so they lack parenting, guidance, they lack their cultural identity. Cultural identity as in going camping, sewing their traditional clothing, using their language. And the trauma passes onto the children because they're not able to communicate with each other in a healthy way." (Participant 4)

> "If your grandparents and your parents have suffered, there's a learned behaviour that's coming down the line." (Participant 6)

> "The different diseases that were brought from Europe had a major effect on the life of the Aboriginal people here in Canada, and the United States, North America. And then the changes of their culture, the taking away and the banning of their ceremonies, that they couldn't do certain ceremonies. It's one generation after another, and there's things that they couldn't handle and weren't familiar

with. As a result, here we are, with the statistics that we talked about." (Participant 7)

In describing their understanding of the concept of generational trauma participants each applied a different kind of terminology, the most common of which was referring to it as "inter-generational trauma". Apart from "generational trauma" and "inter-generational trauma", other terms applied included "multi-generational trauma" and "secondary victimization". Some felt the terms were interchangeable while others felt different terms meant distinctly different things. There did not appear to be a consensus on what would be considered the most appropriate term.

Their definitions of generational trauma did not differ from one another. The variations in terminology could be related to how, or by whom, the concepts were introduced to the participants, which is discussed below. For example, one participant who attended a university program with a strong Aboriginal perspective felt the terms were interchangeable, while another participant who attended mainstream university and college programs felt the term "multi-generational trauma" was much more appropriate. Unfortunately this writer is unable to offer concrete reasoning as to why the differences in terminology exist.

Participants' Exposure to Theoretical Concept

Not all the participants learned about the concept of generational trauma in the same way. Some were first exposed to the concept in an educational environment: "I'm assuming that it was probably at college that I learned about it" (Participant 10). Others gained an understanding when they embarked on their own healing journey: "My healing started here within the First Nations community" (Participant 9). Interestingly, one participant rejected the notion that generational trauma was a concept at all: "You live with it, there's no such thing as concepts. It's just a reality. This generational trauma is normal, it's just the way that we live" (Participant 8). According to these explanations, the line between academic theory and everyday reality is blurred. To some of the participants, to discuss these ideas in abstract, theoretical terms would be nearly impossible because it is something that, to them, exists as a fact of life. Most of the participants stated that they have been impacted by colonialism and the trauma that followed. Their personal stories illustrated this:

"I didn't grow up with a lot of that [traditional knowledge]. My grandparents and my mom were relocated. My mom and my dad and some of my older brothers and sisters went through residential schools, so they were taken away. To be dumped into that, and to be abused and violated, and not knowing. If your brothers and sisters were taken and put into the same school, you were separated. You weren't allowed to speak your own language. My mom told me she, if she spoke her language, she was tied to the heaters and the boilers. They were beaten, they were abused, some were sexually abused." (Participant 9)

"I'll give it to you from my grandmother's perspective. She had twelve kids. And one day the Indian agent shows up, and she hears that the Indian Agent is showing up, so she hides her youngest in the outhouse. The Indian Agent comes and he takes all the kids away. If she hadn't hidden the one in the outhouse she'd have no children the next day." (Participant 10)

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According to the participants, having a strong and emotional connection to this shared cultural history is an important part of the work they do. They believe it makes them more compassionate and understanding when working with their clients. This blurring of the line between theory and reality is also reflected in the theory of indigenization, which would reject Western beliefs that boundaries should be strict and rigid. Respondents in Harms et al's (2011) study spoke of rigidity as being a characteristic of an ineffective social worker. This blurring of academic concepts and lived experiences is also reflected when discussing the importance of an Aboriginal worldview below.

Clients' Understanding of Generational Trauma

Participants also made it clear that, from their perspective, each and every one of their clients has been impacted by generational trauma. This belief is supported by some of the literature discussed above. Woolford (2009) also noted that no Aboriginal person is immune to the effects of generational trauma, though not all experience it to the same degree. Needing to provide services to someone who has been affected by generational trauma was not considered to be unique or isolated incidents. It is the norm rather than the exception.

The participants agreed that generational trauma affects their clients to varying degrees, the effects being much more devastating to some than others. The same can be said for any two individuals struck by the same traumatic event – one may find themselves more deeply affected than the other and struggle more to overcome the situation. However, the social workers do not attempt to quantify the amount of trauma experienced by a client, as they consider this to be irrelevant.

Some of the participants felt that their clients may have some insight into their personal situations and how the cycle of trauma has impacted them directly. Others believed that many of their clients were unable to consider how generational trauma has affected them because they were preoccupied with more critical issues. As noted in the introduction, many Aboriginal service users struggle with homelessness, unemployment, and poverty. As one participant noted, taking the time to consider theoretical concepts such as generational trauma would be considered a luxury when they do not even have a place to sleep that night.

> "Some are so immersed in their stuff that I doubt very much they consider it to be something that they think about, as in this is how it is and this is how they work it out. You're dealing with environmental issues, such as homelessness, such as poverty. Who, seriously, has been without a home for long periods of time, actually thinks of why they're without a home for long periods of time? They spend the day looking and trying to find where they're going to sleep that evening, or trying to find out how to get rid of the pain of that day." (Participant 8)

> "Not all of our people are aware of the history. Not all of our people are aware of the terminology. Most of what they know is that they have this pain, and it's overwhelming." (Participant 5)

> "Sometimes the connection itself is not always present with someone, especially if they're still dealing with major issues in their life. They might say 'yeah, my mom went to residential school and she never said she loved me and she never hugged me and I never got that from her'. They know that connection, they might just not say, 'my mother experienced trauma and so did I'." (Participant 10)

"A lot of times they don't even know why they're carrying around, say, anger or frustration because of their identity issues. It's just because they're not able to see the bigger picture and how they've been impacted by government policies from the residential school era." (Participant 1)

Many of the participants noted that many Aboriginal people are unaware of the history of colonialism and the destructive effect it has had on Native culture. They have noted that part of this relates to the lack of honest historical education in all schools, not only post-secondary institutions. When asked if they felt it was an intentional position taken by mainstream education to only present a European or Western perspective of Aboriginal history, Participant 1 stated that "certain societies were victorious when they conflicted with another society, so they get the right to tell history, right?" Exploring this statement using professional imperialism as a framework, Forrester (1974) might have made a similar comment. From his perspective, the dominant group in society holds the decision-making power and can therefore manipulate theory and discourse to suit their own interests, in this case to maintain the West's presumed superiority.

The majority of the participants stated that they would address their clients' unawareness of generational trauma by explaining the concept to them as part of the healing process. However, unlike the others, two of the participants advised that they would not choose to explain generational trauma to their clients in the course of the services they offer. One participant felt that their role did not offer the most appropriate environment in which to delve into such complex issues, instead referring motivated clients to co-workers more equipped to offer that kind of counselling. The other considered it to be intrusive in terms of their particular field. This idea of non-interference as a best practice for working with Aboriginal clients was repeated throughout the interviews and is further explored below.

Use in Healing Process

For the remaining participants, they considered explaining the impact of generational trauma to their clients as being an important part of the healing process, though it can sometimes be painful. Brave Heart et al (2011) similarly noted that an acknowledgement of the experience of trauma helps to validate the pain and move past it. As one of the participants noted, their clients can sometimes be confused and naïve as to what actually happened to them. For example, explaining to a client that what they had experienced was not an appropriate expression of love, as their abusers attempted to convince them, can be devastating. According to the participants, some service users have lost sight of what is right and what is wrong, and understanding the meaning of generational trauma often means re-defining their entire worldview.

Nevertheless, the majority of participants considered explaining generational trauma to be a very important step in healing. Understanding a client's history helps social workers in assessing their environment and their needs, and it helps to raise clients' self-esteem and self-worth. It also allows them to address their dysfunctional relationships with both previous generations and future generations. One participant described how they used an analogy to describe the cycle of trauma:

"The wife is getting Sunday dinner ready and she cuts the ends off the roast and puts it in the roasting pan, gets it ready and puts it in the oven. The husband says, 'Why did you cut the ends of the roast off', and she says, 'I don't know, that's what my mother did'. So when he sees the mother-in-law he asks her, 'Why do

you cut the end of your roast off? What's the point of that?' And she says, 'To make it fit in the roasting pan'. But based on observation and not asking the questions, that's just what she did. So I think that's a great analogy for inter-generational trauma." (Participant 3)

Explaining it in such terms allows clients to learn that "trauma begets trauma, pain begets pain" (Participant 9). Other participants were more direct with their clients, clearly illustrating to service users the effect specific actions have on them and how they are passing those behaviours on to others. Each participant, however, chose to broach the topic in different ways, depending on their relationship with the client, the client's particular needs, their motivation, and their emotional security. Some literature, such as Brave Heart et al (2011), confirms how service users can benefit from understanding generational trauma.

Brave Heart et al (2011) further recommended grounding interventions, including explaining generational trauma to service users, in a culturally appropriate framework. To indigenize social work practice, as the theory recommends, would be to allow Aboriginal worldviews to influence all interventions, making them more culturally appropriate and amenable to the clients' sensibilities. From this perspective, the uniqueness of the Aboriginal history cannot be adequately addressed by mainstream, Western social work because mainstream social work lacks the insight into these particular kinds of needs.

Regardless of the manner in which the participants choose to address generational trauma with their clients, the intentions are the same. Many of the social workers stated that they want to see a light bulb go off, so to speak, an "a-ha" moment that allows clients to acknowledge and break the cycle of trauma in order to move forward in a positive way. For the most part, participants found addressing generational trauma directly with their clients to be very effective: "I'd say very successful in terms of connecting with people and just being able to at least give them a wider perspective on how we got to where we are" (Participant 1).

Caution in Over-Use

Only one participant expressed being cautious about using the concept of generational trauma as a tool or frame of practice. Their fear was that it could somehow be manipulated to measure trauma, measuring clients against a determined scale, and subsequently pathologizing Aboriginal service users with this as their defining characteristic.

"I don't want a rating system or something like that. Is that actually helpful? Is it actually effective? Is it helpful to create a ratings scale for how impacted you are by inter-generational trauma? And how's the non-Aboriginal community going to use this understanding of inter-generational trauma and this tool to assess it? That's where I get weary of the understanding." (Participant 10)

This relates back to how non-Aboriginal social workers and policy makers have taken advantage of Aboriginal communities historically. As mentioned above, there is still substantial mistrust and cynicism among the Aboriginal community as to the intentions of "outsiders". Weaver and Congress (2009) wrote at length about social workers' participation in state control and federal paternalism. Some may fear that the use of generational trauma in this way has the potential to become another way for mainstream society to co-opt control and to further marginalize the Aboriginal community.

Some of the participants felt there was a tendency by mainstream social workers to require analytical assessment tools that can predict behaviours and result in measurable outcomes for the clients. To criticize the professional imperialism of this kind of social work practice, the possibility of introducing this kind of anti-holistic practice tool to the Aboriginal community has several negative implications. For one, pathologizing Aboriginal service users in this way has the potential to perpetuate negative stereotypes and stigma from the mainstream community, and the internalization of shame by Aboriginal people as a result. It could also been seen as an imposition of ineffective and culturally inappropriate tools developed by mainstream social work to rescue a group from what they assume to be their own personal deficiencies. The exploitation of Aboriginal knowledge, and the imposition of Western values, is further examined below.

What is useful about formal social work education?

Apart from the one participant that was hired based on their experience and traditional knowledge to perform what their organization refers to as "Elder services", meaning they act as a spiritual and cultural advisor, all the social workers interviewed completed programs at post-secondary institutions. Some of the participants had multiple degrees or had completed a combination of college and university-level courses. A few participants had completed Native-specific programs, such as Native Child and Family Worker or Social Service Worker – Native, while the others completed mainstream programs in various fields, and some participants completed a combination of both.

In order to offer assistance to service users in conquering any of their social issues, including the effects of generational trauma, a social worker would draw on skills and knowledge learned as part of their education. This writer wondered if the education taught, particularly in mainstream programs, effectively prepared social workers to work with Aboriginal clients, considering their unique heritage, historical injustices, and the complicated fall-out of generational trauma. The participants offered up their opinions regarding the strengths and weaknesses of their various programs of study.

Useful Skills – Anti-Oppressive Practice

The participants identified multiple skills they learned as being particularly useful to their work. For some this included practical skills such as proficiency in writing, communication skills, and interviewing and counselling techniques. For others it also included broader concepts such as ethics, professionalism, information concerning psychological issues and concurrent disorders, and an awareness of mental health issues. A few even mentioned that their education helped build up their confidence and ease their nerves when working with clients.

Anti-oppressive practice was specifically mentioned by several participants as being invaluable to their education. As one participant put it:

> "Anti-oppressive practice is a great philosophy… not even a philosophy, it's a practice of relating to people and understanding how larger things, like history, can impact people. In that sense it's very congruent to working with Aboriginal people because you have to be very sensitive and aware of history and the larger impacts on people." (Participant 10)

Another participant found that studying anti-oppressive practices even helped them find their own voice in the classroom:

"At that time I as able to speak up about oppression that happens in our region. The oppression of my own people. That was the time when I found my voice to speak up, so that was useful to me." (Participant 4)

Weaver and Congress (2009) felt that mainstream published anti-oppressive literature was perhaps over-used in social work education and that students should have the opportunity to read more marginalized ideas. The participants clearly did not feel the same way. Participants felt that anti-oppressive practice was an appropriate perspective to use in relation to their Aboriginal clients because it looked at wider structural and historical aspects rather than focusing on individual concerns. These responses echo the study conducted by Westhues et al (2001), which stated that the development of anti-oppressive practices was considered to be a strength of Canadian social work programs.

Referring to the theory of professional imperialism, in this case the application of mainstream anti-oppressive theory, critics of universalism may agree with Weaver and Congress' (2009) belief. However, the fact that the participants found the concept of anti-oppressive practice to be so compelling is also supported by Midgley's (2010) notion that Western ideas do not require being discarded outright by indigenous groups. This case, a Western concept being of particular value to Aboriginal students, reflects Tin's (2011) belief that cultural diversity does not imply moral opposites. Despite the differences between Aboriginal and mainstream beliefs, common ground was found by some of the participants in this case.

According to the participants, many of the non-Aboriginal students were grossly uninformed about the reality of Aboriginal issues. As a criticism of professional imperialism would claim, social work education fails to prepare social work students for working with indigenous communities. Sending ill-prepared social workers into Aboriginal communities is another example of perceived Western superiority, the assumption being that understanding Aboriginal culture and history has little relevance to mainstream social workers. This idea is again discussed below when discussing the importance of addressing Native issues in education.

According to the participants, learning about anti-oppressive practice as part of their education also forced some of the participants' non-Aboriginal classmates to re-evaluate what they thought they knew about Aboriginal people and Aboriginal people's history with the Canadian government. This could potentially be an indication that formal social work education has taken note of their part in social work's professional imperialism and, in some cases, now takes a more honest approach to dealing with their own complicity.

Aboriginal Course Content

Despite the useful skills the participants picked up as part of their education, by all accounts Aboriginal-specific content was sorely lacking in mainstream social work programs. This was of course not true to the Native-specific study programs. In the mainstream programs, the Native content that was provided was thought to be lacking "in regards to the human component" (Participant 9). Some felt that the dissemination of Aboriginal-specific course content was very clinical and overly intellectual, allowing students to see Aboriginal issues as abstract rather than concrete; some felt it dehumanized Aboriginal people in favour of academic subjectivity. This clear division between the academic environment and the participants' realities is a Western value that is foreign to their holistic beliefs. To indigenize social work education and practice would be to allow for what some of the participants may consider being a more humane approach to social work.

In some cases there was "a bit of a classroom discussion about the history of residential schools and the impacts of colonialism, but certainly not to any great focus" (Participant 5). When asked directly if their education addressed Native cultures, one participant gave a resounding "No" as an answer. They explained that away, however, by saying:

> "They [mainstream academics] do not understand Native culture, so they can't teach it. They are totally ignorant to what we live, living on a reserve, the borders and the boundaries, the limitations." (Participant 6)

Once again this implies a lack of indigenization in social work education. From the perspective of many of the participants, mainstream educators and academics are not capable of providing appropriate Native-specific education. Echoing Participant 6's quote, many non-Aboriginal instructors lack the personal history and understanding some of the participants believe is required in order to educate students about Aboriginal people. As an extension of this, many social work instructors have themselves been educated in a system dominated by Western thought. As with the criticism that the imposition of Western values does not prepare students for working with Aboriginal clients, it is equally ineffective for preparing teachers for delivering Aboriginal content. As viewed through the lens of professional imperialism, the current educational system has resulted in a plethora of instructors who have no other reference points for knowledge other than their own dominant viewpoint.

In terms of the sparse Native-specific education that was provided, the participants noted several faults. Many of the classes offering Native-specific content were optional for students. Unfortunately this means that most students missed out on learning important knowledge about Aboriginal communities. Participants considered this to be a flaw in the education system.

> "There was one class that you could take that was First Nations specific, it was optional if you were in the regular stream. If you were specializing in child welfare it was mandatory. But still, to me that's not really enough." (Participant 10)

In reviewing participants' statements there appears to be an implication that what is most important to mainstream social work education, and therefore mandatory, are Western ideas and knowledge. They described how indigenous concepts are, by extension of their absence in these setting, of less value and importance. Unsatisfied by this, participants suggested that, at the very minimum, an orientation of Native cultures should be mandatory for all students, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal.

A second flaw according to most of the participants was that the information provided suggested that Aboriginal people are part of one indiscernible, monolithic group. The participants knew this to be false:

> "The reality is you've got to work differently with Inuit people than you do with Metis people than you do with First Nations people. And within First Nations people there are all different nations and they all have different customs and different cultures and different ways of relating to it". (Participant 5)

In the experience of many of the participants, instructors will often refrain from pointing out diversity within Aboriginal communities. In some cases this may be due to time constraints, or ignorance. Compounding this, previous research has indicated that despite diversity, Aboriginal

communities have certain commonalities. Brave Heart et al (2011), as noted in the literature review, listed these as focus on a collectivistic culture, indirect communication styles, emphasis on harmony and balance, and an attachment to all of creation. However, some participants noted how the differences among Aboriginal groups can far outweigh the similarities. For example, one participant advised that when they re-connected with their Soto family they did not fit in. They were instead adopted by a Mohawk family and an Oneida family and learned their cultures instead.

Westhues et al (2001), in their SWOT analysis, noted social work education's attempts at adopting cultural diversity as a strength. The recognition of diversity within a cultural group, however, is not a topic that has been strongly researched in relation to social work and social work education. The inclusion of Aboriginal knowledge in formal mainstream social work education is perhaps a step in the right direction. The homogenization of Aboriginal people in social work education led to other concerns for the participants. Some of the participants expressed concern that non-Aboriginal students would start to believe that there was only one kind of Aboriginal person, or that to be an Aboriginal person one had to partake in particular ceremonies, like pipe ceremonies, whether that was a part of their culture or not. Critics of universalism would agree with these concerns. To interpret it using the theory of professional imperialism, portraying Aboriginal people in Canada in this manner is a continuation of colonial influences. This means that the mainstream's understanding of who or what an Aboriginal person is supposed to be takes precedence over Aboriginal people's self-identification and the ways in which their communities understand themselves to exist.

Finally, the implication of the mainstream's naivety, or misunderstandings, about Native culture was a recurring theme. According to some of the participants' responses, instructors sometimes unknowingly perpetuated some of the misguided and insensitive educational approaches of previous generations. For example, one participant described an aspect of a course at the university they attended. As part of the instructor's attempts at exposing students to Native culture, students were required to go into Native communities and take part in traditional ceremonies, without being invited by the community leaders. The participant saw that as being "a gross negligence of using Aboriginal culture for teaching" (Participant 10).

Others felt that they faced resistance from the mainstream community when trying to contribute to the academic discourse. Within the academic community, many participants found their non-Aboriginal colleagues to be very poorly informed about Canadian history. One participant described an exchange they had during a class discussion:

> "There was a student that commented that those teachers had good intentions to train these people how to be civilized. And I just said 'what!' How does one culture take another child's culture, strip them from their clothing, cut their hair and teach them not to speak their language, and then say it's a civilized society? I couldn't believe it that he would make such a comment." (Participant 4)

Another participant noted that most people in Canada are unaware of the fact that when the South African government was introducing the Apartheid system, they studied the Canadian Indian Act as a template. As upsetting as this fact may be to Canadians, it is well documented that South African officials studied Canada's system for dealing with the Aboriginal population as they developed segregation legislation in their own country (Saul 2010).

All the participants felt that without an accurate representation of Canadian history, social workers would never be prepared to work with Aboriginal clients. This is similar to the discussion surrounding Aboriginal service users' understandings of the impacts generational

trauma has had on their lives. The on-going colonial influence on education, as understood through the theory of professional imperialism, frames education in a way that favours Western actions and beliefs. To re-position the dominant voices in formal social work education would require elevating Aboriginal perspectives of history, as understood by applying the theory of indigenization.

Social Workers as Knowledge Filters

One of the most interesting findings was that a few of the participants felt that the lack of Aboriginal content in their mainstream programs was not a deficiency of their education. This was because they, as Aboriginal people, already held the cultural knowledge necessary to work with Aboriginal clients. This cultural knowledge allowed them to filter what they learned and apply it to a Native environment.

> "A lot of things are applicable in one way or another. But they have to be filtered through the lens of my understanding of the Aboriginal community. So it's not cut and paste. It's cut, paste into photoshop, tweak it a little bit, and then put it in and use it." (Participant 5)

> "It's coming from a Native perspective so it's not something that I have to tweak. It's my perception, all my education is my perception. So, yes, you learn it this way, but how can you do it for my people? I think I've already modified it when I was learning it, if that makes sense." (Participant 6)

> "It is [universally applicable], but only because it's filtered through me as an Aboriginal person. Knowing my history and my connection to my culture, and understanding the differences between the cultures. So my education as filtered through me is universally applicable to working with Native clients. If it was a non-Native person going through my programs I would say I don't know." (Participant 10)

For many of the participants, Western knowledge was the primary knowledge source for their education, with indigenous knowledge taking a secondary role. The participants' belief that the lack of Native-specific content was not a deficiency to their education appears to be a huge contradiction of Midgley's (2010) criticism of professional imperialism, that Western social work education does not adequately prepare social workers for working with indigenous cultures.

On the other hand, the need to filter Western knowledge also implies that the social workers are not receiving the most appropriate guidance in developing their skills. They must instead independently modify, adjust, and re-shape what they have learned to suit a different kind of situation. Participants also agreed that non-Aboriginal students would not have the same advantage and would likely find it difficult, if not impossible, to work with Aboriginal service users. Mainstream education alone is not enough – "if it wasn't filtered through the lens of me it would not be applicable" (Participant 5).

However, the value of some aspects of Western social work education to the participants does confirm Midgley's (2010) statement that Western social work does not need to be discounted outright. From this perspective it appears that the concern is more about the versatility of the education that social work students receive. Lambe's (2003) claim that Western

and indigenous knowledge can accommodate one another is also supported by this idea that Aboriginal students benefitted, at least in some way, from their mainstream education.

Aboriginal Presence

Aboriginal presence, also commented on by Westhues et al (2001) and Weaver and Congress (2009), was mentioned by many of the participants. Consistently, the representation of Aboriginal students and the presence of Aboriginal lecturers were found by the participants to have added to their education in a positive way, specifically in Native-specific programs. Participant 4 noted the benefit of having Inuit teachers, even though their program followed the university's mainstream guidelines and policies. Another noted that the presence of Aboriginal faculty members in mainstream courses meant that they were infused with an understanding of colonialism and Aboriginal concerns. Participants found the presence of Aboriginal people to be both beneficial to their education and positive to their personal experience.

> "Sitting in a room with a whole bunch of Aboriginal people understanding where we come from and who we are and moving forward. Having those Aboriginal professors made a big difference for some of the people sitting in the room, for sure." (Participant 3)

> "I really enjoyed that it was Native-specific. It was Aboriginal students and Aboriginal teachers, so the whole program was infused with understandings about Aboriginal history and different kinds of… it was just very empowering I guess. It was an empowering program." (Participant 10)

Seen through the lens of indigenization, the use of indigenous community members acting as knowledge providers is beneficial to social work students. The theory of indigenization recommends using local practitioners to develop strategies best suited to their own communities. For the participants, being able to learn from members of their own community helped strengthen their confidence and understanding, making them more effective with their clients in the long run.

On the opposite side, some of the participants spoke of how the low representation of Aboriginal students in mainstream programs made for a challenging personal experience. Participant 10, who attended both a Native-specific college program and a mainstream university program, said that: "being the only few racialized students in this mostly white group, the dynamics can sometimes feel not great". Where Aboriginal presence was weak, participants felt programs should invite-in Aboriginal facilitators: "They need to invite people in from the community who can speak about those experiences in a real way, especially when it's difficult" (Participant 5). This was previously mentioned in terms of teaching Aboriginal content to students – Aboriginal facilitators may perform better. Inviting Native instructors can have a positive impact: "They have a program that's called 'Aboriginal Perspectives' and sometimes they ask Elders to come in and sit on certain days. And we get right in there" (Participant 7).

Importance of Addressing Native Issues in Education

Without exception, all the participants agreed that it was important to address Native cultures as part of formal social work education. Aboriginal people are the largest growing demographic in Canada, and also one of the most over-represented in social services. As noted

by a few of the participants, a social worker working in nearly any capacity is almost guaranteed to provide services to a Native client at some point in their career.

> "In order to assess them properly you need to be able to connect with them properly. If you don't know who you're serving then you won't have an idea of how to help the clients." (Participant 4)

> "Because you could very well be working with those types of clients. And it's very important to know the true history of us." (Participant 1)

The participants' insistence that Aboriginal knowledge should be included as part of formal social work education can be understood through the theory of indigenization, which says that indigenous knowledge should be pushed to the forefront of social work education. For one thing, some of the participants expressed their feelings that Aboriginal people, as the original inhabitants of Canada, deserve the respect of being included in social work curriculums along with perspectives from the dominant groups of society. In reviewing the interviews it appears that the inclusion of Aboriginal content in social work education is important for both Aboriginal students and non-Aboriginal students, but for different reasons. But for both groups it prepares them for scenarios that they are all but guaranteed to come up against as professionals.

In discussing the importance of including Aboriginal perspectives in formal social work education, other interesting topics were raised. Some participants spoke about the public opinion that government-funded Native-specific social services, such as Native ceremonies afforded to inmates in federal correctional institutions, are considered a "perk" not afforded to other cultural minorities. Some considered this opinion to exist because of a lack of education. Though interesting, the parameters of this study do not allow for that particular debate to be addressed.

What is lacking in mainstream social work education?

Included in the discussion of what was useful about formal social education was the inevitable discussion about what was missing. According to the participants, this included a lack of hands-on learning; the omission of an Aboriginal worldview from curriculums and its impact on social work practice; and the creation of boundaries and relationships within an Aboriginal community. Many of the participants felt their respective educations left them unprepared in these respects.

Hands-On Learning

Many of the earlier studies reviewed in this study commented on the importance of hands-on learning. Harms et al (2011) found that textbook learning, common to mainstream social work education, did not sufficiently prepare social workers for working with Aboriginal service users. Weaver and Congress (2009) highlighted the importance of student placements and internships with Native organizations prior to graduation. Dumbrill and Green (2008) also recommended including non-text based resources in social work education. Many of the participants expressed the same feelings, not least of which was because hands-on learning was more suited to their traditional educational methods: "We're more hands-on than sitting here reading a paper and trying to learn things. The learning style is different" (Participant 3). Some felt that complex social work scenarios require more than just academic knowledge:

"The thing about social work is, you've actually got to use a whole series of different skills. You've got to know who your resources are, you've got to know who your allies are, you've got to form partnerships. They don't teach that in the books." (Participant 8)

"She [the instructor] had us do role plays, she had us do different kinds of exercises which, from my perspective, were much more useful, in terms of learning, than simply reading about it." (Participant 5)

"Unless you have more practical components with the research and materials, something very hands-on, very tangible… Like, someone who's real, who's lived this, who's worked this, who's functioning from this, it will stay as a very analytical concept." (Participant 9)

This is similar to some of the above discussion, that social work education may be overly theoretical and intellectual, missing out on the opportunity to give students a taste of the reality they'll receive once they graduate. This can be understood through the theory of professional imperialism, which criticizes the idea of the universality of modern social work theory. As indicated in the literature, and by the participants, focusing exclusively on intellectual written material does not prepare a social worker for the real life situations they will encounter. Instead, incorporating Aboriginal styles and methods of learning is encouraged, which is supported by the theory of indigenization. According to the participants, the Aboriginal community places a high value on experience and personal knowledge. This has been reflected in participants' admission that they rely heavily on personal experience when working with their clients, and is further discussed below as well.

Aboriginal Worldview

According to the participants, qualities unique to the Aboriginal worldview were not addressed in mainstream social work education. Multiple participants, however, made mention of how important it is to their social work practice. One participant referred to one's culture as being their worldview and their belief. It can be understood then that a social worker would choose to offer services in a way that is congruent to a service user's culture, by incorporating a worldview with which the client can identify.

Two of the participants made reference to a traditional value related to the Aboriginal way of life known as "the good path" or "the red road".

"The Red Road wants us to shift so we move from our heart, particularly when we're dealing with human beings. Because that's what we share with one another as human beings, we all have a heart beat. That's what makes us not different from one another." (Participant 5)

"I don't go to ceremonies, but I'm spiritual. I burn my tobacco, I talk to the creator, we smudge all the time, we follow the good path. That's traditional, following the good path. You can't work with the community and not be traditional. I think it's important in the culture, if you find people who can walk it. That's going to be the key." (Participant 6)

It is this writer's understanding that walking the good red road relates to finding harmony within oneself, the community, and the environment. As such, a Native approach to social work requires a collectivistic mindset, unlike the individualistic approach imposed on communities by Western social work. The theory of indigenization holds that social work should reflect local behaviours and practices. This requires approaching social work from a more compassionate perspective. The holistic view of social work practiced by Aboriginal social workers is not conducive to a Western framework, suggesting that the education and practice should grow from local, indigenous roots.

The most important thing in social work practice, according to one of the participants, is to approach it from the heart.

> "I hope you're the type of worker that comes from here [points to heart]. Because if you can't come from a place of compassion rather than up here [points to head]… Clients need to know it's okay to just cry. We need to be strong enough to give them that place to just cry, no matter how much it hurts us as workers to hear the pain." (Participant 9)

Coming from the heart allowed social workers to connect with their clients. Empathy is considered a positive emotion among many Aboriginal social workers; the participants felt this was not encouraged as part of their social work education. From their perspective, formal social work education maintained that social workers should be able to detach themselves from the reality of the clients' lives and should approach social work practice from a more objective standpoint. A couple participants referred to this as being "stuck in their brain". According to the literature, Western social work espouses traits of individuality, rationality, and objectivity. These strict, detached approaches to practice were not found by the participants to be conducive to their methods of helping and healing. Critics of professional imperialism would make a similar argument.

Participants also explained their deeper understanding of their clients' pain by citing a biological connection. An Aboriginal worldview maintains that pain and trauma can also be shared genetically.

> "Some of us carry that memory in every cell of our body, regardless of whether or not there's a passed-down oral history of trauma that our families have survived. And we carry that in our bodies. We may not be consciously aware of what it is, but it's there and it has an impact on our lives." (Participant 5)

> "We have blood memories, so some things may not have happened to us, but certainly we understand the pain and the hurt of other generations." (Participant 3)

> "In terms of dealing with conflict or just trying to heal a wrong that was done in the past, we use ceremonies to deal with that. And that's engrained, I believe, in our DNA." (Participant 1)

It appears that the participants' personal experiences of colonialism and generational trauma have given them a unique understanding of the pain felt experienced by their Aboriginal clients. This perspective to social work practice, that all are connected, impacts the relationships the social workers form with their clients, and the accompanying boundaries. While several of the articles reviewed above noted the close connection between Aboriginal social workers and their clients,

such as Dumbrill and Green (2008) drawing attention to the importance of inclusion and interconnectivity, very little was found concerning the belief that memories and traditions being shared genetically or biologically.

Relationships and Boundaries

Aboriginal communities tend to be small and many participants felt that they were unable to maintain the strict boundaries with their clients that mainstream social work programs expected. Many of the Aboriginal social workers interviewed live in the same neighbourhoods or on the same reserves as their clients, attend and participate in the same ceremonies, and even know each other's families. Bennett et al (2011) also discussed the unconventional character of boundaries between Aboriginal social workers and their Aboriginal clients. Many of the participants felt it was unlikely that non-Aboriginal social workers would ever interact with their clients outside of a professional environment, nor would a situation like that likely present itself.

> "The difference between me and a mainstream worker is I can't disconnect myself from the community. It's the community I live in, it feeds me too. Lots of other workers I know in the mainstream, they don't go to the places their clients are. They move in completely different circles. I don't have that option. There's only one Aboriginal community here." (Participant 5)

Participants felt as though mainstream standards for boundaries were ineffective and unsustainable. Many created their own standards, including signing contracts with clients about appropriate behaviour in the community and aligning themselves with performers at ceremonies rather than attendees. For some of the participants this helped them to keep their personal lives and their work lives separate. To look at this according to the theory of indigenization, some of the participants have developed their own tools to suit the particular needs of their community instead of trying to implement incompatible Western tools, which they find less successful. The potential for close relationships, however, could sometimes be an added benefit to the work.

> "Everybody knows everybody. It automatically gives them a level of self-esteem because they're not coming to a stranger, they're coming to somebody that they know, that they can talk to. Just because it is an outside agency that is from the government, we're still people from [the reserve] working it to meet our own people's needs." (Participant 6)

Changes to Social Work Programs

In response to what they felt was lacking from formal social work education, the participants held opinions about what changes should be made to programs. Consistent with their previous responses, as well as the existing literature, such as Dumbrill & Green (2008) and Rice-Green & Dumbrill (2005), the participants had two primary recommendations: courses providing a detailed account of Aboriginal and Canadian history, and the effects of colonialism; and the opportunity for hands-on learning, including frequent placements and internships, and community involvement.

> "I think that if that is engrained in the education of people who are studying social work, then it would definitely give them a more well-rounded perspective of

society and definitely of the Native people that they would interact with. Everybody would be better off." (Participant 1)

Having Aboriginal communities and styles of learning as the basis for knowledge indigenizes social work education. Aboriginal worldviews should be given priority. This does not require discarding Western knowledge. In this criticism of professional imperialism Midgley (2010; 2011) maintains that both streams can come together. As one participant noted:

"Even if it's a clinical program and it's family work, making sure in part of that curriculum you're going to look at indigenous ways of helping in terms of working with families. And what are certain Aboriginal dispute resolutions and circles. Integrating it into each course, ideally, would be awesome. It doesn't mean that your whole program is going to turn into an Aboriginal program, but it's respectful that this is the context that we're working in. Just approaching it like you would any other theory." (Participant 10)

Without an availability of formal training regarding Aboriginal approaches to social work practice, the participants often find themselves relying on traditional knowledge. Many of the participants stated they often turn to cultural practices when faced with a situation for which their formal education did not prepare them. In many cases, the use of cultural traditions is considered to be a best practice when working in Aboriginal communities.

Relying on Traditional Knowledge

As confirmed by the participants, Aboriginal people had their own way of dealing with community concerns and problems long before the settlers arrived. Echoing this statement, Huang and Zhang (2008), referenced earlier in relation to indigenization theory, state that social work should be seen as "an achievement of human civilization", rather than as an "invention" to be attributed to one culture and adapted by another. This perspective can also be seen in some of the participants' responses. As they explained, the imposition of Western systems of social welfare caused more damage than they did introduce benefits. Participants acknowledged that Aboriginal communities were not immune to social challenges and disruptions prior to the arrival of colonialism, but stated that the prevalence of negative social issues was never as extreme before as they are now.

"Before colonization, there was not a perfect system – there is no perfect system. But we've never had the higher rate of abuses and poverty and the issues that we have right now" (Participant 9).

As already noted earlier in the analysis, many aspects of mainstream, Western social work does not translate well to Aboriginal service users and communities. Midgley (2011) would argue that this is because of the disregard of the value of indigenous knowledge combined with colonial perceptions of superiority. Indeed, as one participant noted:

"The thing is that most of the information that we're given in social work programs is based on heterosexual, white study. So who's it really applicable to? Heterosexual, white people. Heterosexual, white males as a general rule." (Participant 5)

Holistic Approach to Social Work

In response to this, many of the Aboriginal social workers interviewed stated that they would often find themselves incorporating traditional knowledge and techniques into their social work practice to make it more applicable and appropriate to the situations in which they work. In some ways this is an unconscious move on the part of the social worker, as their cultural values are a part of who they are as individuals.

> "As social workers, and as humans, our beliefs and viewpoints ultimately affect how we work with people, and part of being a social worker is making judgements. Clinical judgments based on our knowledge and skills, but our values and beliefs and worldview still come into play." (Participant 10)

For others, approaching social work practice from a traditional and holistic perspective was paramount. Employing traditional methods was explicit and purposeful.

> "We do our work from a completely cultural perspective. Culture isn't something we add on, it's something that we do as part of the work. We use the teachings that we have culturally in order to accomplish our work, and often the work is helping our clients to access cultural activities, like sweat lodges or smudging ceremonies or drumming or whatever." (Participant 5)

> "We try to do it in a culturally appropriate manner, trying to do it holistically, so looking at the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects of an individual." (Participant 3)

> "There are different techniques that work differently that they don't have for non-Natives. When you refer to us, a cultural based, rooted program, you get further than giving them the non-Native traditional mental health or anger management." (Participant 6)

Westhues et al (2001) identified the holistic practice orientation of Canadian social work education as a strength, referring to the understanding of people in relation to social structures. A few of the participants, however, were of the opinion that mainstream social workers do not understand the subtleties of a holistic approach to social work. From their perspective, the categorization of social issues (for example, homelessness and addiction being separate issues requiring separate interventions) and the requirement of visible outcomes by mainstream social workers are incompatible with Aboriginal holistic values. Dumbrill and Green (2008) would agree with these thoughts, stating that the holistic nature of Aboriginal tools such as the Medicine Wheel are hard to grasp from a Western perspective.

In the meantime though, Aboriginal social workers often rely on best practices when working with their Aboriginal clients. Some of the most common best practices mentioned by the participants included: the use of traditional practices and ceremonies; the value of non-interference; using food as an incentive; and emphasizing listening as a tool.

Some of the most common traditional practices, as explained by the participants, include: healing on the land; art expression; the understanding of dreams and visions; and ceremonies. Healing on the land, not a practice incorporated in mainstream social work, appeared to be specifically important to Inuit and northern communities. Korhonen (2006) also noted the value of healing on the land and connecting with ancestors.

> "Because a lot of people lived on different camp sites, and one of the best things we can do is being on the land, having a chance to go down to the river where there's no television, no phones, no internet. You connect with the person and take time to be with them. For some reason it seems to have an effect, a circle compared to the four walls. I don't know why. Maybe it's part of the spiritual stuff. A lot of it has to do with being on the land where it's open. That makes a difference too." (Participant 4)

In some cases Aboriginal service users were encouraged to use their art as part of the healing process.

> "I would say 60% have some sort of artistic knowledge that they can express in their art. They express in their art. They express what they feel and what they do. And some of the art is way-out and different, but they express trauma and they express that in their art." (Participant 7)

According to this participant, different kinds of trauma would manifest itself through different types of art. Some service users choose to paint or draw, while others make drums, learn songs, or craft things out of hide. The art allows clients to express what they have gone through, the trauma they have experienced, in a personally meaningful way. It is possible that this helps them circumvent the shame mentioned previously because it does not require them to express verbally to a social worker the events they endured. Regardless, the recognition of the trauma is an important part of healing, as confirmed by Brave Heart et al (2011).

As expressed by one of the participants, dreams and visions provided clarity and guidance to individuals. They are taken seriously by the Aboriginal community, and messages are carefully deciphered. As one participant described it, clients often come to them to discuss the meanings of dreams.

> "Aboriginal people are very much into dreams and we try to decipher, to help them [the clients] decipher, their dreams. Most of the time they'll decipher them themselves. They'll come to you and say, 'I don't know what it means, but this is the dream I had'. They'll tell you and you just say to them, 'well, what do you see in this dream, what do you feel about this dream'. And they'll go on and on and they'll decipher the whole dream." (Participant 7)

The validity of dreams and visions are not readily accepted by mainstream social work, which values rational and verifiable skills and tools. However, in the case of Participant 7, he has had great success in his partnerships with mainstream agencies and their willingness to be open of the meaning of dreams. Professional relationships, along with their challenges and benefits, are further discussed below.

Finally, according to the participants, traditional ceremonies are regularly employed as part of social work practice.   This includes, but is not limited to, sweat lodges, smudging, the use of wheels, and the use of traditional medicines. The benefit to clients can be great; as one participant explained it, the use of traditions is "rewarding, soothing, and makes total sense" (Participant 6) to clients.

> "For us it's our healing in our own methods. Our own culture and ceremonies, things like that. That's a big step that the agency is taking, healing through our own traditional ways. Like sweat lodges and our own cultural practices." (Participant 2)

> "Whenever we did our self-esteem they learned how to smudge. Everybody was given a leather for their protection, so now they all want medicines. We do a Thanksgiving Address. These are things that raise your self-esteem. It's about giving them more than just what's expected through your job." (Participant 6)

Zapf (2010) described how his Native co-facilitator would begin each class with a ceremonial smudge, prayer, and affirmations. The experience helped to connect students to the academic tasks ahead and was a "profound learning experience" (Zapf 2010, p.330) for the teachers and the students.   In this case the use of traditions found validity in an academic environment, adding credibility to arguments that it should be considered a legitimate form of professional social work practice. This result would be supported by criticism of professional imperialism, as indigenous methods of teaching were found to be superior to Western methods, affirming the belief that universalism is not as attainable as mainstream social work may wish it was.

Best Practice – Non-Interference

Non-interference was offered above as an explanation as to why one participant chose not to explain the concept of generational trauma to their clients: "When families are involved with child welfare, they're not coming for [that kind of] service. It's a pretty intrusive thing" (Participant 2). Non-interference, as a value and as a style of social work practice, was expressed by other participants as well.

> "My Native clients don't know what they want. As I sit there and I listen to them, I might be able to point them in a direction that they didn't know they wanted to go in. And it's their choice, I'm not forcing them to do that, but they find out a little bit more about themselves, which is my goal." (Participant 8)

> "I can't do the work for them. They have to be able to do the work, but I'll be here to support them." (Participant 4)

> "I talk about how I live my life, to some extent. I talk about the good things in our culture that are there to support us as human beings, I talk about harm reduction, I talk about safer sex. I talk about all of those things in a very genuine sort of way. And hopefully that let's people know that I come from a non-judgmental perspective." (Participant 5)

Non-interference was also noted by Weaver (1997) as being an Aboriginal value that social workers should respect. Weaver (1997) stated that interfering in the lives of others is often considered to be disrespectful and inappropriate within some Aboriginal communities, and that non-interference can be a common style of parenting, for example. To non-Aboriginal people this method can appear neglectful, while the intention is rather to allow children to explore the world and learn their own lessons. One participant described a situation they had as an outreach worker with an Aboriginal client. The social worker would spend time at Native agencies and with the clients, without identifying themselves as a social worker. When one client finally struck up a conversation and learned of the capacity in which the participant was there, the client expressed disbelief and complemented the social worker on being so "seamless". According to the participant, this non-interference approach was appreciated by the clientele.

Best Practice – Food as Incentive

Despite non-interference being a popular philosophy among many of the participants, this is not to suggest that they do not want to encourage their clients to change their circumstances for the better. In order to accomplish that, many of the participants stated that they use food as an incentive for clients to attend or pursue counselling and programming.

"Sometimes they [prison inmates] come for the food, sometimes they come just to get out of their cell. If they're not part of the ceremonies on the Native grounds then they have to stay in their cell, so even though they don't want to participate they can still come out. We try and get them to participate, but they don't always. Sometimes they fake it till they make it so that they can come out." (Participant 7)

"Food is a great ice breaker, right? You want to do education, provide food!" (Participant 5)

"If a kid's sitting there hungry they're not going to learn, so food is a big part of our alternative school. We feed them morning snack, we make sure they have a lunch. And when the kids are coming in after school there's a hot dinner for them." (Participant 3)

Part of this relates to the fact that many Aboriginal service users live in poverty, suffer from homelessness, or are unemployed. Providing food fulfils a basic need for many of the clients. The goal, according to the participants, is that the clients will also see the benefits of attending services at the same time. In some cases they do. In terms of the previous literature, the use of food was not mentioned.

Best Practice - Listening

Finally, the practice of listening was considered to be a best practice among the participants. Participants in the Bennett et al (2011) study noted that listening was an important skill when working with Aboriginal service users, as did the participants in this research. According to many of them, simply allowing a client to vent can be very effective, both in terms of the client's welfare and in the relationship building process.

"The love and respect and compassion are the most important tools. The education, the placements, your own experience go so far, but your respect, compassion, love, and understanding, those are the strongest tools you're going to have. Just listening, hearing, being there, letting them cry." (Participant 9)

"Listening to them. Don't put words in their mouths and don't finish their sentences for them. A lot of people seem to think that specific questions are going to give you the answers. Not even close. Specific questions just give you a narrow, narrow view, but when you take the time out to sit back and listen… you'll find that there's a pattern they've followed in order to get where they're at today." (Participant 8)

"Listening to their story. I think a lot of them feel they haven't been heard. And certainly helping them identify why they act, or why they're the way they are, because they don't understand that." (Participant 3)

The act of listening is certainly not foreign to mainstream social workers. Huang and Zhang (2008) argue that mainstream social workers value may of the same skills as indigenous social workers, including listening. From the perspective of the participants, however, the reasoning behind listening is different. Some of the participants felt that mainstream social workers listen with the intention of assessing a situation, finding causation for behaviours, and to subsequently offer advice on what they consider to be an appropriate lifestyle. Aboriginal social workers, on the other hand, feel they have no agenda and want their clients to feel comfortable expressing themselves in their own time.

When Unprepared

As a follow-up to questions concerning best practices for working with Native clients, the participants were also asked about how they would approach a situation with a client for which their formal education did not prepare them. According to the participants, this was a common occurrence. All the clients considered honesty to be paramount. They agreed that, if they were unsure of how to proceed in any given situation, they would promise to return to their clients at a later time with a suitable response. According to the participants, this would often entail consulting with a more experienced colleague or conducting their own research. The service users who participated in Harms et al's (2011) study believed that honesty was an important trait found in effective social workers. This suggests that the participants in this study are acting responsibly when they are honest with their clients about not having all the answers.

"It's about being truthful that I'm being upfront with the client saying, 'I'm not sure, but let's look at what we can do to assist you'. Certainly, looking at 'you're beyond my capabilities, so we need to include someone that can best meet your needs'. So being upfront and honest with them, absolutely." (Participant 3)

As with best practices, some participants said they would rely on traditional knowledge rather than clinical social work skills if necessary:

"I guess traditional healing. Those kinds of things that we didn't learn really in school. Going back to my own community or going out to places to find it for my own self, but not in the education system." (Participant 2)

"That's one of the benefits of being an Aboriginal person and being connected to the Aboriginal community. Through the years and through these experiences, I learned more and more about indigenous cultures and indigenous ways of being or helping." (Participant 10)

Some other participants noted that they would call in an Elder to help deal with the situation. The positive influence of Elders has been noted in many previous studies. Harms et al (2011), Korhonen (2006), Martel et al (2011), and Bennett et al (2011) all discuss Elders as being respected, knowledgeable, moral leaders in the Aboriginal community, that have the ability to wield considerable influence.

"I would bring in an Elder to support me. An Elder that's used to doing social work, or counselling, or has done therapeutic work with people before. I would probably even bring someone who's got spiritual connections to a higher power. Elders have the most knowledge, the most patience, and most love and understanding of mistakes. It makes them easier to talk to." (Participant 4)

"When they say 'this is what I feel' or 'this is what I'm going through' we can say we understand. And we do understand because some of that we've experienced and we decided to make those changes in our life. It gave us now the opportunity to help somebody else to make that change." (Participant 7)

Participant 7, who is employed as an Elder by their organization, advised that they were hired based on their personal experience rather than their education. Achieving respect as an Elder is not contingent on having a certain kind of education or academic knowledge. From this perspective, being qualified to impart knowledge on others does not require certification from an institution of higher learning. For Aboriginal people, life experience is considered an education in itself. Looking at this from the theoretical perspective to professional imperialism, it supports the criticism that Western standards are not appropriate for indigenous communities.

According to Participant 7, Aboriginal service users appreciate talking to them because the Elders have often had personal experience with what the clients are going through. Others noted that Elders hold considerable influence in their communities. This dilemma of education versus experience is further discussed below, along with the imperialistic notion that education is superior to experience.

Importance of Native-Specific Social Services

Finally there was consistency among the participants as to the importance of the availability and provision of Native-specific social services. For many, they felt that their clients would likely not attend mainstream services "because there's such a mistrust historically" (Participant 8).

"It is crucial. Many of our people won't go to mainstream agencies because of racism. I think it's absolutely crucial because it establishes a certain amount of

trust right from the get-go. A certain amount of openness in both directions."
(Participant 5)

As an extension of this, many participants felt that the opportunity to attend Native-specific services gave their Aboriginal clients a sense of safety, comfort, and understanding that they might not receive at a mainstream agency. Participants were also secure in the fact that they could provide services whose standards were easily equal to mainstream services.

> "As an Aboriginal health centre we still have the same high standards as another health care agency in terms of our credentials and our practices with people. But as an Aboriginal agency we are very safe, very comfortable, and it's very supportive. I know that my way of being is supported there." (Participant 10)

> "Personally, I think that anything that can strengthen somebody's identity and give them some kind of guidance within the scope, I think is the most important thing you can give to somebody." (Participant 1)

> "We're the largest growing demographic. I think we need to start looking at how can we help our own people. How can we take some of that stigma off of our people and what can we do to show that resiliency and emerge a stronger, healthier society." (Participant 3)

This last statement is in line with Midgley's (2010) criticism of the way social work has been imposed upon indigenous communities. Critics who see social work education and practice as part of the colonial structure would support indigenous communities being provided the opportunity to seize responsibility of their own social services. The opinion of theorists and researchers such as Weaver (1997), and of the participants, is that Aboriginal communities are comprised of strong people who are capable of creating solutions to their problems independently. Aboriginal communities are not constantly in need of Western social workers to swoop in and care for them, as though the Aboriginal people are "nothing" (Participant 9).

However, some participants were quick to note that despite the availability of Native-specific resources, and what they consider to be the positive impact of these resources, one cannot assume that what an Aboriginal person needs is an Aboriginal service provided by an Aboriginal person.

> "First ask the client. Do you want to go with your own culture, or outside of your own culture? What's more comfortable, what's more comfortable for the specific client? Sometimes they want to go within their own culture, sometimes they don't." (Participant 9)

> "A lot of people are more church-spiritual than they are culture and tradition-spiritual." (Participant 3)

> "Maybe you think this program will help them. But what if that's an assumption that you're making because you think that's what would be good for them as an Aboriginal person, but really you have to understand each individual person and what's going to be good for them, and resisting the urge to universalize." (Participant 10)

This idea that Aboriginal people may choose to refuse Native-specific services in favour of mainstream services relates to some of the previously discussed concepts, such as the mainstream perception of Aboriginal homogeneity and service users' feelings of shame. It has already been established that Aboriginal people are not a monolithic group of people devoid of any diversity. The existence of a Native-specific agency does not automatically imply that it is perfectly suited to an individual's unique heritage, language, culture, or relationship with their community.

Shame, which participants described earlier as a resulting effect of generational trauma, also plays a role in some service users' decision to refuse Native-specific services. As noted by some of the participants, space and resources on reserves are often scarce, meaning that many services are located in the same building. For example, sexual abuse counsellors might hold sessions in the same location as the social welfare office, the addictions counsellors, and the family welfare mediators. In small communities, someone attending a service they would rather keep private could easily be spotted by a neighbour. Instead, they choose to simply not seek out services.

> "Maybe the community is small and they have a family member or someone they know who works in that organization and they don't want to go there because they're uncomfortable. Maybe it's something like that." (Participant 10)

A few participants noted the naivety of mainstream social workers in assuming that all Aboriginal people would benefit from Native-specific services. This challenge was mentioned above when discussing failed attempts at providing cultural education. To see this through the lens of professional imperialism, mainstream social workers automatically referring Aboriginal clients to Native social services is another assumption that the Western social worker knows best, regardless of their intentions. One participant reflected on a classroom experience that illustrated this kind of professional imperialism:

> "I remember having a classmate once in my BSW [Bachelor of Social Work], and she was giving a presentation and there were some red flags. It was a race class. I remember asking the question, 'you have this Native client, what are you going to do with them?' Her example was 'I'll send them to this Native program', like that addresses it. You can't just assume that sending them to some Native program is what they need." (Participant 10)

Making referrals without consulting the individual strips the client of their agency and self-determination. As noted by some of the participants, some Aboriginal people may feel more closely connected to mainstream society than Native society, similar to how the children of immigrant parents sometimes feel they have more in common with the country they grew up in than in their parents' homeland. This has been reflected in the literature, specifically where van Gaalen (2009) noted that one should not assume that there is a uniform Aboriginal approach to social services, and that not all Aboriginal people benefit from services in the same way. Similarly, mainstream services are not presumed to fail if applied to select Aboriginal cases.

Dilemmas

Many of the participants admitted that they experienced dilemmas in the process of their duties. Though not all the participants agreed on the dilemmas, or experienced them to same degree, the most common were: balancing lifestyles; partnerships with mainstream agencies; the "tunnel vision" of mainstream social work education; the importance of the social worker's heritage; students and clients as teachers; and the debate of experience versus education.

Balance

Not all of the participants expressed experiencing a dilemma in combining their formal education and their traditional knowledge:

> "I think I'm able to use both cultures. We're very respectful of both, making them talk, not rushing them. I that's something that connects both the cultures – being patient, taking time with the client, and having the confidence that they will make an effort." (Participant 4)

Those who did experience dilemmas faced different kinds of dilemmas. The challenge for some was combining mainstream education, expectations, and values with their traditional way of life.

> "On the surface those are two different things. The challenge is walking that line – maintaining your culture, maintaining who you are, your identity, but at the same time educating yourself and surviving in society with a career and just trying to have that balance." (Participant 1)

> "If you're a victim of a crime, the offender will go in front of a council of their peers [referring to restorative justice practices] – 'Why would you do that? Do you feel bad?' Over here they think that's so stupid, but in our community it's an embarrassment. So, do you go with the embarrassment or do you charge them with a crime? It's the same thing, different values." (Participant 6)

Others found that the dilemmas lie within their bureaucratic responsibilities.

> "For example, if I got a job in mainstream child protection I could see how that would probably really start to create an issue for me. I think it would be hard for me, when I'm working with Aboriginal families. I have a feeling that I would probably come across a wall, in terms of trying to help them in a way that I see they can be helped. I think in that type of mainstream agency there's not a lot of room for indigenous ways of being unless it fits their legislation or their bureaucracy, which it doesn't necessarily." (Participant 10)

> "You have to learn to walk in both those worlds. And how do you do that balance? I think we have to conform somewhat to mainstream society. It's not just about working with the people – if we get a pot of money we have to be accountable for that money. We still have to do what we need to do, but I still need to report back [to the funders]. And there are some staff who feel that's not our way, and I said 'well, it is if we want to be accountable and we want to

continue receiving that money. So I need your numbers'. And then I say, 'Do you want me to pay you in beads? Because I can pay you in beads if you want to really be traditional'." (Participant 3)

This same challenge was highlighted by Westhues et al (2001) as a weakness of social work education in Canada. In that study respondents felt that their extensive bureaucratic responsibilities detracted from their professional autonomy and social work values. Some of the participants of this study appeared to accept bureaucratic responsibilities as being part and parcel with the job. Other participants felt similarly to Westhues et al's (2001) respondents, that the bureaucracy of the job was conflicted with their values and created unnecessary challenges to the job.

Issues surrounding funding came up in other interviews as well. Two of the participants were employed by government agencies, and many of the other participant workplaces received government funding. This meant that many of them were required to keep records or provide services to certain demographics based on government standards and requests. For some, this kind of on-going colonial presence, as well as the designation of physical boundaries, created immense problems. Even Native-specific services were not entirely free to conduct their work as they saw fit because the bulk to funding came from mainstream funders. While a crucial aspect of social service provision, this research does not allow for a deeper exploration surrounding boundaries and funding.

Partnerships

Many of the participants described dilemmas in forming partnerships with the mainstream, both in regards to the education they received and as part of the profession. A couple of the participants, however, described the positive aspects of partnering with mainstream services, and their attempts to use partnerships as a way to combat prejudice.

"I feel very fortunate because when I deal with psychology or psychiatry, they're always very open. They're very open to discuss and they really try to understand our beliefs. When I go with a client, they try to be realistic in their beliefs, and they try to understand where we're coming from. We work together very well. We get calls from them all the time – 'Will you go and see so-and-so because he's having a problem. They won't talk about it with us, but they want to talk to you'." (Participant 7)

"I think it's been a big thing about creating relationships with mainstream service providers so that they know who to call, so they're not just calling reception and saying 'uh, who do I talk to?'" (Participant 2)

"I carry a bundle [of supplies] for work with the Aboriginal offenders, and I used to lay that bundle out on the table at the change of shift. We'd answer questions and we'd talk a little bit for those that were coming in that were interested about it. We got a very good reception." (Participant 7)

Despite the unavoidable frustrations some of them felt in trying to work with mainstream agencies, some of the participants recognized the eventual benefits that would come from working together.

"I remember being in that forum and sometimes, as Aboriginal people expressing our concerns, it's hard to put away that frustration, when we've had such difficult relations with some people and areas, or just Canada and the government in general. It's hard sometimes to put that aside, to put those frustrations aside, and to be patient and see that they are ignorant, but it's not in a negative way. They just don't know. They're here because they want to know and they want to help. We have to try to come to the same level of understanding." (Participant 10)

Other participants talked about the resistance they felt from mainstream organizations in their unwillingness to compromise with Aboriginal groups or to respect Aboriginal values.

"I worked for another Native organization before, where we worked in the school boards, so we had a program that worked in the public and the Catholic school boards. And that was a big barrier for us because we're working with mainstream institutions. We did a lot of cultural programming in the schools, like just to smudge in the schools or bring some of our traditions in. It's a big barrier. They don't have any understanding of our culture and history." (Participant 2)

"If we actually want to do a proper service, then we should have four offices in each of the other jurisdictions so people would know I'm here, come talk to me. When you want to talk and you get the courage to talk, that's when you have to go." (Participant 6)

"I think that in the grand list of ethics to which the college [referring to the professional association] aspires to have all social workers and all social service workers adhere to is a great idea. I think it needs to be operationalized in a slightly different way." (Participant 5)

The majority of the participants in this research work for Aboriginal-specific services, implying that their mandate and policies are more conducive to an Aboriginal way of learning and working. Despite being supported in their environment, it appears that many of the participants continued to face challenges as a profession. According to the theory of professional imperialism, this resistance from mainstream social work to accept indigenous perspectives would be considered to be an on-going colonial influence. Critics of this kind of colonial imposition would reject the idea that Western values are superior. Askeland and Payne (2006), for example, called for the need for cultural diversity in social work education and practice, as they considered universalism to be unrealistic.

While the dilemmas related to partnerships with mainstream agencies do not relate entirely to the merit of their education, it indicates that the Western values are still strongly enforced as part of the profession. It also leads to a larger conversation that if occupational requirements do not adapt along with social workers' education, the impact of the latter has little value if it cannot be implemented.

"Tunnel Vision"

Similar to the rigidity mentioned in relation to building partnerships, some of the participants also spoke of the "tunnel vision" of their mainstream colleagues. Some of the

participants suggested that this narrow-minded kind of approach is incompatible with their Aboriginal values. As mentioned above, many of the participants advised that they prefer to address social issues from a holistic perspective that includes an individual's physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional health at the same time. They did not feel that this perspective was shared by their mainstream counterparts.

> "Sometimes they can be so tunnel vision, only seeing one aspect and not seeing these other things that could be positive, or they could spin it in a different way." (Participant 10)

> "Sometimes mainstream service providers have a purpose and they can't go outside the box. They're more narrow-minded, working in silos. We're trying to… we've got such a gamut of services, and trying to work them together." (Participant 3)

At least two of the participants, one who studied in a Native branch of social work education and one who studied in a mainstream college program, referred specifically to the term "silos" as a popular practice method in current social work education. This approach recommends individualizing a person's problems and addressing one concern at a time, effectively storing them in separate "silos". The very nature of this approach appears to be in conflict with a holistic Aboriginal worldview. Seen through the lens of professional imperialism, this is again another form of oppressive colonial influence. The individualistic nature of mainstream social work is in conflict with the values of community and inter-connectivity, which were highlighted as important to Aboriginal groups by both Dumbrill and Green (2008) and Zapf (1999). To dismiss these values in favour of Western values, which mainstream social work often assumes to be superior, is to dismiss the value of Aboriginal knowledge.

Social Worker's Heritage & Cultural Competence

Just about all of the participants felt that it made a significant difference to their Aboriginal clients that they were also Aboriginal. The participants found that clients were more relaxed, more open, and more engaged when working with someone of the same cultural background.

> "They're very thankful that they do have somebody they can relate to, somebody that's from the community, or from 'the rez' as they say, somebody that understands the uniqueness of our culture. It kind of breaks down those walls that you could normally have to work a little harder at." (Participant 1)

> "I think it plays a big part. I think that's just the legacy, how people have been treated. Not saying that non-Native can't work with us, but I think it does make a big difference." (Participant 2)

> "I think a non-Native would have a hard time. Not being disrespectful, but it's easier when you're talking to one of your own. You can make the association in a different manner. It's the same thing, whether it happens over here or it happens over here, but they will see it as they're being judged." (Participant 6)

"Being part of the culture and having a bit more understanding and familiarity with our issues we're, I think, a bit more sensitive to being able to work with that family in a way that's culturally safe. We understand a bit more where they're coming from." (Participant 10)

The reasoning for the Native mistrust of social workers has been outlined in detail in previous sections of this study, and was repeated in much of the literature. Brave Heart et al (2011) noted the difficulty of some dealing with generational trauma to build trust and relationships. Weaver and Congress (2009) similarly discussed the injustices perpetrated by Western social workers against Aboriginal communities. The way in which Aboriginal social workers can identify with their clients and make them feel more comfortable also offers support to initiatives aimed at recruiting more Aboriginal representation

One participant was of the opinion that non-Aboriginal social workers would more often than not be ineffective with Aboriginal clients, stating that mainstream social workers tend "to be very aggressive in their approach". The participant also felt, however, that they would be equally as ineffective as an Aboriginal social worker with a non-Aboriginal client – "I can't direct a white person in any direction because I don't know where they're coming from" (Participant 8). Others were of a different opinion, believing that non-Aboriginal social workers had the potential to be very skilled at working with Native clients. The understanding was that cultural heritage does not need to be the deciding factor in a competent working relationship.

"For non-Aboriginal people working with Aboriginal people, it's fine that you have a different background, and it's not like you're going to be less effective than I will because you come from different backgrounds. But I think the best you can do, if you're working with a lot of Aboriginal clients, is really just taking that time to learn." (Participant 10)

"I think there is a track record for that, for people getting involved with different cultures, fully embracing it." (Participant 1)

"Non-Aboriginal workers can be just as effective as Aboriginal workers if they get it. And getting it has nothing to do with your brain. It's like anybody can be trained to be a counsellor, or a social worker. Very few people have a gift for counselling." (Participant 5)

These participants felt that some of the most important qualities of a social worker included patience, understanding, and compassion, all of which could trump an individual's cultural heritage. Respondents in Harms et al's (2011) research also made reference to many desirable qualities held by social workers, though they did not mention culture. One participant in this study referred to a high degree of self-awareness as being important for non-Aboriginal social workers working with Aboriginal clients, which is supported by Bennett et al (2011).

"If I'm aware of my own culture and I learn how to be comfortable with that, and understand how it colours my view of other people then I create a situation where (…) I can say, not that you're different from me, but I'm really different from you. Doesn't that give us more of an opportunity to learn from one another?" (Participant 5)

As a companion to this discussion, many participants brought up the idea of cultural sensitivity, cultural competence and cultural safety. Some felt that learning about cultural competence as part of social work education helped social workers to be more prepared for working with Aboriginal service users.

"I think there has to be a basis in what you need to know [as part of social work], but put in cultural awareness, whichever culture you're going to be dealing with. If I walked into an Ojibwe community, they have different traditions and different values than the Mohawks. It would be a struggle for me, but I would be okay because I have my basis for social work. You have to have that extra class about cultural sensitivity." (Participant 6)

"Not that they're [Aboriginal service users] getting treated any differently, but at least you have the understanding of what that individual is and how that inter-generational trauma has impacted them and how to work with them." (Participant 3)

Other participants felt that the idea of cultural competence was either misleading, that it did not prepare social workers for working with culturally diverse clients the way it claimed to, or even that the idea of cultural competence was complete nonsense.

"I always don't like the work 'competence' – it sounds like you can just learn about someone's culture and then be competent enough to work with them. Almost like you take this training and then you're fine." (Participant 10)

"We don't have to waste our time becoming culturally competent, culturally sensitive, culturally aware. Because all we do when we go through that tap dance is we replace a very flawed set of assumptions for a slightly less flawed set of assumptions." (Participant 5)

Weaver (1997) referred to cultural competence as being an important part of formal social work education. In her research, cultural competence referred to self-reflection and awareness, developing sensitivity to other cultures, and building respect for service users. These are traits that some of the participants in this research referred to as being important qualities found in effective social workers. In conjunction with Weaver's (1997) research, this suggests that cultural competence would be an important aspect in preparing non-Aboriginal social workers to working with Aboriginal clients. However, one participant referred to the importance of a social worker "getting it", meaning that a good social worker will use their intuition and their natural ability to their advantage. The participant spoke of the difference between knowledge and understanding and the two not being synonyms of one another. From this perspective, some of the participants feel that classroom education will never prepare social work students for working with Aboriginal clients, regardless of how in-depth it may be.

One participant raised the point that non-Aboriginal people can work as "allies" to the Native community. They discussed the important role their boss plays in the community, despite not being Native themselves:

"She's done a lot of good work in our community and has a good rapport in our community, as a woman of colour and working with lots of different immigrant

communities before coming to our health centre. She's really good for it even though she may not be Aboriginal herself. She's someone that we, as an indigenous people, recognize as an ally. She's a good helper." (Participant 10)

The participant also explained that allies to Aboriginal people cannot identify themselves as allies, but must be identified, or chosen, by the community. As such, the Aboriginal community chooses what is important to them and what they consider to be a meaningful contribution to their welfare. Indigenous knowledge is given primary authority, as it would be in the indigenization of social work. According to Gray and Coates (2010b), proponents of indigenization, ways of addressing social issues should be appropriate to a community's demands and needs. By having the authority to determine who can or should be an active helper in their communities, Aboriginal people are able to guide social work practice according to their own values and beliefs.

Students as Teachers

The use of Aboriginal social work students as teachers in the classroom was mentioned by two of the participants. One considered it to be a positive thing, that they were able to share their knowledge with their less well-informed classmates.

"Even in my research class my professor invited me, if I wanted to do that one piece of the curriculum, to teach about or sharing about indigenous research processes. So I did a power point covering that part of the curriculum, which I didn't mind because I have some experience in doing Aboriginal research from before." (Participant 10)

The other participant saw the reliance on an Aboriginal student for information in response to the lack of Native representation as a negative attribute.

"The challenge with being pretty much the only Aboriginal student in the class is, just like if you're the only Aboriginal client that a social worker has, you're expected to provide all the education that other people are lacking." (Participant 5)

This participant commented that it made the learning and counselling processes "counter-productive". When uninformed faculty rely on a student to educate the class, the Aboriginal student is being denied the opportunity to learn. And again, it implies a Western assumption that all Aboriginal people are experts on their own culture. Considering the above discovery that many of the participants first learned about generational trauma in an educational setting, this would be a very misguided assumption.

One of the participants made special mention of what they considered to be the difference between culture and tradition. According to them culture refers to beliefs and worldviews, while tradition refers to actual practices. Self-identification with a certain culture does not require one to participate in specific traditions or speak certain languages. A student who identifies culturally as Aboriginal does not necessarily have vast knowledge about history or ceremonies. In fact, one participant advised that they were not informed of their Aboriginal heritage until they were eighteen years of age and had to discover the culture for themselves as an adult.

Experience versus Education

The debate of experience versus education has already been touched upon in terms of the lack of hands-on learning in formal social work education, and in how Aboriginal social workers address situations that their formal education did not prepare them for. From some of the participants, this writer was given the impression that personal experience was often valued over formal degrees and diplomas among both Aboriginal practitioners and Aboriginal clients. This is similar to one participant's feelings about the difference between being knowledgeable and actually understanding, mentioned in relation to the debate surrounding the value of cultural competence. Many of the participants made reference to how Aboriginal communities have always valued experience, the respect for Elders being evidence of this. Attendance rate of Aboriginal people at institutions of higher learning are very low. According to Statistics Canada (2006), only 7% of First Nations adults have a university degree, compared to 25% of non-Aboriginal adults.

A few of the participants stated that, while education was not necessarily in vain, it did not mean that those holding the degrees were qualified, in their opinion.

> "I've worked with lots of social workers who have all kinds of paperwork on the wall, and social service workers, who don't have a clue how to actually connect with their clients. Because they're too busy making sure that they maintain good boundaries." (Participant 5)

One participant described how them education has given her clout in the professional community, but has done little else to enhance the work they does with her clients.

> "Just having the degree itself opened the door. Other than that, it just built up a confidence of being able to apply for the jobs. It helped develop… well, my cynicism comes out for that, because the real healing you can only do as a person. It depends on you, how you are, where you lived, what you've come through, how you are as a person, and who you are as a worker." (Participant 9)

Another stated that they decided to get a university degree because they were tired of their work being devalued as compared to more educated colleagues, sometimes to the detriment of the client.

> "I was just so sick of having social workers doing social work with my people and me having to be called a social assistant. They were always given promotions because they have the paper, but they don't have the skills. I just got fed up with them not knowing the culture while they practiced social work and shaming the people they were working with, shaming their own clients." (Participant 4)

Historically, personal experience has been very highly respected within the Aboriginal community. Elders, which some participants said they would turn to when they needed guidance with their clients, are chosen because they are experienced. As revealed in the literature review, including Korhonen (2006) and Martel et al (2011), Elders are mentors, guides, and keepers of traditional knowledge. As described above, to be respected as an Elder one does require a formal education. Their life experience is deemed more valuable.

"That's how Elders are chosen in the community. They're people who can help from life experiences. 'I've experienced what you're going through and this is what I did. This is what I did to straighten my life out and make changes, and if I can help you we'll work together on this and I'll walk you through what you need to do to make that change if you're willing to do that'. As far as helping somebody else, it's because of the experience." (Participant 7)

The debate of experience versus education has important implications. From the perspective of professional imperialism, the demands of employers for social workers to have credentials according to their standards are, once again, an imposition of Western values on Aboriginal communities. The mainstream community, by demanding certain credentials, implies that they know what is best for the indigenous people. The feeling of some of the participants that their more traditional methods, such as working from the heart and including Elders in finding solutions, suggests that a formal education may not be as vital as the mainstream would like to assume. Though independently run Native-specific agencies are free to hire whomever they please, many Aboriginal service users must still use services from non-Aboriginal, government funded agencies and organizations. This may include hospitals, government welfare offices, child protection services, and probation services, where educational requirements are very strict.

On the other hand, as stated by some of the participants, the world has changed. For the Aboriginal people, the social environment in which their communities existed shifted with the arrival of colonial powers. The trauma that exists today is a new phenomenon with which the Aboriginal community did not need to deal with historically. A few of the participants stated that it may be in Aboriginal people's best interests to seek out skills that were previously foreign to them to help them deal with equally foreign situations. Not to mention participants claims that some of what they learned in mainstream social work education has been useful.

Regardless, as one participant put it: "If you value one more than the other, you lose out. You need to balance it, but you also need to not devalue one over the other" (Participant 9). This is consistent with Midgley's (2011) claim that both Western and local knowledge can complement one another. Working as a team may be the best approach to providing social services holistically so that all parties can exist in harmony.

DISCUSSION

This writer set out to explore how Aboriginal social workers apply their formal education to working with their Aboriginal clients in a culturally appropriate setting. Sub-questions included which aspects of formal education were the most useful, do Native social workers find themselves relying on traditional knowledge, and what kinds of dilemmas do they face when transferring knowledge from one community to the other. Ten Aboriginal social workers of various educational and experience backgrounds were interviewed. These interviews were then analyzed using thematic analysis, and through the help of theories of professional imperialism and the indigenization of social work as a theoretical framework.

The findings of this study suggest that for Aboriginal social workers, the duties they perform are more than just part of a job. They describe a professional stance where there is no clear separation between work and life. Their social lives and their professional lives intertwine, which is unusual and unique in comparison to mainstream social workers. The participants spoke

of a shared history and bond between them and their clients that they feel mainstream social workers cannot understand or relate to. Aboriginal social workers tend to feel an emotional connection to their clients that, while responsible, contradicts popular practice. The trauma inflicted upon Native communities by colonialism impacted Aboriginal people as a whole, meaning that both service providers and service users have first hand experience as to what this really means. Mainstream cultural groups in Canada cannot say they have the same kind of shared collective history.

The participants of this study have explained that, coming from a place of such deep understanding of their clients' needs, Aboriginal social workers work to infuse the services they provide with Native values and beliefs. They do this to ensure that their clients feel comfortable and safe in an environment that supports and understands them. Aboriginal people are the largest growing demographic in Canada, so ignoring their particular needs cannot be an option. Both the participants and the earlier research suggests that formal mainstream social work education does not adequately prepare students to work with Native clients, despite social workers' responsibility to offer competent services in response to the unique social, cultural, and political environment of an individual's needs.

It is interesting that Aboriginal social workers consider themselves to be effective despite an insufficient education because their traditional and cultural knowledge fills the gaps, a luxury not available to mainstream social workers working with Aboriginal clients. Considering the importance of traditional and cultural healing, teaching, beliefs and ceremonies in the work that they do, as has been described by the reviewed literature and the participants, it can be concluded that an Aboriginal worldview deserves to be given a position of respect within the social work community. Indigenizing social work for Aboriginal people de-centres Western knowledge and prioritizes indigenous knowledge when it comes to materials produced, educational content and style of learning, and method of practice. Rather than simply criticizing the ineffectiveness of Western social work in addressing Native concerns, indigenizing social work in Canada would mean allowing First Nations, Inuit and Metis educators to consult on, develop, and provide social work education relating to their own communities. Considering the responses suggesting that addressing the effects of generational trauma requires the inclusion of cultural practices, it makes sense to indigenize Aboriginal social work in Canada.

There also appears to be a need to instil within non-Aboriginal social workers an appreciation of Aboriginal worldviews. For the same reasons stated above, regardless of their field of employment, all social workers are likely to come in contact with Native clients. In the Canadian context, this is unavoidable. As seen in the results, the level to which non-Aboriginal social workers are ignorant about Native history, culture, and concerns is staggering. According to the participants, many Aboriginal people are equally as uninformed about their history. Some have internalized a Western version of historical events that are not necessarily true to reality. Non-Aboriginal social workers need to understand these issues, and how they unconsciously play a role in the on-going colonialism of Native groups, in order to appreciate why Aboriginal clients don't trust non-Aboriginal social workers. It is the nature of social workers to seek to address their clients' needs from a cultural, political, and social position, but without Aboriginal-specific knowledge and skills, non-Aboriginal social workers are not capable of providing them with the best possible service.

The imperialistic quality of social work education and the profession not only has a negative impact on service users, but on social work students as well. Statistics show that Aboriginal people are over-represented in almost all social issues. In this way it is clear that the imposition of Western values has not had a positive effect on Aboriginal communities. Continuing to insist on educating social workers using individualistic, clinical, Western

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knowledge constricts students' abilities once they enter the work force. By disregarding Aboriginal knowledge, mainstream social work is contradicting their own values of offering competent, suitable, and non-judgmental services to clients. Introducing non-Aboriginal students to Aboriginal worldviews gives them a basis from which to work more effectively with their Aboriginal clients.

Recommendations, based on the information found in the interviews, would be to offer mandatory classes offering an introduction to Aboriginal cultures to all college and university social work students. Similar to this, and based on the opinions of the participants, another recommendation is to encourage community involvement in the provision of Aboriginal knowledge, as well as securing practical placements for social work students at Native-specific agencies. In terms of the social work profession, recommendations would include re-evaluating mainstream standards and codes of conduct to better reflect boundaries and relationships between Aboriginal social workers and their Aboriginal clients. A re-evaluation of credentials should also include the recognition of personal experience and how it can be a positive addition to a person's professional qualifications.

Despite the discovery of many interesting results, this writer also came across other areas that would require further research. These included the colonial influence on funding and physical boundaries, and ways of addressing diversity within Native groups as part of formal social work education. These were all mentioned briefly in the analysis as interesting avenues to explore that were mentioned by the participants. Some participants also talked about whether or not they would take a different approach with an Aboriginal client than they would with a non-Aboriginal client, and vice versa. On this matter there was no consensus. Unfortunately, these findings did not directly impact of research questions and this writer made the decision to omit them from the final product.

This writer would also consider ways in which the research could have been improved, some of which has already been mentioned in the methodology section above. It would have been preferable to include the Aboriginal community in the design and analysis of the research. It would also have been preferable to nurture stronger relationship with the participants, had the circumstances allowed for it. In hindsight, this writer also wishes that the time constraints had allowed for second and third interviews to be conducted with the participants, allowing for further topics to be explored. A more in-depth study would have also included interviews with non-Aboriginal social workers about what challenges they encounter when working with their Aboriginal clients, and Aboriginal service users' opinions what they considered to be effective counselling and programming. These views would give a wider understanding of how to address the effects of generational trauma from all sides.

The theories provided a suitable framework in which to understand the participants' opinions and beliefs about formal social work education and practice. In some instances, however, the theoretical perspectives could not explain some of the participants' statements. For example, the participants' opinion that their personal history can have such a strong impact on their ability to perform as competent social workers implies that this may also be true in other cultural communities as well. Could a student from Africa or South America, for example, similarly apply their Western education to their home communities, using their local cultural understanding as a filter for the information? Should this be accurate, it challenges the idea of indigenization of social work, where it is believed that indigenous knowledge should be the primary knowledge source. If indigenous groups can so easily apply Western, mainstream values and knowledge to a local context, then what need is there to de-centre Western structures? The

theoretical perspectives of professional imperialism and indigenization of social work were unable to provide a framework in which these questions could be answered.

Despite the presumed clarity with which this study's results seem to appear, there is danger in swinging too far in either direction. Both perspectives are ethnocentric in their approach, though this is not necessarily a fault. Both Western and indigenous social work is developed within a certain social and economic climate with the intention of serving a specific population, in response to their singular attitudes and beliefs. Both groups also believe that they are providing the best and most relevant services to their respective communities. To abandon one completely in favour of the other defeats the purpose of a multicultural society and living in harmony with one's neighbour.

Separation and alienation has the potential of resulting in a repeat of historical injustice. Instead, it is recommended that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal groups cooperate with each other. Diversity and mutual respect should be fostered. Even critics of professional imperialism, such as Midgley (2010) and Lambe (2003), would reject the notion that Western values should be unilaterally dismissed. They instead believe that Western social workers can learn from their Aboriginal counter-parts, and vice versa, and both perspectives have worth and value in practice. In the same vein, cultural diversity does not automatically imply moral opposites. Participants in this research could identify some way in which their formal education enhanced their ability as social workers, suggesting that unique cultural groups can find common ground with one another.

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APPENDIX 1 – Interview Guide

Section 1: Participant
1. What is your cultural heritage?
2. What is you education (degree, institution, date of graduation)?
3. Where do you work? What is your current position?
4. Describe the demographics of your clientele (age, gender, culture, etc).

Section 2: Background
5. What are some of the most common social issues your clients deal with?
6. What is your familiarity with the term "generational trauma" and does it play a role in how you practice social work?
7. How common is it to work with a client who is affected by generational trauma?
8. Are your clients aware of, or do they consider, the impact generational trauma has had on their lives?
9. What is the best practice(s) for working with Native clients dealing with the effects of generational trauma?

Section 3: Education
10. Did your formal education address Aboriginal issues at all?
    - If yes, how so?
    - If no, do you consider it to be a deficiency in your education?
11. What aspect of your formal education did you find most useful?
12. Were you able to apply your formal education to a Native setting?
13. How do you approach a situation with a client for which your formal education did not prepare you?
14. Do you find any dilemmas in combining your formal education with your traditional knowledge?

Section 4: Benefits to Clients
15. Has there been a universal applicability to your formal education, or is there is a lack of cultural sensitivity to Native culture?
16. In general, how important is it to offer Native specific social services to the community? What kind of services are most important?
17. Why, if at all, is it important to address Native cultures as part of formal social work education?
18. Would you like to see any changes to social work programs at Canadian universities or colleges?

APPENDIX 2 – Informed Consent

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INFORMED CONSENT

Dear Participant:

You have agreed to be interviewed as part of my graduate thesis.
This research project is part of my Masters in Social Work and Human Right at the University of Gothenburg in Sweden. In order to ensure that this project meets the ethical standards for good research, I promise to adhere to the following principles:

- Participants will be given information about the purpose of the project
- Participants have the right to decide whether he or she will participate in the project, even once the interview has been completed.
- The collected data will be handled confidentially and will be kept secure so that no unauthorized person is able to access it.

For clarity, the interview will be recorded; this recording will be destroyed once the interview has been transcribed. Some data may be modified in the final analysis to protect participants' anonymity. The data collected will be used for this project only.

You have the right to refuse any questions you wish not to answer, or to terminate the interview at any time without explanation.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me, or my supervisor, at any time.

Student: Annalisa Rasmussen
annalisa.rasmussen@gmail.com

Supervisor: Lena Sawyer
lena.sawyer@socwork.gu.se

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INORMED CONSENT

□ I wish to participate in the interview study and I have acknowledged my above-mentioned rights.

□ I agree to be recorded for the purpose of this interview and I acknowledge that it will be destroyed after the study is completed.

Name and Signature

Place and date