

CULTURE & WAY OF BEING

Unification of Three Cultures:

Individualist, Collectivist, & First Peoples

by

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Abstract

This is a study about culture, about three different cultures, in fact. It is about how these cultures mix together, sometimes are at odds with each other, and how they come together in the context of my work as a counsellor. Although each person is a unique individual, the culture he or she grows up in and is exposed to throughout life shapes the person's frame of reference, as well as his or her relationships in every aspect of life. Needless to say, as the centuries go by, the cultures in every part of the world evolve and change. This study is also about families, for these global changes impact family structures and the relationships within family structures. I explore family structures and functions in three different cultural contexts: collectivist (India), individualist (modern Canadian), and the first peoples. Using a literature review methodology I explore how the values for relationships are at play within each culture. The significance of medicine wheel, collaborative therapeutic approaches, and the influence of the familial teachings are discussed as pertaining to culture and family. These approaches provide a foundation for a unique collaborative style of therapeutic interventions, with a focus on relationships, that I have learned to value in my practice.

Key words: culture, Individualist, Collectivist, family, joint family, Indo-Canadian, nuclear family, dislocation, First People's cultures, Medicine Wheel, Collaborative therapy

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Chapter One: Introduction

We are all visitors to this time, this place. We are just passing through. Our purpose here is it to observe, to learn, to grow, to love... and then we return home. (Australia Aboriginal Proverb Lavell & Harvard, 2006, p. 1).

When I am asked to introduce myself at school, work, or any other setting, I usually start with my name and my professional title. As though my physical appearance and my name does not give it away, I feel proud to add a few words about my growing up in India, a country in South Asia. As I reflect back, the memories are somewhat faded, yet the loving relationships I had, not only with my own family but with extended family, neighbors, and all of the people around me in our small village remain with me. How we acted and behaved as children (my siblings and I) and then as young adults were seen as a reflection of our parents' teachings as well as the other important figures in our lives. It was a reflection of our existence and being in this world. We lived with our grandparents in the same home and they were also influential in shaping my way of being. Everyone in the village was treated as one big extended family and it was considered disrespectful to call people who were older than us by their names, instead they were all aunties or uncles. When I got married, which my parents arranged, the whole village came to celebrate and give their best wishes for a happy and prosperous married life. A similar gathering was observed when I left my village to unite with my husband in Canada.

Although the Canadian lifestyle provided me with a completely different picture from India, the extended family values and my parents' teachings stayed paramount in my life. However, there were differences in the cultural characteristics, for example in Canada I noticed that hardly anyone knew their neighbors other than the people living directly next door. There were no gatherings of people at the end of the day on the corners of the streets or under the big

old trees. In my village, there was a common outside area under gigantic old trees where people would gather at the end of the day and share stories about anything they encountered or heard, which led to laughter that felt like relaxing music to the ears. The neighbors were viewed as a part of the family. Only a few feet walls separated most houses and we were able to interact with our neighbors at any time of the day or night. As I went on in my journey, I started to notice that despite my initial observation, there are places in Canada where people do connect. However these gatherings seemed a little formal, for example, these gathering were scheduled at community centers, sports clubs, and other community events. Despite the differences, one thing that was similar in both cultures was the need to connect with each other. My way of being in this world became inclusive of blending a Canadian lifestyle while keeping my own cultural values.

Another turning point in my journey took place when I started working with an Aboriginal child welfare agency. I felt privileged to learn the Aboriginal way of life and felt at home in the communities, as there are similarities in the Aboriginal family and extended family relationships and Indian culture. As I spent more time with the Aboriginal elders and people in general, I learned that we as human beings, regardless of the part of the world we belong to, are more similar than different. Although there is variance in the names we attach to each culture such as collectivist or individualist, we as people have a need for human connections, love, and relationships. The foundation of my way of being in this world and treading along in my journey is rooted in my cultural values and teachings. Each turning point in my life further reinforces my belief in connectedness and human relationships, which starts from a mother's womb and then is carried on during the life cycle. Therefore, I introduce my thesis topic as a culture and way of being with this quote from Levine (2014):

Our culture teaches us to focus on personal uniqueness, but at a deeper level we barely exist as individual organism. Our brains are built to help us function as members of a tribe. We are part of that tribe even when we are by ourselves, whether listening to music (that other people created), watching a basketball game on television (our muscles tensing as the players run and jump), or preparing a spreadsheet for a sales meeting (anticipating the boss's reaction). Most of our energy is devoted to connecting with others (as cited in Van Der Kolk, 2014, p.78).

When I read this quote, I thought to myself how accurately it sums up the existence of human beings. The cultures are depicted under different names and classifications. People behave according to the cultural norms that are acceptable in their society (Triandis, 1995, p. 1). All cultures are based on certain core values that serve as guiding principles in individuals' lives (Triandis, 1995, p. 1). Every culture teaches and encourages its members to internalize values that are specific to the culture and tremendous efforts are made to reinforce the inculcation of customs and norms (Smith & Bond, 1996, p. 112). Cultures are expressed by specific patterns of shared attitudes, beliefs, categorizations, self-definitions, norms role definitions, and values that are organized around a theme (Triandis, 1995, p. 2). This theme evolved during a specific historic period, in a definable geographic region, and among those who speak a particular language (Triandis, 1996, p. 52).

Purpose of Thesis

The purpose of this thesis is to review literature regarding three different cultures. First, collectivist cultures such as India, second individualistic cultures such as western societies, and third the First Peoples cultures in Canada. The focus of the literature review is on historical family structure in each culture as well the current family structures with an impact on the

familial relationships in each society. Furthermore, this thesis studies cultures is an attempt to provide an understanding of one's way of being within these cultures and the impact these cultural teachings have on creating a therapeutic style. The therapeutic style presented is my evolving therapeutic approach, which includes working in collaboration with others with a focus on establishing relationship of trust and mutual respect.

Literature Review Methodology

Furthermore, the literature review is limited because it is primarily influenced by my personal interest as I focused on how the cultural differences and similarities have influenced my journey in life. My greatest challenge in the process has been to find the literature that focuses on healthy family structures especially in the Aboriginal cultures. I believe there needs to be more emphasis on Aboriginal families that are embracing their culture in the face of atrocities they have experienced. Another limitation has been that most of the research on culture is classified either under the topics of collectivism, individualism, or a comparison of two. With this thesis, my intentions were to learn more about the family structures in each culture and how the familial relationships have changed over time due to external influences. These external influences have includes people moving away from their cultural roots for a better life, which in turn has impacted their relationships.

The main goal of my thesis is for readers to understand that people exist in relationships regardless of their cultural backgrounds. I will assert that relationships keep people centered and balanced in their life cycle. From a therapeutic standpoint when working with individuals, what matters at the heart of therapy is co-creating a trusting relationship. Importantly, this thesis is in no way intended to be generalized to the larger society, rather, it was for my own understanding

as it impacts my way of being and relating to others. If this thesis resonates with others, if the formation of relations across our differences connects with others – all the better

Structure of Thesis

There are five chapters in this thesis. The first chapter is the introduction, which introduces the topic, the purpose of this thesis, the methodology, and an outline of the five chapters. Notably, people construct their view based on what is available in the culture in terms of how they see people behave. This concept is important to my thesis because it provides a general overview the family structure in each individual culture I wrote about. In Chapter two, I define culture based on the American anthropologists, Kroeber and Kluckhohn, who compiled a list of 164 different definitions (Spencer –Oatley, 2012, p. 1). From their research, the definition that stood out the most for me was “culture... is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (as cited in Spencer-Oatley, 2012, p. 2). Chapter two explores the collectivist culture and the functionality of the families living in such societies with a focus on the Indian joint families and the structure of Indian families at the present time. The discussion will also illustrate the impact on my personal journey in life because to this day embrace, if not all, most of the values of the extended family structure. This is significant to my thesis, as the extended family structure has influenced my way of being and thus my therapeutic orientation.

Chapter three provides an analysis of the attributes of individualist cultures in western countries. Although there are innumerable differences between cultures, a review of the literature indicates that individualism and collectivism show the most significant difference. In this chapter, the history of individualism and where it stemmed from is explored, which shows that individualism is an extension of collectivistic cultures (Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2001,

p. 35). The historical family structure and the contemporary family structure are also explored. Additionally, Alexander's (2008) concept of dislocation is presented, extends the changing structure of the society and examines fragmentation in today's growing society. Chapter three concludes with the influences of individualist culture on my personal journey in life.

In Chapter four, I explore the First Peoples culture in Canada in general terms rather than focusing on a specific community. The reason for focusing on the culture more generally is to emphasize the core values within all Aboriginal Cultures, such as centrality of community and family relationships (Deloria, 1999, p. 51). Importantly, most of the current issues faced by the First Peoples stem from the colonization process, which is also central to the Aboriginal communities (Gray, 2011, p. 21). I also present a few direct quotes from the residential school survivors to provide the readers an opportunity to understand the depth of losses Aboriginal people have endured. Even though the losses have forever changed the family structures, Aboriginal people have proven themselves to be resilient as they continue to fight for their rights and keeping their cultures and languages alive.

I have titled the chapter five Meeting of the Cultures. In this chapter, I share some of the commonalities between Indian culture and the First Peoples cultures that I have experienced through my professional journey working as a social worker. I have also made an attempt to bring my culture, the one I grew up in, and the other cultures that I have been exposed to thus far in my personal journey together through sharing of stories.

Finally, in chapter six, I present my therapeutic stance and way of being when working with people. This therapeutic stance is based on the philosophy of collaborative working style. The collaborative style resonates most with my personality when I am interacting with people. I will describe the building of my foundation in therapy by explaining the philosophy behind the

medicine wheel. This holistic view integrates mind, body, emotions, and spirit dialogue, which has significance for the world of counselling and psychotherapy (McCabe, 2007, p. 144). I will also share the gifts I have been blessed with through my father's teachings from a very young age such as acts of humility, generosity, and kindness, which are also integral to the teachings of the medicine wheel. I believe that my way working in the psychotherapy field will be built on the teachings of the medicine wheel, the gifts my father shared with me through his many teachings, as well as the collaborative approach to therapy, and collaborating as a style.

I would like to conclude the introduction with this quote from Dr. Bruce Perry (2007) "For years mental health professionals taught people that they could be psychologically healthy without social support, that "unless you love yourself, no one else will love you."...The truth is, you cannot love yourself unless you have been loved and are loved. The capacity to love cannot be built in isolation." (Perry, 2007, 15)

Chapter 2: Indian Culture

Culture is to society what memory is to individuals (Kluckhohn, 1954).

How do we define culture? The American anthropologists, Kroeber and Kluckhohn, critically reviewed concepts and definitions of culture, and compiled a list of 164 different definitions (Spencer-Oatley, 2012, p. 1). The one that stands out the most and seems relevant to this topic is: “culture ... is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (as cited in Spencer-Oatley, 2012 p. 2). These acquired habits and capabilities shape our existence and how we act in the society. This learning extends to life inside and outside of the home. In almost all of our actions, we rely on values, ideas, feelings, strategies, and goals that have been shaped by our cultural experiences. This chapter explores the collectivist culture and the functionality of the families living in collectivist societies. This chapter also outlines joint Indian families and the impact on a person’s social, emotional, psychological, and economical supports. Another aspect of importance to this discussion is the changing of joint Indian families in the today’s world. I will also link the different aspects of collectivist societies though sharing my personal journey over my life span from growing up in India to moving to a Western society at the age of 21.

Collectivism

Collectivism is a basic element of human culture and has existed since the founding of human society ten thousand years ago (Triandis, Gelfand, & Chan, 1996, p. 398). Though all human societies contain elements of both individualism and collectivism, by definition some societies are on the whole more collectivist and others on the whole more individualist (Triandis, et al., 1996, p. 398). The first empirical study to identify individualism and collectivism was

done by Hofstede (1980), who surveyed IBM employees from 53 different countries (as cited in Gelfand & Triandis, 1996 p.125). Results from the culture analysis of this study showed that affluent western countries were high in individualism and developing countries were high in collectivism (as cited in Triandis, et al., 1998, p. 129). Interestingly, despite their affluence, most Asian countries also tended to be more collectivist (as cited in Triandis et al., 1998, p. 91). Two-thirds of the world's population lives within collectivist countries such as India, Japan, Singapore, Taiwan, Mexico, Turkey, and Sri Lanka (Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002, p.28).

Varieties of Collectivism

There are many kinds of collectivist cultures. One important distinction is between vertical and horizontal collectivist cultures. Indian culture is considered to be a vertical collectivist society, which by this definition means that it is traditional and places an emphasis on in-group cohesion, respect for in-group norms and the directives of the authorities (Bond & Smith, 1996, p. 198). The term in-group refers to a collection of individuals who have regular contact and frequent interactions, mutual feeling of camaraderie, and work together to achieve a common goal (Triandis & Suh, 2002 p. 136). Families, work-groups, religious groups, geographical districts and tribes are only some of the examples of in-groups. Vertical collectivism correlates positively with age and religiosity and negatively with education and exposure to diverse persons (Pettigrew 1999, p. 5; Triandis, 1995, p. 59). On the other hand, horizontal collectivist cultures emphasize empathy, sociability, and cooperation (Triandis, Gelfand, & Chan 1998, p. 35). Gabriel & Gardner (1999) found that another variation of collectivism exists between genders. According to their research, male collectivism is derived from group memberships such as a person referring himself as "Indian" whereas female

collectivism is derived from specific relationships for example, “I am Rosy’s best friend” (Gabriel & Garder, 1999, p. 55).

Collectivism and the Individual

A defining attribute of collectivism is concerned with the goals of the individual and the collective. Among collectivists these goals are consistent, which means that the individual does what the culture expects, asks, or demands (Gelfand, Triandis, & Chan, 1996, p. 55). Individuals rarely oppose the will of the collective (Gelfand, Triandis, & Chan, 1996, p. 55). As a result, personal deviations from norms are criticized (Gelfand, Triandis, & Chan, 1996, p. 55). Individuals perceive themselves as an integral part of the group, which promotes interdependence and provides a stable social environment (Triandis, 1989, p. 65). An individual’s behavior is shaped by group goals. The personal desires and needs of individuals are of less significance and an individual is expected to share beliefs with in-group members (as cited in Ram, 2010, p. 10). A fundamental goal of individuals in collectivist cultures is to maintain harmony with others and avoid differentiation between themselves and other members of the in-group (Ram, 2010, p. 15).

Furthermore, collectivists societies play an important role in the development of an individual’s self-identity, worth, and acceptability. Interpersonal relationships are self-defining, while individual experiences, behaviors, emotions, and expectations are a reflection of the thoughts and feelings of members of the in-group (Suh, 2002, p. 45). A fundamental goal of the individual is to maintain harmony with others, and avoid differentiation between self and other members of the in-group (Suh, 2002, p. 45). Individuals may have to make sacrifices of their own goals in life in order to maintain harmony with in-group members. There is reciprocity in which family and friends compensate the sacrifice of the individual by providing praise and

presenting a positive evaluation of that individual (Christopher, 1992, p. 15). The praise and positive evaluation further solidifies the importance to acting in accordance with the goals and values of the in-group, which outweigh the sacrifices the individual makes (Christopher, 1992, p. 15). In collectivistic societies, happiness and life satisfaction are linked to an individual's in-group membership because they feel valued and accepted by the group (Ram, 2010, p. 16). Additionally, collectivist societies and individual's standing and acceptance in the in-group are more relevant to life satisfaction, than his or her own personal accomplishments (Christopher, 1999, p. 55).

Collectivism and Family Relationships

As Grudyknust, Yoon, & Nishida (1987) state that of all the in-groups, family is one of the most significant in any given society (p. 301). Families provide individuals with an important support system, not just during childhood but also throughout life. Also, families provide society with a structure for passing on cultural values from one generation to the next. The term family is derived from the Latin word 'familia' denoting a household establishment and refers to a "group of individuals living together during important phases of their lifetime and bound to each other by biological and/or social and psychological relationship" (as cited in Chadda & Deb, 2013 p. 299). The concept of "joint family" is typical in Indian society, where multiple generations and extended family members function as a single unit. My experiences are gained through living in a traditional joint Indian family. Thus, my place in this world and my way of being has been shaped by these experiences. However, before I continue, it is crucial to note that any generalization about the Indian family suffers from oversimplification, given the pluralistic nature of Indian culture.

The Joint Indian Family

Asian and Indian families are considered classically as large, patriarchal, collectivistic, and harboring three or more generations (Chadda & Deb, 2013 p. 299). Indian joint families are considered to be strong, stable, close, resilient and enduring with a focus on family integrity, family loyalty, and family unity (Chadda & Deb, 2013 p. 299). Ancient Indian literature includes inscriptions, which dictate the role of each family member and their responsibilities towards each other (Sethi, 1989, p. 24). For example, the oldest son in the family is expected to take care of his elderly parents; the children are to be obedient and consult with their parents before they make any decisions, even when they are adults. The sons in the family join the family business and take it to the next level while living in the same home with their parents and grandparents (Sethi, 1989, p. 24).

Strong bonds of interpersonal relationships and emotional attachment provide family members of joint Indian families with social, emotional, physical and economic support. For example, I grew up in in a small village located in West Punjab, India. I am a product of a joint family that included my parents, siblings, a grandmother, as well my paternal uncle who moved to England in his late 40s with his wife before I was born. Growing up, I always thought that I had three older brothers. It was not until I was in my teens when I learned that my oldest brother was in fact my cousin; he was my paternal uncle's son. My uncle and aunt left him behind when they moved to England, trusting my parents to take care of him. My parents raised him as they raised the rest of us. As I reflect back, I find it fascinating that out of my three brothers I felt closest to my cousin. My fondest memories of childhood include my cousin spending time with me and doing little gestures for me that I will forever cherish. He once saved money to buy me my favorite doll. As a teen when he would have conflict with my parents, he would reach out to

me although he was 10 years older than me. I believe it was the strong bonds of interpersonal relationships and emotional attachment that made my family cohesive.

When I grew up, I was married into a joint family, which includes my mother-in-law, two brothers-in-laws and a sister-in-law. After a few years, the family became even larger, when the spouses of my brothers-in-law and sister-in-law joined the family. We lived in the same house for about fifteen years and during this time there were many ups and downs. Despite the many ups and downs, the social and economic supports were evident as the family progressed over the years. The financial decisions were made by the males in our family, which speaks to the patriarchal aspect of collectivist societies. The money was pooled together and as a result our family business expanded. However, when the economy crashed our family lost thousands of dollars. I strongly believe that if there was no economic support from one another, our family may have ended up losing all we had. In addition to the financial loss we experienced, we could have also suffered from additional mental health stressors that arise due to hardships in life. However, because our family was together we were able to pick each other up and re-establish ourselves.

It can be argued that social supports are an advantage of living in collectivist societies. Social support is one of the most effective means by which people can cope with stressful events (Kim, Sherman, & Taylor, 2008, p. 518). It can reduce the likelihood of illness, speed recovery from illness when it does occur, and reduce the risk of mortality from serious diseases (Holahan, Moss, Holahan, & Brennan, 1997, p. 112; as cited in Kim, et al., 2009, p. 518). Conversely, lack of social support during stressful times can be distressing, especially when people with high needs for social supports are unable to obtain it, including the elderly and the victims of sudden uncontrollable life events (as cited in Kim et al., 2009 p. 518). In collectivist societies, the

support of other members of the in-group who love and care for one another as well as hold esteem and value for each other are part of this support network. Therefore, such families do not have to seek supports outside their in-group (Kim et al., 2008 p. 518).

My cousin, or non-biological brother, moved to England in his twenties to reunite with his biologic parent because they were growing old and needed their son to take care of them. Although he was close to his parents, he was away from his family connections and relationships in India, which were his social and emotional supports. After moving to England, he started to drink heavily and had constant conflict with his parents and wife. Due to his drinking, his health started to deteriorate and his wife left him with their two young children. He passed away at the young age of 32 in 1994. Although it is difficult to draw a strong conclusion, one has to wonder if the outcome would have been different should he have stayed with his supports in India.

The interdependence between generations is not uncommon in Indian families (Segal, 1999, p. 235). Two or even three generations may live together as a joint family under a single roof including the elderly, sick, or disabled family members. The primary dyad in the Indian culture that cultivates the perseverance of collectivist values is the parent-child dyad (Segal, 1999, p. 235). Parents raise their children and in turn the children are expected to remain available and take care of their parents when they are elderly (Ram, 2010, p. 16). Taking care of sick and elderly parents is not only a gesture of kindness and care, but also a collectivist cultural expectation. This expectation is relevant to my life because of the care we provide to my mother-in-law. My mother-in-law who is in her early eighties now is still with us in the same home that she's lived in for more than 25 years. Despite having gone through numerous health challenges, such as four major surgeries including having both of her knees replaced, two hip replacements, and a couple of eye surgeries, she remains in the family home. Throughout these health

challenges our family has been there to take care of her post surgery and help her gain her strength back. There is high probability that she will not be placed in an elderly care home as her family will be there to take care of her.

The Changing Indian Families

As Chadda and Deb (2013) argue, traditional Indian families are being replaced by nuclear families, not only in India but also all over the world (p. 302). The family systems are becoming highly differentiated and heterogeneous social entities in terms of their structure, relationships, obligations, and values (Chadda & Deb, 2013, p. 302). Joint families that stay under the same roof, but have separate kitchens, separate finances and with considerable autonomy and reduced responsibility for extended family members are common and represent transitional families (Chadda & Deb, 2010, p. 303). Others may stay in separate households but cluster around the same community. Such transitional families though structurally nuclear, may still continue to function as joint families. Goode (1968) argues that education, especially if it stresses Western values, could well be a force in causing brothers and sons to end not only joint residence, but also jointly owned property (p. 2215).

My husband and I lived under the same roof with his extended family for 15 years. This family included seven adults and four children. If we were in India, the family probably would have continued to live together. However being in Canada, as the children were getting older, they wanted their own space. Perhaps this was as a result of listening to other children at school or other places discuss this. The family's men, as they were the decision makers, developed a five-acre property and divided it into a number of lots to build separate houses. We kept three houses to ourselves next to each other in the cul de sac. It has been 10 years since this change

and we are still in the same location next to each other. Although we are as Chadda and Debb (2013) state, a structurally nuclear family, we still function as a joint family.

Personal Journey

In the last 20 years, much attention has been focused on specifying the attributes of individualism and collectivism. Although there is the notion that collectivism underlines, cohesion, solidarity, concern for others, and integration with other people and groups (Triandis, 1989, p. 21) a defining attribute appears to be the definition of the *self* as independent for individualists and as interdependent for collectivist (Marku & Kitayma, 1999, p. 21). According to Triandis, “the self consists of all statements made by a person, overtly or covertly, that include the words ‘I’, ‘me’, ‘mine’, and ‘myself’” (1989, p. 506). The statements that people make that constitute the self have implications for the ways in which people present themselves.

In my personal journey, I have embraced a mixture of attributes of collectivist as well individualistic culture. Growing up in India and then moving to an extended family in Canada after marriage has shaped my personality and frame of reference. For the longest time I had to behave as a timid and dependent person when I was at home. In my professional life, I presented myself as an independent and confident person. The timid version is consistent with the collectivist family attributes such as family cohesion, keeping harmony, and a patriarchal stance while the other is independent and is more of a reflection of the individualistic cultural values.

Triandis, Gelfand, and Chan (1996) present collectivism and individualism as a bipolar construct, which means that they are two separate extremities. What is interesting is bridging the gap between the two poles and becoming a complete self. The research suggests that an individual can be high or low in both a collectivist and individual mindset depending on the situation (as cited in Triandis & Gelfand, 1996, p. 407). It is recommended that researchers take

this dimensionality into account in the conceptualization, measurement, and analysis of collectivism and individualism (as cited in Triandis & Gelfand, 1996, p. 407). A research study completed by Triandis, Gelfand, and Chan (1996), suggest that it may be inappropriate to assign a single score of individualism – collectivism because they are multidimensional at the culture level as well as the individual level. An individual may stay true to some of the values of collectivism and yet pursue her personal individual goals as well.

Chapter 3: Individualism

“(F)or recent sociologists the dark secret at the heart of modern individualism is its failure as a mode of life...” (Patterson, 1991, p. 15)

There is an ancient Hindu saying truth is one: it has many names so too is in the case of defining cultures (as cited in Triandis & Geffland, 2005, p. 501). Although there are innumerable differences between cultures, a review of the literature indicates that individualism and collectivism are the most significant difference. Although both constructs may appear to be on opposite ends of the spectrum, they are more similar than they are different. One way of learning about the difference is examining the important aspects of culture. These aspects often are exhibited in the form of *unstated assumptions*, which are systems of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviors, norms, habits, and artifacts that are deep rooted and provide direct guidelines that individuals incorporate in their daily living (Triandis, 2001, p. 42). These differences shape individuals’ ways of being in this world within the structure of their families as well as holding their individual identities while following the cultural unstated assumptions (Triandis, 1996, p. 27).

When discussing cultures it is to be noted that both individualism and collectivism are two sides of a coin. Broadly defined, individualism emphasizes personal freedom and achievement. Individualist culture therefore award social status to personal accomplishments such as important discoveries, innovations, great artistic or humanitarian achievements and all actions that make an individual stand out. Moreover, individualism is the idea that an individual’s life belongs to himself and that he has an inalienable right to live it as he sees fit, to act on his own judgment, to keep and use the product of his effort, and to pursue the values of his choosing (Craig, 2012, p. 1). However, Triandis (1995) suggests that individualism and

collectivism are situation specific. That is, an individual may be very individualistic at work and quite collectivist in the extended family (Triandis, 1995, p. 27). Extreme individualism may be linked to several forms of social pathology, such as high crime, suicide, divorce, child abuse, emotional stress, and physical and mental illness rates (Triandis et al, 1988, p. 326). This is not to say that the extreme collectivism does not have these social pathological challenges. In essence, a person can be individualist and yet needs collectivist social supports to act as a buffer of life change stresses (Triandis et al, 1988, p. 326). Both constructs serve human needs for connection when practiced in moderation.

Individualism describes as a set of beliefs that an individual has absolute autonomy, and is encouraged to be independent, private, complex and organized (as cited in Ram, 2010, p. 8). Within the individualistic cultural schema, the self, rather than the environment, is the primary source of personal meaning and guidance (Suh, 2002, p. 1380). Individuals are expected to express and enhance individual needs, potentials, desires, personal goals, and develop self-containment (Christopher, 1999, p. 50). A self-contained person exhibits the characteristic that he/she does not need assistance from others and is self-sufficient (Christopher, 1999, p. 50). Individuals use their personal feelings, thoughts, and experiences as the primary source of information for evaluating their judgments of well-being (Suh, Diener, Oishi, & Triandis, 1998, p. 116). Therefore, the development of internal attributes is emphasized in individualist societies, and they become crucial determinants of an individual's well-being (Suh et al., 1998, p. 356).

Interestingly, individuals tend to transition between collectivism and individualism throughout their lifetimes. Most people start their lives by being collectivists as they are attached to their families while they are young. However, as they grow up they become detached from their families to different degrees in order to establish their individual identities (Triandis, 1993,

p. 60). For example, individuals may move away from their family home to pursue their personal goals, start their own individual families, or migrate to different parts of the world. In collectivist cultures the detachment is minimal because people think of themselves as part of their in-groups and in most situations subordinate personal goals to those of their collectives. However, in individualist cultures there is more focus on the idea of the individual's right to happiness, an aspect of its subjective culture, there is more focus on individuality than conformity (Triandis, 1993, p. 69). Triandis (1993) also proposes that an individual is part of a group, which may be situation specific (p. 69). For example, an individual belonging to a religious group, activist groups to gain a sense of belonging.

Emergence of Individualism

The conception of individualism is thought to have emerged in Western history and nations. The National Group Comparisons of Individualism report includes the results of 46 studies and states that European Americans are higher in individualism than individuals from Eastern countries such as Japan, Korea, Hong Kong, Indian, who, in contrast are higher in collectivism (Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2001, p. 61). Despite that some cultures are on the whole more collectivist or individualist, within any culture there are people who act more in line with the values of collectivist or individualist's worldviews. There are two important factors that determine the transformation from collectivism to individualism in society as individuals make shifts in their lifestyle and make shifts in their ways of being (Triandis, 1989, p. 280). These factors are culture complexity and affluence. The concept of cultural complexity refers to the creation, separation, and distinction of different lifestyles (Triandis, 1989, p. 280). When this occurs, the individual is confronted with conflicting norms and newly separated worldviews. This internal conflict requires individuals to decide how to act on the basis of internal factors

rather than the norms of the collective, and thus individualism is born (Triandis 1989, p. 44). Cultural complexity can also be found whenever there are economies based on functional specialization, which refers to instances where different individuals do different jobs and this differentiation in jobs is beneficial for the whole (Triandis, 1989, p. 43). Furthermore, it occurs where there is separation, such as when the geography involves mountains or islands. Some of the other cultural complexity factors that separate individuals from their groups are the industrial revolution and migration (Triandis, 1989, p. 51). Affluence is another major factor in creating individualism. One can be independent when rich, and financial independence is at the core of individuals' independence from in-groups (Triandis, 1989, p. 52; Hofstede, 1980, p. 54). In essence, with increased financial independence one does not have to do what the groups wants and adhere to the values of the groups (Triandis, 1989, p. 54), rather they are able to act in their own self-interest. Importantly, this increased movement towards individualism has not only occurred in the Western world (Triandis, 1989, p. 55).

In the cultural context where I come from, I have noticed individuals moving further away from their home communities to earn more money or live a better life. For example, over the last few decades many families have moved to Western countries such as the United States, Canada, England, Australia, and New Zealand. This movement to different countries has given birth to more individualized lifestyles and has resulted in people breaking their ties with their homelands. On my maternal side of the family, there is only one family member left in India. The rest of us are all over the map from New Zealand, England, Australia, to Canada. My family members seem to be more focused on creating their new identities as individuals rather than as a collective family unit.

Individualism and Cross Cultural Studies

The formation of individualism is believed to have emerged in Western history. Nations such as Western Europe and North America have been identified as individualistic societies (as cited in Ram, 2010, p. 10). Although they are identified as individualistic, different definitions of individualism are found in different countries (Triandis, 1989, p. 41). Triandis (1989) argues that although the American definition of individualism is self-reliance, competition, and distance from in-groups, the interesting point is that these dimensions are of little importance in contrasting different cultures in the world (p. 55). From cross-cultural studies, Triandis et al. (1986) found that the most important contrast between cultures was obtained on the factor of family integrity (p. 53). Family integrity included the notions that ageing parents should live at home with their children and that children should live at home with their parents until they get married (Triandis et al., 1986, p. 61). Additionally, there is large variance in the concepts of self-reliance, competition, and distance from in-groups when compared worldwide. Triandis et al. (1986) further found that what is most important in the United States is less important worldwide. For example, they found that some people agree with extreme self-reliance and competition while others disagree with the importance of these characteristics (Triandis et al., 1986, p. 62). Furthermore, in relation to the factor of family integrity, almost all Americans indicate that they do not want to live with their parents until they get married or after their parents are old (Triandis, 1989, p. 65).

My observations and interactions with individuals holding individualistic worldviews in North America echo the research. I have found that most people living in this society would rather not live with their parents. Most of the people I have interacted with move out on their own as they reach adulthood. Similarly, they do not want to move back in when their parents are

elderly. Thus, my observations coincide with the findings of Hofstede's (1989) cross-cultural study. This is very different from families from collectivist cultures such as mine because most children stay home until they are married, unless they have found employment outside of the local area and are not able to commute. Additionally, the elderly stay with at least one of their children, if the joint families have separated. An example of this is my mother-in-law, who is living with us while my mother is living with one of my brothers. Both my mother-in-law and my mother are in their eighties and there is no plan to shift them to an old age care home. Although my own sons were born and raised in Western/individualistic society, they make comments about me living with them when I am older. Their comment may very well be a result of respect or a sincere thought, which is a reflection of growing up in a household where collectivism is valued.

Furthermore, cross culture studies have indicated that individualist nations tend to be 'ideocentric' with emphasis on the self and individual well-being (Farver, Narang, & Badha, 2002, p. 339; Segal, 1991, p. 234). In ideocentric societies preference is given to personal desires and decision over those of the in-group. Individuals are less likely to make sacrifices when personal goals and desires are in conflict with the choices or approval of the in-group (Farver et al., 2002, p. 341). For example, someone who embodies idiocentric tendencies might marry an individual disliked or disapproved of by their family, basing their decision solely on personal preference. Therefore, individualists exemplify idiocentric qualities, considering the in-group and the self as separate units and making decisions based on individual preferences over the in-group values.

Attributes of Individualistic Society

Individualistic notions place emphasis on the individual self in which he/she is encouraged to gain autonomy (Christopher, 1999, p. 143). Individuals are expected to express and practice individual needs, potentialities, desires and personal goals (Christopher, 1999, p. 143). They use their personal feelings, thoughts, and experiences as the primary source of information in order to evaluate wellbeing (Christopher, 1999, p. 143). Therefore, the development of internal attributes is emphasized in individualistic societies and they become crucial determinants of an individual's wellbeing. Another aspect of individualist societies is the feelings people experience and express about themselves. Personal feelings are encouraged and are regarded as unique to the individual. In addition to their uniqueness, personal feelings are regarded as private experiences (Triandis, 2001, p. 55) (239). Furthermore, the self is viewed as stable and the social environment as changeable, which means that individuals try to shape external factors to fit their own unique personalities (Suh et al., 1998, p. 483). The uniqueness of an individual is shaped by the family practices, and each family has its own unique characteristics that impact how an individual develops.

In individualistic cultures, the self-concept of an individual is developed independently from the in-group. Individuals use personal self-descriptors to describe themselves (Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002, p. 14). For example, people use statements like *I am kind*. This refers to aspects of an individual's personal qualities rather than a collective self (Triandis, 1989, p. 279). Individuals also attempt to distinguish themselves from the members of the in-group and believe that personal success is more important for self-esteem than being part of an in-group (Triandis, 1989, p. 280). Children are encouraged to be vocal, self-directed, independent, self-sufficient, and autonomous (Triandis, 1996, p. 55). Individual identities of children are valued

and are not perceived as extensions of the family (Hofstede, 2001; Shweder & Bourne, 1994, p. 159).

The Family Structure in the Individualist Societies

As humans we are evolved primates and primates require groups to survive (Triandis, 1995, p. 159). Despite the necessities of groups, when we adjust to our environments we become individualists (Triandis, 1996, p. 89). Similarly, as the discussion of family structure takes place within the Western culture or individualistic societies, the thought of nuclear families immediately comes to mind. This thought likely arises because for a long time nuclear families appeared to be the norm in individualistic societies. Nuclear families are those families consisting of two parents and their children. It is also important to note that there seems to be no such thing as a typical family in the 21st century due to the amalgamation of family units, single parent families, same sex families, blended families, single adults without children, foster families, adoptive families, unmarried couples with children, bicultural families. However, it is imperative to explore the history of family structures in Western society in regards to the evolution of individualistic societies because it lead to differentiation in the worldview individuals hold about each other.

Historical Family Structure

The industrial revolution in Europe began in the 18th century and later impacted the United States in the early 19th century (Triandis, 2001, p. 18). With the industrial revolution came significant changes to agricultural societies in Europe. Prior to this change, most people lived in extended families in rural communities, which consisted of at least two biologically related nuclear families residing under the same roof (Triandis, 1996, p. 29). This included grandparents, adult married children, and their young offspring. Living nearby, in similar

multifamily households, were grown siblings, aunts, uncles, and cousins (as cited in Lin, Wilson, & Fake, 2012, p. 115). Everyone was involved in agriculture and its sale for the family's sustenance. People were not mobile; they remained in their location tilling their fields (as cited in Lin, Wilson, & Fake, 2012, p. 115). There is evidence that extended family households could be commonly found in the less industrialized European nations, Albania, and Serbia until the end of the 19th century (Gruber, 2012, p. 59). Despite the impact of the industrial revolution, co-residence of elderly parents and their adult children is still frequently found in Latin America, Africa, and Asia (Adams & Trost, 2005, p. 189; Xie & Yu, 2011, p. 280).

The Changing Family Structure

As previously noted, innovations in agricultural and industrial technology beginning in the 18th century in England and other European countries and in North America in the 19th century spurred the industrial revolution (Lin, Wilson, & Fake, 2012, p. 58). More efficient farming methods and the demand for wage labor undermined historic patterns of agriculture and the traditional extended family. Families needed to be more mobile, move to where the jobs were and no longer depended on local networks of kin and friends for their livelihoods (Lin et al, 2012, p. 20). People shed their extended family members and dependent elderly parents, who formerly had resided with them, as they became a financial burden. In this process, over the 18th, 19th, and early 20th century, extended families started to disappear. With the disappearance of the extended family, the nuclear family gradually became the predominant family type (as cited in Lin et al. 2012, p. 20).

Family researcher Stephanie Coontz (2004) provides an enlightening analysis of the economic, political, and social basis of the extended family in pre-industrial Europe and North America. She observes that for the upper classes, which owned property, "marriage was the main

way of consolidating wealth, transferring property, and laying claim to political power” (Coontz 2014, p. 14). For the lower classes, there were immediate practical concerns. For example, marrying someone with adjacent fields, finding a mate who met the approval of neighbors and kin with whom they farmed, and acquiring a spouse who could bring additional skills, tools, and other resources to the family (Coontz, 2004, p. 14). In both strata of society, finding good in-laws, selecting a mate, and having children were equally important. The individual needs and desires of the prospective mates were not considered to be the primary concern (Avner, 2006, p. 89). Therefore, it was acceptable not to be in love with the person one married. Love was not a stand-alone concept to be given high importance in marriage (Avner, 2006, p. 90).

From personal experience and observations over the last few decades, I have noticed that collectivist’s cultures such as Indian also followed the same pattern when arranging marriages. Love is not considered to be a standing alone concept. For instance, my parents arranged my marriage, and the match was based on the information gathered through relatives. In this tradition, a middle person, who knows each family, typically arranges matches. Most of the marriages in my immediate and extended family were arranged. To this day, arranged marriages are common in India as well as in Indian cultures in Western countries such as Canada. In arranged marriages, the main feature families look for in selecting a mate is whether that person is able to enhance the life of his/her partner. If the person is a female, they look at whether she going to respect her in-laws and if her in-laws are going to accept her as a member of their family. If the person is a male, the family looks for if he has enough wealth and is able to support his partner throughout life. Love is at the bottom of the list and compatibility is often not talked about. In some instances, when arranging a marriage, it is considered winning the jackpot if a female is the only child from a wealthy family. This is highly regarded as it means her parents’

wealth will eventually be transferred to her husband. Arranging marriages for political gain is also common. For example, if both families are active in politics and belong to different political parties, they will arrange a marriage to emerge as one family in order to be more influential in the society and gain more political power.

The Contemporary Family in the Individualistic Societies

There have been remarkable changes in the family structure and dynamics in Western Europe and North America in the 20th Century (Cliquet, 2012, p. 122). Some of these changes include smaller household sizes, a further shift from extended to nuclear families, as well as a decrease in marriages and an increase in separation or divorce. The appearances of new forms of unions in relationships have increased such as unmarried cohabitation and living-apart-together, changing gender and intergenerational relations, and, last but not least, a substantial decrease in fertility. A comparison can be drawn between the influence of the changing family structure on the individual in both collectivist and individualist societies. In fact there are more similarities in the impacts than differences. Bruce Alexander (2008) extends the changing structure of the society in his book “The Globalization of Addiction; A study in Poverty of the Spirit.” He claims that the changes in society are the failure of our civilization (Alexander, 2015, p. 25). Alexander identifies the central problem as the poverty of the spirit in the modern world. People have been pushed towards a global capitalist system, which causes people to dislocate and lose a touch with themselves in order to succeed (Alexander, 2015, p. 25). He contextualizes civilization in large social, economic and historical terms. He states that societies everywhere have become severely fragmented in the last five centuries (Alexander, 2008, p. 81). From the time of Christopher Columbus onward, large scale colonization by Western powers has crushed defenseless societies around the globe by conquest, disease, enslavement, economic exploitation, religious

domination, and devastation of local ecosystems which has given rise to individuals feeling disconnected, as they do not have a group to belong to (as cited in Alexander, 2015, p. 8).

Alexander (2015) examines the fragmentation of today's growing society in terms of dislocation. He uses the word dislocation to describe the devastating psychological consequences of unrelenting societal fragmentation on individuals as a result of capitalism, competitiveness, corporate culture that has taken the societies to another level of individualism (Alexander, 2008, p. 25). He also refers to dislocation as alienation and disconnection from society (Alexander, 2011, p. 2). Dislocation refers to the experience of a void that can be described on at least three levels. In social terms it is the absence of enduring and sustaining connections between individuals and their families and/or local societies, nations, occupations, traditions, physical environments, and gods (Alexander, 2011, p. 14). In existential terms it is the absence of feelings of belonging, identity, meaning, or purpose (Alexander, 2011, p. 15). In spiritual terms it is the experience of poverty of the spirit, homelessness of the soul, or being forgotten by god (Alexander, 2015, p. 24). These experiences leave individuals suffering in isolation.

Parallel to the ideology of Alexander (2008), Dr. Sinha (1988) states that rapid change towards individualism, even in India, has direct influence on family structures by causing harm to the mental health of individuals (as cited in Triandis, 1995, p. 55). In cities, as traditional extended family patterns change to nuclear families strong social support weakens. Although the traditional extended family puts stress on members by having them conform to authoritarian older adults, to freedom-confining norms, and to unpleasant expectations, it provides a sense of belonging that can be important, especially during life crises (Chadda & Deb, 2013, p. 305). Fragmentation of today's society can also be observed in families in collectivist societies and families who have moved to countries considered to be individualistic. Although, families

continue to live together as an extended family unit to fulfill their duties, the behavior of the members significantly indicates the competitiveness in the relationship. There is much more focus on enhanced capital gains and investments than embracing the untied relationships as an extended family unit where everyone benefits the same way. Often times, individuals continue to live together because of a fear of being ostracized although there is no internal desire to do so. Again, it is difficult to make a direct connection and yet, my observations and lived experiences lead me to consider the possibility that this may be a result of the growing fragmentation of the society. Capital gains seem to be more palpable and the love and care that relationships prove seem to be given lesser value as fragmentation in society increases.

When reading about dislocation and fragmentation in the today's modern world, the story I shared in the previous chapter about my cousin's move to England in adulthood cannot escape my mind. When he moved in the anticipation of a better life to a more westernized society, he left his connections and relationships behind. Although it is challenging to make a direct connection between his move and his addiction to alcohol, which ended his life at the age of 32 years, I am left to wonder if there was one.

Individualism and Collectivism Co-existence

Although they may appear as opposing values, tendencies towards collectivism and individualism can co-exist (Triandis, 1986, p. 85). An analogy of water and ice can be used to illuminate the relationship between the two; just as water and ice can coexist, so can collectivism and individualism (Triandis, 1986, p. 85). Humans are dependent on protection from their family, especially during the early years of life. As they become independent from the family and emotionally detached from it, they become self-reliant and more individualistic. However, some of the bonds of family integrity and interdependence remain, such as the relationship

between parents and their adult children. Although they may not live in the same home, they still care for each other in different capacities (Triandis, 1989, p. 270). This is different from family relationships in collectivist cultures where many generations live together in the same home (Triandis, 1989, p. 270). Therefore, collectivism is like water and individualism is like ice: each molecule of water may be transformed into ice, but ice can melt back into water (Triandis, 1989, p. 271).

The analogy of water and ice resemble the particular relationships of an individual with friends, coworkers, or neighbors with whom the individual shares similar demographic attributes, common experiences or attitudes (Triandis, 1989, p. 271). These similar attributes can be due to speaking the same language, living in the same area, or sharing similar experiences such as belonging to a sports team or work group. In each culture a different pattern of those self-other links become ice. Additionally, there are different kinds of individualism and different kinds of collectivism, depending on whether the predominance of the molecules are water or have been transformed into ice (Triandis, 1989, p. 272). For example, like collectivism, individualism can be horizontal or vertical. The horizontal dimension emphasizes that people should be similar on most attributes such as status whereas the vertical dimension accepts inequality and that certain ranks hold more privilege in society (Triandis, 1989, p. 272).

Personal Journey

I grew up in a collectivist culture and then moved to the Western/individualistic society of Canada at the age of 21. My extended in-laws' family valued collectivistic cultural attributes, such as the belief that the family's interest comes first and the personal goals and desires of each member are secondary. For example, if there is a family gathering, I am be expected to attend rather than spending a day by myself engaging in self-care after a long workweek. The current

literature proposes that people construe the self in two divergent ways. One type of construal is described by using concepts such as individualist, independent, autonomous, agentic, and separate, and the other by their antonyms such as collectivist, interdependent, ensemble, communal, and relational (as cited in Kashima et al., 1995).

It has also been explained in the previous sections that collectivism and individualism are different and yet are quite similar when the discussion is about relationships and the impact of disconnection in relationships on the individual. I find myself falling somewhere in the middle of collectivist and individualist concepts. For example, I am attending graduate school and working full time as a social worker. It is not typical for an Indian daughter-in-law or wife to go back to school at the age of 45. I am continually working on advancing my career and social status, which is commonly a characteristic of individualistic culture (Gorodnichenko & Roland, 2001, p. 81). On the other hand, I continue to conform to collectivist family expectations such as living in an extended family and fulfilling the responsibilities of a daughter-in-law, sister-in-law, auntie etc. As I balance both, I see myself as embracing aspects of individualistic and collectivist cultures.

Furthermore, people construct their views based on what is available in the culture. Public discourse, including narratives and metaphors, provide the cultural basis of who they become (Bruner, 1990; Kashima, 1987, 1984; Smith 1985/1991 as cited in Kashima et al., 1995 p. 933). My journey in life and who I am today is based on the experiences and exposures to different continents such as Asia and North America. The family values from collectivist culture have provided me with the humility and gratitude when connecting with individuals at personal or professional levels. The exposure to the individualistic culture by living in Canada has

provided me the ability to gain further education and professional experiences, which have shaped my views and frame of reference, which are inclusive of both cultures.

Chapter 4: First Peoples' Cultures

Culture is the common denominator that makes the actions of the individuals understandable to a particular group (Gray, 2011, p. 23).

Culture is a dynamic and adaptive system of meaning that is learned, shared, and transmitted from one generation to the next (Krueter & McClure, 2004, p. 440). It is reflected in the values, norms, practices, symbols, ways of life, and other social interactions of a given culture (Krueter & McClure, 2004, p. 440). First People's culture refers to the Aboriginal way of life, which is the foundation of both individual and collective identity for Aboriginal people (Gray, 2011, p. 23). The history of Colonialism, and Capitalism has forever changed how Aboriginal people are treated and viewed presently in the Canadian society. Although the forced assimilation, injustices, prejudice, and discrimination have forever changed First People's family structures and their way of being, the resilience is evident as the cultural traditions and ways are still practiced to this day in the Aboriginal communities (Olynick et al, 2016, p. 156).

It is important to note that the intent of this chapter is to explore the First Peoples cultures in general rather than focusing on a specific community. The reason that I have decided to keep the focus general is to emphasize the core values, such as centrality of community and family relationships, which are at the center for each community (Deloria, 1999, p. 51). It is important to acknowledge that most of the current issues in Aboriginal communities stem from the colonization process, which was extremely influential to Aboriginal communities in North America (Gray, 2011, p. 18). In this chapter I have focused on the traditional Aboriginal families and the impact of the colonization on the current family structure from a general point of view. It is also important for the reader to know that the information provided in this chapter is from the

perspective of a Non-Aboriginal person. My exposure to the Aboriginal culture has been through my training as a social worker and afterwards working with the Aboriginal communities.

Throughout this chapter I have used the terms First Peoples, First Nations, Indigenous and, Aboriginal peoples interchangeably. While these terms can include all peoples of Aboriginal ancestry, it should be noted that First Nations are identifiable as a distinct group with a unique legal status (Bennett, Blackstone & De La Ronde, 2005, p. 6). Within Canada, Aboriginal peoples are constitutionally recognized as being Inuit, Métis and First Nations (or Indian) people (Bennett, et al., 2005, p. 6).

A Synopsis of First People's Cultures

Culture is an expression of a worldview, which in turn is the core of communities and influences how communities' function and individuals relate to each other in these communities (Gray, 2011, p. 22). For the First People, traditional culture should not be seen in such a light. Since the beginning of time Aboriginal people had very distinct and unique cultures based on a profound spiritual relationship with their land and natural resources, regardless of where they were located (Gray, 2011, p. 22). History was passed on through storytelling, art, pictographs, songs, and dances (Gray, 2011, p. 22). Culture provided people with a sense of belonging, a connection to their Creator and to each other. This connectedness provided a feeling that people were part of something larger than their individual selves alone (Gray, 2011, p. 22). Additionally, Aboriginal culture was centered on spirituality, which was evident through how people functioned in their daily lives (Gray, 2011, p. 23). For example, Aboriginal people would pray and practice sacred ceremonies (Gray, 2011, p. 23). These practices illuminated their strong connection to the land, each other, families, communities, and their ancestors (Gray, 2011, p. 23). Also, people thanked the Creator for other living beings that had given up their lives so that

people could eat and clothe themselves, as part of their daily lives (Gray, 2011, p. 23).

Aboriginal people understood that their lives were a gift from the Creator, so they must value it and fulfill their responsibilities as human beings (Gray, 2011, p. 23). As human beings, the First Peoples feel responsible for maintaining and strengthening their distinctive spiritual relationship with their traditionally owned or otherwise occupied and used lands, territories, waters and coastal seas and other resources. The people ensured that they were thankful and accountable, which gave them an understanding that their actions could either positively or negatively affect the next generation (Gray, 2011, p. 23).

Ceremonies were an integral part of First People's daily lives. They have countless ceremonies and rituals serving distinct purposes that brought the communities together in times of sorrow, prayer, transition, and celebrations (Francis, 2011, p. 15). Some ceremonies were purely spiritual in nature, while others publically marked milestones for individuals, families, or the community (Gray, 2011, p.23). Specific ceremonies were held for significant events such as the birth of a child, raising a totem pole, in times of transition like puberty, marriage, and death, the transfer of Chieftainships, names, songs, or dances (Gray, 2011, p. 24). These ceremonies were led by individuals who had been trained from an early age after they were identified as being born into the role or as uniquely gifted with specific knowledge and skills by elders in the community (Lischke & McNab, 2005, p. 89).

Another salient characteristic of indigenous cultures was that they were based on a collective perspective (Timpson, 2009, p. 23). In the same way that indigenous peoples consider their lands and resources to be collective assets, they saw their cultural values, activities, and their identity as a function of the group (Francis, 2011, p. 59). With the collectivist nature of the Aboriginal culture, the traditional family structure was unique and embraced collectivist values.

This meant that each community member took an active role in supporting each other as a community rather than a single-family unit (Timpson, 2009, p. 25).

Traditional Family Structure

Historically as well in present times, Aboriginal families are best understood as social networks of related people, called kinship in anthropological studies (Lafrance & Collin, 2003, p. 105). It is through these kinships that an individual's identity, rights, and responsibilities are defined and given meaning (Lafrance & Collin, 2003, p. 105). Emphasis was placed on large multigenerational families rather than on nuclear families (Lisheke & McNab, 2005, p. 21). Children were sacred and were mentored throughout life about the traditional teachings and ways of their Nation so that they would grow to know their family and community (Olynick, Veerde, & Ciu, 2016, p. 155). The Aboriginal communities were unique in their child rearing practices and family networks (Olynick, et al., 2016, p. 155).

Child Rearing Practices

Aboriginal parents believed in teaching children by being living examples and through experiential learning (Olynick et al., 2016, p. 155). Boys were traditionally taught to hunt and fish while girls were taught to make clothes, baskets, prepare hides, cook and care for children (Olynick et al., 2016, p. 155). One of the most important lessons taught by the traditional Aboriginal caregivers was to live respectfully with nature, sustaining the environment as well as to behave in ways that maintained peace and harmony with others (Olynick et al., 2016, p. 156). Child rearing was not only the duty of the mother and father, but was a shared responsibility with the entire community. Grandparents would often move into the home to help care for the grandchildren or even raise their grandchildren themselves (Olynick et al., 2016, p. 157). A big part of child rearing was teaching culture, history, and lessons through storytelling (Olynick et

al., 2016, p. 157). The stories were used as lessons about life instead of hitting or scolding when children needed to be disciplined (Olynick et al., 2016, p. 157). This process was commonly performed and advocated by elders. Additionally, a major part of child rearing practices were rites of passage, which were commonly performed by the elders to celebrate the developmental milestones in children's lives (Olynick et al., 2016, p. 159).

Rites of passage symbolized transitions from one developmental stage to another such as becoming an adult or an elder (Olynick, et al., 2016, p. 156). These points of transitions were ritualized, celebrated, and witnessed by the community (Olynick, et al., 2016, p. 156). Ceremonies were common ways to celebrate these rites of passage. Singing, feasting, dancing, and plant medicine were frequent occurrences in these celebrations. Rites of passages were very cultural and based on individual community's cultural beliefs, norms, and traditions (Olynick et al., 2016, p. 158). The common rites of passage in traditional Aboriginal culture included naming ceremonies, the Sun Dance, the Vision Quest, and the first kill a boy made after learning how to hunt (Olynick et al., 2016, p. 158). Regrettably during the 19th and 20th centuries, systems were implemented to abolish such rites of passage and traditions. This system was the colonization and the assimilation of the First Nations People (Olynick et al., 2016, p. 158).

History of First Peoples' in Canada

Colonialism, in which the French first colonized this land and were later succeeded by the British, began the history of what is now known as Canada (Froman, 2007, p. 13). The contact was established at different times in different regions and was principally linked to the establishment of the fur trade (Waldram et al., 2007, p. 59). The fur trade was between the settlers and the Aboriginal people, which established the social, economic, and colonial relationships between Europeans and Indigenous people (Francis, 2011, p. 129). The fur trade

provided First Peoples with European goods that they could use for gift-giving ceremonies (Francis, 2011, p. 129). The introduction and spread of infectious diseases such as smallpox, measles, influenza, yellow fever, among others have been cited as primary causes for the high death rates among Aboriginal people following contact with European settlers (Waldram et al., 2007, p. 81). It was estimated that over 7 million Indigenous peoples inhabited North America prior to contact with European settlers, and that an estimated 90% of these individuals died as result of both the direct and indirect effects of European settlement (Kirmayer et al., 2000, p. 15).

In addition to infectious diseases, the change from a traditional diet to a reliance on European food sources has been cited as another causal element resulting in high death rates among Aboriginal people during this time (Waldram et al., 2007, p. 55). Prior to contact with Europeans, Aboriginal diets were comprised of traditional foods that were high in animal protein, nutrient-rich, and low in fat or high in marine sources of fat (Earle, 2011, p. 2). The energy spent obtaining traditional foods was significant given the very physical demands of hunting, fishing, trapping, growing and gathering (Kirmayer, MacDonald, & Brass, 2001, p. 5). Due to the contact a transition in diets occurred for First Peoples, with historic consumption patterns replaced by diets high in fat and sugar, combined with a more sedentary lifestyle (Earl, 2011, p. 2). These changes in diet have given rise to chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease and diabetes (Earl, 2001, p. 3). Mental health challenges such as depression, alcoholism, suicide, and violence in many communities have been on the rise as well with the most dramatic impact on youth (Kirmayer, et al., 2001, p. 5). These mental health challenges have been directly linked to the residential school system, which has impacted generation after generation of First people (Partridge, 2010, p. 34).

Residential School System

When colonizers arrived in North America they aimed to undermine the strength and vitality of indigenous families through policies ranging from direct genocide, forced assimilation in residential schools, and child apprehension policies of the 1960s and 1970s in which indigenous children were taken from their home communities and raised in non-aboriginal foster homes (Partridge, 2010, p. 34). Although the specific histories of colonialism vary across Canada, the underlying process was one in which colonizers invaded, disrupted, stole, and denigrated indigenous experiences, ways of life, and societies (Partridge, 2010, p. 35). A significant tactic used to assimilate indigenous people was the residential school system, which was one way of separating children, families, and communities from their roots and culture (Olynic et al., 2016, p. 157). The residential school system refers to a method implemented by particular religious orders and the Canadian government in order to assimilate Aboriginal children into mainstream Westernized society (Olynic et al., 2016, p. 157). In this process, children were removed from their homes, stripped of their traditional ways of living and parental influences (Partridge, 2010, p. 35). Children were forced to adopt a new language, a new religion, and a new way of life. The implementation of the residential school system had tragic, far reaching, and long term negative outcomes (Olynic et al., 2016, p. 157).

The type of child rearing practice in the residential schools was inadequate and lacked the care and nurturing the children would have received if they stayed in their communities and families (Partridge, 2010, p. 34). Most children experienced physical, sexual, and verbal abuse in the residential schools (Partridge, 2011, p. 36). The impact of these experience and the negative consequences can be felt in many generations of First Nations people (Bennett et al., 2005, p. 16). For example, First Nations parents who grew up in the residential school system note that when raising their own children, displays of love were limited, whereas high expectations, abuse,

confusion regarding child-rearing roles, and neglect were more prevalent (Rosalyn, 1991, p. 18). In short, children who were forced into residential schools were substantially deprived of the opportunity to learn the ways of their own people (Bennett et al., 2005, p. 16). They were trained to be ashamed of Aboriginal practices and to accept and adopt White customs and habits from language and work habits to recreation and manners (Réame and Macklem, 1994, p. 153). Residential schools were designed to eliminate the Indianess in the children by converting them into *civilized* and *Christianized clones* of European society (Bennett et al., 2005, p. 16). The abuse experienced in the residential schools left them bruised emotionally and psychologically (Partridge, 2011, p. 59).

When the residential schools closed, more survivors came forward and broke their silence about the physical, sexual and emotional abuse they had suffered (Lafrance & Collins, 2003, p. 108). It was clear that the impact of the federal government's assimilation based education policy would endure for many generations (Bennett et al, 2005, p. 30). Residential schools denied children the opportunity to learn the traditions of their people, thus disrupting the intergenerational relationships and the passage of traditional knowledge from one generation to the next (Partridge, 2011, p. 58). Decades after the closure of residential schools, the lingering effects can still be felt through Aboriginal communities (Morrissette, 1994, p. 55). Substance use and abuse, child rearing role impairment, family breakdown, feelings of displacement, low self-esteem, and a loss of culture are some of the damaging consequences experienced by the Aboriginal people who grew up in the residential school system (Morrissette, 1994, p. 55). For many Elders, residential schools resulted in a denial of one of their key roles, which gave meaning and purpose to their lives by ensuring the sustainability of their community and culture through the education and mentorship of children and youth (Partridge, 2011, p. 58).

Furthermore, children who eventually returned home after being in residential school were often disconnected from their families, communities, and cultures (Partridge, 2011, p. 58). These children's experienced being strangers in their own homes (Partridge, 2011, p. 58).

Through residential schools and its deliberate attack on Aboriginal families, the families became vulnerable to the next wave of interventions of child abductions sanctioned by provincial child welfare laws (Fournier & Crey, 1997, p. 121). By the 1960s child welfare agencies successfully replaced residential schools as the preferred system of care for Aboriginal children (Armitage, 1995, p. 92). Large numbers of Aboriginal children were apprehended over a 30 year period. By the end of the 1960s, 30 to 40% of legal wards in the child welfare system were Aboriginal status children, even though they represented less than 4% of the national population (Fournier & Crey, 1997, p. 121). Moreover, Aboriginal children were vastly overrepresented in the child welfare systems across the country (Bennett et al, 2005, p. 19). Once placed in foster care or adopted out, few children would ever return home. Most children were sent to live with non-Aboriginal families, often in other provinces, the United States, or even other countries (Bennett et al, 2005, p. 19). Raised by middle-class, white parents, they grew up with little understanding or awareness of their roots, and yet they were often discriminated against because of the color of their skin (Bennett et al, 2005, p. 19). In addition to racial discrimination, their foster or adoptive parents physically and sexually abused some children (Bennett et al, 2005, p. 19). By the time some of these children reached adolescence, they were experiencing crises, running away repeatedly and turning to alcohol, drugs, and crime to ease their torment (Teichroeb, 1997, p. 78).

From the Voice of Residential School Survivors

In this section, I have included direct quotes from the residential school survivors to demonstrate the intergenerational impact on the Aboriginal people even to this day. Their struggles in life continue as they try to live their daily lives. Many of the residents have fallen prey to addictions such as alcohol or other drugs to numb the pain. Some of them are struggling to find an aim in their life as they feel destroyed inside and feel paralyzed in their ability to function. Therefore, it is important to include these direct quotes as they tell a story of their sufferings:

“Once Aboriginal people internalized the colonization processes, we feel confused and powerless... We may implode with overwhelming feelings of sadness or explode with feelings of anger. Some try to escape this state through alcohol, drugs and/or other forms of self-abuse”

(Hart, 2002, p. 27).

In my healing journey, I began to understand that alcohol abuse wasn't a genetic flaw and that not all Indians become alcoholics, as insinuated by some people. It is merely a means of coping with other, bigger problems. This isn't cop-out, as we can all make choices, but alcohol's effects are cunning and can make a person feel as he hasn't care in the world; it's also a great confidence builder (Fontaine, 2010, p. 120).

Those of us from residential schools were mentally crippled by the experience and clueless about what we were or were supposed to be. Most survivors left school in their teens or early 20s, and most didn't live long. They were trapped at age seven or slightly older in psychological, emotional, and spiritual age. For many, it has proved difficult or impossible to recover (Fontaine, 2010, p. 120).

The bad effects of our early school years surface every day of our lives, affecting how we live. It is when we finally remember, and confront our hurts, that we begin to heal. We aren't "survivors" as most former residential school students like to call ourselves, but "victors". Although we were brought to an unnatural state that devastated most of us for most of our lives, we've emerged later in life and done what we needed to do to live worthwhile and happy lives – at least, some of us have (Fontaine, 2010, p. 121).

These quotes of the residential school survivors tell a story of their struggles and resilience. From my professional experience as a social worker, I have observed the direct impact of the institutionalized colonialism on families. Every family and individual I have met has a story that sometimes is told with a smile that they have made it and often times with sadness and teary eyes. Humility is a common factor that moves me towards my own personal growth in shaping my worldview. I have learned the value of human connections, forgiveness, emotional, and psychological strength from every individual I have interacted with from children to elders. Through their courage and determination the families and communities are bringing their stories to light.

Aboriginal Families Today

Understanding families as a general term inclusive of a couple and their children, which is full of cultural connotations is an ineffective way of understanding First Peoples families (Silver, 2006, p. 18). Many Aboriginal people have internalized a colonized consciousness that continues to impact their family systems. Since contact, the nuclear family model has been rigidly imposed by outside cultures, even though it did not fit with Aboriginal cultural traditions (Armitage 1995, p. 89; Fournier & Crey, 1997, p. 51). These events forever changed the traditional circle of extended families in Aboriginal communities (Bennett et al., 2005, p. 18).

Generations of Aboriginal people experienced the ripping apart of their families and this severely undermined the role of the extended family and kinship networks, causing these networks to breakdown, or in most cases, to be destroyed (Lafrance & Collins, 2013, p. 112). However, this does not mean that families do not exist or that families have no meaning for First peoples. Families, groups of people related by marriage, birth, and history, are in fact at the core of Aboriginal communities (Olynick et al, 2016, p. 155).

Resiliency of Aboriginal People

The current generation of Aboriginal people in Canada is the only generation that did not have their parents attend residential schools (Olynick et al., 2016, p. 158). However, most of their parents or grandparents attended the residential schools and therefore are deeply impacted by wounds and bitter memories of childhood experiences (Partridge, 2010, p. 38). Regardless of these traumatic experiences, Indigenous communities have kept their cultures alive by passing on their worldview, their knowledge and know-how, their arts, rituals and performances from one generation to the next (Partridge, 2010, p. 38). Preserving their cultural heritage has also included speaking and teaching their own languages, and protecting their sacred sites and objects (Partridge, 2010, p. 38). It has also included defending and holding onto their lands and territories, since these are fundamental for sustaining them as peoples and cultures (Partridge, 2010, p. 58). The strength of First people is illuminated in the following quote:

What people didn't understand is that those boarding (residential) school terrorists thought that it (culture) could disappear in a generation, and they would have white thinking children. They couldn't erase it, and therein lies the hope. Right there. And when that spirit is reawakened it is more powerful than anything that I have ever met in my whole life. I am impressed with the strength of culture. Even though the missionaries

tried, the boarding (residential) schools tried, all the well-intentioned little white people tried . . . But something hasn't died (as cited in Partridge, 2010, p.59).

Moving Forward

Finally, I have chosen a poem to conclude the chapter that exemplifies the Aboriginal Peoples resilience and that they are able to move forward in the face of the adversities their ancestors' experienced in the form of colonization process and the residential school system. They are carrying on as they are healing from the wounds of the past to create fulfilling lives for their upcoming generations.

We are free to be who we are—

To create our own life Out of the past and out of the present.

We are our ancestors.

When we can heal ourselves,

We also heal our ancestors,

Our Grandmothers, our Grandfathers and our children.

When we heal ourselves, we heal Mother Earth.

(Blumenstein, 2013, p. iii)

Chapter 5: A Meeting of Cultures

In this chapter, I describe my personal journey in the exposure of the three cultures in my lifetime thus far, Collectivist, Western, and First Peoples Culture. Experiencing different environments have enhanced the worldview I hold today. Each culture emphasizes unique values and belief systems. The Indian culture values collectivistic thinking and the Western culture places more weight on individual needs. Through my exposure in my work as a social worker, I learned that First Peoples' cultures hold the worldview as an integrated whole, balancing physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual health. These beliefs make up who a person is and how he or she functions in society and within the environment. Similar to my culture of origin, Aboriginal culture recognizes the common good of all people over the individual (Campbell, Menzies, & Peacock, 2003, p. 10).

Being born in India, I inherited the *we* concept, which contends that everyone else's welfare in the family is greater than my own personal needs. For example, in Western society most of the time when young adults turn a certain age they are free to choose what meets their personal goals. In the culture I grew up in, my needs and goals were shaped and directed in ways that were consistent with my entire family unit. This system was not viewed as a deficit but a strength that met collectivist goals. When I moved to Canada I was exposed to the Western ways of being and thinking, which added a new way of thinking and being. This included a focus on individual needs and introduced me to the concept of *I* over *we*.

As I started my journey in Canada, through attending college and afterwards in my professional life, I started to hear the term *self-care*. Initially, I was not able to comprehend the concept of self-care in terms of spending time on oneself away from my family. In the culture and family I grew up in, there is no term for *self-care*. In the context of my family and culture of

origin, taking care of oneself means meeting everyone else's needs and by doing so it is believed that a person would feel appreciated and positively reinforced to continue the same behavior through verbal statements such as *she is a good daughter/son/wife/mother/ etc.* Despite the influence of my family and culture of origin, overtime I started to realize that there is value in spending time on oneself away from daily routines and expectations. The elders in my family considered this time spent with myself to be an abandonment of my roles and responsibilities, although it was not verbalized. In this process I felt similar to a teeter-totter. I was trying to balance both worlds, the expectations of the collectivist culture and my new identity as an individual with the exposure to the Western ways of being. As I continued on further with my education and enhancing my world view I started to work as a social worker for an Aboriginal child welfare agency that brought me back to my original way of being.

Not everyone is fortunate enough to feel like home when connect with certain individuals or cultures different from their own. I felt this sense of connectedness through a mere chance when I was completing my fourth year practicum for my child welfare specialization certification. Although my practicum was through the Ministry of Children and Family Development, the program required that I to spend two weeks with an Aboriginal child welfare agency. Soon after the completion of my program, I was hired as a front line Social Worker. I predominantly worked with Aboriginal communities and families. As I started to meet with the families and began connecting with the elders I learned more about their cultures. This learning resonated with me in regards to the values and beliefs I was raised with, such as respect for elders, responsibilities towards younger generations, and honoring mother earth. For example, traditionally in my culture the elders are seen as a source of wisdom and they share their wealth of wisdom with the younger generations through storytelling. My grandmother, who lived with

us until she passed away, used to tell me stories every night until I fell asleep in her bed. This continued on until I went to college at the age of 16. Through these stories as well as the time I spent with her, she taught me many life skills that I utilize to this day, such as traditional ways of cooking and most of all being a humble and kind human being.

There are many resemblances between my culture and the First Peoples cultures that have left me feeling more and more connected with the Aboriginal way of being as I have continued on my journey in my profession. For instance, Aboriginal culture honors a close relationship with the land. In my culture people call land *mother earth*. Mother earth symbolizes unconditional love and the nurturing of humankind as it provides the basic essentials people need to survive. My father was a farmer, and although he was educated and had a job in the city, he moved back to his village to take care of his land and continue farming to provide for his family. In turn, he felt tremendous satisfaction because he was where he felt he belonged. We grew up with the values to respect nature and honor the sacred land that gives back to us unconditionally. There are many more stories of humility, kindness, forgiveness, connectedness, and giving without an expectation of receiving, which are similar between both cultures that I could share. However, due to the constraints of the topics covered under this subject I will conclude this chapter by sharing a story about my father that displays his kindness and giving without an expectation of receiving, which has influenced my journey in life.

Family Influence

The path of my personal or more so, my professional journey, has been influenced by my father's direct and indirect teachings. He has gifted me with the virtues of kindness, humility, generosity, patience, and genuineness. I strongly believe that my place in the world, working with an Aboriginal agency with children, youth, and their families, and my experiences with the

Aboriginal culture, has all been exactly how it was supposed to be without any planning.

Although there are countless stories I recall as I reflect on my memories of childhood about my father's kindness and humility, the ones that stands out the most are inviting a lost stranger to our family home to stay with us for a few days and my father's faith in humanity above the prevalent cast system in India. I would like readers to not be carried away with the language and words I use in sharing this story, instead I encourage them to connect with the experience, as the words do not do justice to the essence of the story.

On a typical summer evening, my father came home after working a long day at the farm. This particular summer evening, a stranger in roughly his 30s carrying a suitcase in his hand entered the door with my father. My mother and I were puzzled about who this person could be as they did not look like any of our relatives. He did not speak our language and had no way of communicating, other than saying a few words in broken English. The story unfolded that my father met him while he was walking home from the farm. This man approached my father and appeared to be lost and was asking for directions. As it was getting dark and there was no public transportation left that could take him back to the city from our small village. My father trusted him enough to bring him to his family home.

As we sat together and had our dinner, this stranger could not contain himself. Tears started to flow down his face. In his broken English, he was able to communicate that he was lost and that someone had stolen his wallet. When he was not able to pay the bus fare, the bus driver kicked him off the bus in the middle of nowhere and he just kept on walking until he ended up on the dirt paths of our village. Although it was not clear, it appeared that he had two children back home in Kerala, which is located in the southwestern tip of Indian peninsula whereas Punjab is in the north west of India where we lived. The distance between Punjab and Kerala is 2,465

kilometers/1531.7 miles. What my father understood from the conversation was that he was on a business trip and boarded the wrong train when someone stole his wallet. He was not able to pay the fare for the next train and somehow ended up in our village.

The next day was Sunday, a day off for the buses in the small villages. Because of this, my father let him stay with us for two nights in our family home. I am not certain if a thought of fear ever occurred to my father, that this man might be dangerous or could harm us in any way. Instead, my father not only gave him enough money for the fare to reach his home but also some extra to eat along the way. The scene I remember when this man was leaving and saying goodbye was unforgettable. He had tears in his eyes, an expression of gratitude and connectedness in some way with our family. We never heard from him again and hoped that he reached back home safe and sound.

Chapter 6: Ways of Working – Collaborating & Creating Relationships

The theme of this thesis has been the exploration of culture and its influence on people's relationships with one another. I have explored my culture of origin, which is collectivist, the western culture where I moved to when I was 21 years old, and the exposure to the First Peoples culture I've had through my work with an Aboriginal child welfare agency. As I dug deeper into each topic of discussion, it became evident that people exist in relationships, regardless of their cultural background. For example, a baby is born to a mother and that mother is someone's daughter, sister, friend, wife; she also has many other relationships. Within all three topics of discussion, I have shared some of my personal journey experiences and family influences, which are all in relationship with others. In this final chapter, I will describe my way of working and creating relationships, which will work as a foundation that I will continue to build on as I further my personal and professional growth. The foundation of my work is built on the teachings of the medicine wheel, the gifts my father shared with me through his many teachings, the collaborative approach to therapy, and collaborating as a style.

Medicine Wheel

When working with people the medicine wheel is used to encourage balance and harmony in all aspects of an individual's life (Clarke & Holtslander, 2010, p. 34). This is related to the philosophy of Mitakouye Oyasin, a phrase that comes from a Lakota prayer, which translated means, "All my relations" or "We are all related" (Tinker, 1996, p. 158). In psychology the medicine wheel is known as the Jungian mandala—a symbol of wholeness (Dapince, 2006, p. 251). The teachings are to encourage harmony in the individual, community, and nation at large (Clarke & Holtslander, 2010, p. 34). Thus, the teachings of the medicine

wheel are holistic. Although the medicine wheel varies among Canada's over 500 tribes and among the teachings of elders, the four directions are similar (Clarke & Holtslander, 2010, p. 34). They may be presented as four seasons, four directions, or four teachings (Pewewardy, 1999, p. 29).

Holistic teachings from the medicine wheel are centered from the inside out as the person is placed in the middle and then expanded into four directions (Pewewardy, 1999, p. 29). The four directions are east, south, west, and north (Clarke & Holtslander, 2010, p. 34). East represents physical health, which can include diet, health, sexual identity and maturity (Twig & Hengen, 2009, p. 15). Issues of addiction, chronic or acute stress symptoms, and developmental issues during adolescence are placed in this quadrant. South is representative of emotional dimensions, which include the array of human feelings: love, belonging, fear, joy and the like (Twig & Hengen, 2009, p. 15). Issues that began in childhood are often located in this quadrant. West represents mental and social dimensions, which include general intellectual ability, social skills, education, career development, and interpersonal communication such as family relationships (Twig & Hengen, 2009, p. 15). The last but not the least of the four directions is north. It is representative of spiritual and moral factors, which can include moral values, respect, religious beliefs, and personal goals (Pewewardy, 1999, p. 29). Spiritual or moral development is often plotted in this quadrant (Twig & Hengen, 2006a, p. 15).

The Medicine Wheel in Therapeutic Practice

The four directions of the wheel provide a framework for assessment and intervention from a holistic perspective when we are working with people (Clarke & Holtslander, 2010, p. 34). The medicine wheel teaches us that we have four directions to our nature. From this perspective, each of these aspects must be equally developed in a healthy and well-balanced

individual (Pewewardy, 1999, p. 31). Spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical aspects of the person are all connected and interplay with one another (Nabigon & Mawhiney, 1996, p. 51). As a result, there are no clear-cut lines between each aspect (Nabigon & Mawhiney, 1996, p. 51). To attain balance one must understand how each aspect connects with the others. For example, physical distress affects how we feel, think, and what we embrace and as such it needs to be recognized as interrelated and addressed in a holistic manner (Verniest, 2006, p. 3). The goal of being healthy is attained by facing issues concerning all aspects of the self.

A holistic view of people is paramount to my work. In writing this thesis and exploring different cultures, I found that regardless of the cultural background people develop holistically and there needs to be a balance of social, emotional, physical, and psychological supports. The idea of the Medicine Wheel and the mind, body, emotions, and spirit dialogue has significance for the world of counselling and psychotherapy (McCabe, 2007, p. 144). Therefore, my intention as a therapist will be to base my therapeutic practice on the philosophy behind the medicine wheel. In the Aboriginal philosophy, it is believed that what happens to the individual is interconnected to, and will affect, the family, community and nation to which the individual belongs (McCabe, 2007, p. 144). When individuals are influenced by something, by extension their families, communities, and nations will be influenced as well.

Health and wellness in a person's life are seen as outcomes of the balance and integration of these aspects within a person (McCabe, 2007, p. 145). It is believed that these traits need to work harmoniously together in the interest of healing to result in wellness. For example, in writing this thesis, I take the view that I am not just a physical body moving my hands with my brain and writing sentences in response to the neural impulses (McCabe, 2007, p. 145). Rather, as McCabe (2007) proposes, in this process of writing an integration dialogue is

occurring which is composed of mind, body, emotions, and spirit. This integration engages the process at a deeper and profound level of understanding and experience, without necessarily being aware of it. In applied terms, according to the medicine wheel, without an integration of the mind, body, emotions, and spirit, the necessary qualities to create potentially meaningful experiences would be missing, which would mean that the essential ingredients for activating healing process are missing (McCabe, 2007, p. 145).

The Medicine Wheel offers a way of understanding and conceptualizing the unexplainable and the mystical (McCabe, 2007, p. 145). This inner dialogue is needed in order to maintain balance and harmony. For example, The Medicine Wheel and inner dialogue can help counsellors to hear their own inner dialogues of healing which facilitates the healing of others (McCabe, 2007, p. 145). Moreover, one of the underlying assumptions of conventional counselling is that it works well when dealing with one person at a time (Verniest, 2006, p. 40). The focus of counselling is usually on the individual seeking help rather than working within a circle of relationships and communities. However, from the Aboriginal spiritual view focusing on the individual is only part of the solution, instead the community is considered to be an integral part of the healing process (McNab, 2008, p. 149). Ceremonies, teachings and spiritual integrity are considered to be essential components of traditional healing (McCabe, 2007, p. 149). Participants in traditional healing actively link their past, their present, and their futures and the meaningful relationships through their participation in ceremonies, the development of wisdom through teachings, and their acceptance of a higher life force in the universe (McCabe, 2007, p. 150). Therefore, to promote understanding in therapy, I feel it is essential to view the person from a holistic lens, mind, body, and soul.

I feel privileged to be exposed to the Aboriginal culture and the knowledge about the four essential natures of life often in the form of medicine wheel.. I write this with great modesty and humility that I am making a small attempt to explore the teachings of the medicine wheel. The scope of this thesis is limited and under no circumstance can I justify the inclusiveness and holistic nature of the medicine wheel teachings. Despite this, I felt it was important to introduce the medicine wheel as I am pulled towards these teachings and they resonate with me as I can relate to many gifts that I have been blessed with in my childhood years from my father.

Gifts from my Father

One of the sacred teachings of the Medicine Wheel is humility (Benton-Banai, 1988, p. 51). It is there because human pride is always a threat to our inner balance and harmony (Bopp, Bopp, Lane & Brown, 1984, p. 69). Although I am not aboriginal, the value of humility is central to me and comes from my father, who I consider to be my inspiration as I move further in my journey in life. Growing up, I had the honor of witnessing many acts of humility, kindness, generosity, social justice, and empathy portrayed by my father. These observations helped to shape my worldview, as well as influenced my attitude towards my way of being in this world, and increased my gratitude as I evolve in my journey. To illuminate the importance of humility, I will share the following story, which is an example of my fathers' expression of humility. In India the cast system is present to this day and there are unspoken standards that most people follow when around people of lower classes. For example, high-class people do not sit on the same level as workers, who are considered to be members of a lower class. Also, higher-class people use different utensils and dishes when feeding the poor. Contrary to these societal standards, my father treated the lower class people who worked on our farms with the same respect as he would possibly the chief of the village. He never really cared about what influential

or socially important people thought of him. He always seemed to be more concerned with what the lower class people in the village thought of him. He was a humble person and never wanted to hurt anyone's feelings. To him, it did not matter who was in his company he treated everyone with the same respect. His acts of generosity and kindness were evident in his daily life from helping strangers stay at our home to donating funds to a number of asylums in our neighboring communities. When I was growing up, there was little support in place for children and adults with special needs or mental health challenges. Because of the lack of support, families would often send them away to live in asylums or group homes. Once these individuals left their family homes, they rarely came back. The funds supporting these asylums or group homes were scarce and even if they were there the corruption in the system limited the accessibility of these funds for the residents of these places. My father would donate food, clothes, and thousands of rupees every year without making it known to anyone. Following the saying that the left hand shouldn't know what the right hand is doing, he was always discrete when he supported any charity.

I learned at a young age that we have choices each and every day with those we encounter within our circle of influence, our work, and our life space. I recognize that the people I interact with may have had different opportunities than I have had. When provided the chance I believe it is important to consider what you can do to help others become more visible; how you can talk to, not through others; how you can respect, not disrespect a person in need; and how to value, not devalue those who do not appear like us. I believe all these teachings from my father growing up help me in my work as a professional in the field of social work as well as an early childhood educator when working with children and families. More specifically, I relate to people from a place of empathy, genuineness, and humility. My aspiration to become a therapist

was influenced by my culture, my family influences especially my father as well as the gifts the people who I have met in my life span who I feel privileged to have worked with.

At this point in my education to be a therapist, I have researched and studied many diverse therapeutic approaches. As I continue to learn more, what seems to be more important than the specific techniques is the presence of the therapist and collaborative nature of the relationship, no matter what cultural group the person coming to therapy belongs to. The therapeutic approach that I find resonates with my philosophical stance is collaborative therapy. I believe that therapy is in conversation and that no other approach to therapy explains the process of creating relationships that make a difference through conversation quite like collaborative therapy (Anderson, 2007, p. 2).

Collaborative Therapy

“How can our practice have relevance for people’s everyday lives in our fast changing world, what is this relevance, and who determines it?” (Anderson, 2007, p. 1)

The philosophical stance is the heart and spirit of the collaborative approach and refers to the way that we, as counsellors, approach our practice and the people we meet in it (Anderson, 2007, p. 10). It refers to an attitude, a posture and a tone that communicates to another the special importance that they hold for us (Anderson, 2007, p. 10). This therapeutic approach conveys that they are a unique human being and not a category of people. Following this approach, people are recognized and appreciated; their voices are worthy of hearing (Anderson, 2007, p. 10). It refers to a posture of meeting each person and their circumstances as if we have not met them before. It reflects a way of being with people, including ways of orienting with, thinking with, talking with, acting with, and responding with (Anderson, 2007, p. 44). The significant word here is with: a *witnness* process of orienting and re-orienting oneself to the other person (Hoffman,

2007; Shotter, 2004, 2005). Influenced by Shotter's notion of *witness thinking*, Hoffman (2007) refers to this kind of relationship as "one that is as communal and collective as it is intimate, witness that requires us to be intrinsically more participatory and mutual and less hierarchical and dualistic" (as cite in Anderson, 2017, p. 44). Working with children, youth, and families has gifted me with an understanding of the value of sometimes seemingly simple conversations:

I can imagine a work, which is not aimed at changing the person, or parts of the person, it is, rather a work which stirs together, creating a people. I now can imagine a work which transforms not souls, but rooms and worlds, which clears spaces where soles can gather, and do gather. And a people become (Kinman, 2009 p. 6).

Kinman's words in his writing resonate and validate my approach towards social work as well as my attitude towards the field of counselling as I enter as a novice therapist. During my time as a guardianship social worker I worked with a number of youth with challenging behaviors. These youth were flagged as high risk, difficult to connect with, and ultimately had a variety of diagnoses attached to their names. Although some of the diagnoses were helpful in establishing after care arrangements and supports, the others were no more than labels attached to them. Many of these children were on high dosages of medication. It was interesting, although not at all surprising that when they were in stable placements and had a close connection with their caregivers/foster parents, they were either completely weaned off the medication or the dosage was drastically decreased. Although most of these caregivers/foster parents had taken training to become foster parents, they had a way of working with these children that was simply being there when they needed them. Oftentimes, the time of need was when these children and youth were pushing them away. From my observations as well as the assumptions that can be made based on the decrease of medication when in stable placements, I believe that what

mattered was the quality of time spent with each individual person. As a social worker, some of these quality moments were as simple as going to the Tim Horton's drive through for coffee. Alternatively at times these quality moments involved going shopping with young teen females who loved to window shop at the mall. These examples are significant in that they convey that simple gestures can mean more than expensive interventions. As I reflect back on my work, the most memorable moments have been when I was with my clients having simple conversations.

This value for seemingly simple conversations is echoed in Anderson's therapeutic approach. As Anderson states (2007), when we are with people, our stance embodies a belief that communicates to others through our attitude, tone, body gestures, word choices, and timing, the special importance they hold for us. It conveys to people that they are valued as a unique human and not as a category of people (Anderson, 2007, p. 44). As a result of this type of engagement, they feel that they have something worthy of saying and hearing. When we meet with people without prior judgment of past, present, or future, we hold the space for them to collaborate and have conversations (Anderson, 2007, p. 44). We hold a stance of 'witness,' which is intrinsically more participatory and mutual rather than hierarchical or dualistic (Anderson, 2007, p. 44). The unique feature of this philosophical stance is the interconnectedness between the therapist and the client (Anderson, 2007, p. 44). The therapist creates a space for a dialogical conversation and a collaborative relationship and as a result both therapist and client become conversational partners (Anderson, 2007, p. 45). The engagement in conversation is reciprocal and becomes a social activity. It becomes witness thinking, which is reflective and involves coming in contact with another human being through words and bodily expressions. In this stance, the therapist is the listener who follows the client who is a talker. In following, not only hearing the words but also seeing how the words are expressed (Anderson,

2007, p. 70). From the stance of witness, people become conversational partners who engage in collaborative relationships and in dialogical conversations with others. Being *with* cannot be overemphasized as it describes human beings encountering and responding with each other as they reciprocally engage in the social activity and community that we call therapy (Anderson, 2007, p. 45). Anderson (2007) also emphasizes that it is important to keep in mind that each circumstance and occurrence is unique when we are with people. Therefore, we as the therapist must spontaneously adapt to each new and continuing relationship and conversation. Each relationship is unique as it forms and evolves. The art of witness is spontaneous and mutually readapts as well as redefines itself over time (Anderson, 2007, p. 46).

In my work with people, I am also inspired by Kinman's (2001) Collaborative Action Plan, which is an alternative to the usual problem – oriented approach and is widely used by agencies and service delivering agencies such as social welfare agencies (as cited in Anderson, 2007, p. 76). This process of working with individuals is based on collective and collaborative planning rather than being hierarchical where the decisions are made in isolation without the involvement of people being impacted (as cited in Anderson, 2007, p. 76). Kinman's approach is organized around the *language of gifts* (as cited in Anderson 2007, p. 76). From this approach, we place emphasis on the gifts and potential a person can give to the community and what the community can give to the person. These gifts are not of monetary value or materialistic, rather they are the unique qualities of each person, that when working in collaboration, enriches the process of mutual interaction and building of relationships (as cited in Anderson, 2007, p. 76).

These therapists have inspired my therapeutic approach and general way of being. My aim to create a position of respect for each person I interact with and ultimately create trust and safety in these relationships is inspired and supported by these therapists. These approaches and

ideas reinforce my stance of being in this world, which includes being a genuine human being in relationship with others around me in my personal and professional life. Learning more about these philosophical stances helps me improve my personality and create a deeper understanding about my own relationships. For example, as a parent I have learned the value of creating respectful relationships rather than placing greater emphasis on academic or financial achievements. What brings my children and I closer is our conversations and being with each other. In my professional practice, I am focused on embracing the strengths of my clients and coworkers that build each other up and creates a space for mutual respect and understanding.

Collaborating as style

Collaborative therapy is not simply a set of tools, rather this “therapeutic collaboration is a stance [that] implicitly and explicitly opens therapy decisions and other activities to the client for participation on a par with the therapist” (as cite in Anderson, 2007, p. 403) Collaboration is not just a professional lifestyle but rather a stance to life (as cite in Anderson, 2007, p. 403). When we approach daily interactions of our professional lives collaboratively, it enhances and produces greater satisfaction within those working relationships (Anderson, 2007, p. 403). These interactions support and deepen our collaborative efforts with our clients and have the potential to stimulate change on other levels, such as systemic levels (George & Wulfe, 2007, p. 403). In order to be effective we need to make collaboration a lifestyle that is with us all the times and in every situation that we are with people.

Key Elements in Working Collaboratively

Anderson’s (2007) stance on collaboration as a lifestyle resonates with me as she describes approaching our daily interactions and those in our professional lives collaboratively (Anderson, 2007, p.403). I believe when we have developed this attitude, it becomes part of who

we are and that this way of being shows in our personal and professional work. Some of the key elements of working collaboratively include valuation, manners, critical self-reflection, appreciation and responsibility for community, and creative action that make us collaborative (Anderson, 2007, p 404).

Valuation

Valuation means we behave in ways that truly value what each person has to say rather than framing interactions as conversations in which the other person is either in agreement of a position or against it (as cited in Anderson, 2007, p. 408). Valuation involves becoming genuinely interested in views that are different from our own and approaching this with a sense of novelty and attraction. It is a stance that places value on the unusual and encourages the development of ideas outside of our comfort zone or preferred views (as cited in Anderson, 2007, p. 408). Working with this stance increases the possibility among the participants to generate new ideas in relation to problems or issues that are under construction (as cited in Anderson, 2007, p. 408).

Acting Mannerly

Although it seems like a simple and basic concept, manners are subject to and derived from our larger systems of culture, ethnicity, gender, and context, and therefore the notion of manners is not singular (as cited in Anderson, 2007, p. 411). Manners are specific ways that we communicate respect and regard for others (as cited in Anderson, 2007, p. 411). Manners help convey to the person we are in conversations with that we are connected to them and that they matter to us (as cited in Anderson, 2007, p. 411). In therapy, we show manners when we value the process more than overvaluing the outcomes (as cited in Anderson, 2007, p. 408). Respecting others is widely viewed as a core ingredient in successfully working with clients and is a widely

held manner. It is a vital element in all the relationships of our lives (as cited in Anderson, 2007, p. 411). People often do not remember the specific content of working together, but they often remember how they were treated (Anderson, 2007, p. 411).

Critical Self-Reflection

Critical self-reflection is another core element of collaborating as a professional. It is the process of carefully examining our behaviors and generating improved or enhanced behaviors and relationships (Anderson, 2007, p. 412). Critical self-reflection includes evaluating abilities and capacities and communicating the results of such inquiries in respectful ways (Anderson, 2007, p. 412). It is asking questions of our behaviors, assumptions, and effects on others (Anderson 2007, p. 413). For example, am I being true to what I believe? Has what I believe been checked lately to see if it still meaningful and useful for me? Am I sure that I am taking everything into consideration? How does my behavior look from a variety of positions? What ideas do I consistently edit out? We must critically reflect with ourselves and be open to receiving feedback from others. Critically examining our positions models a willingness to challenge our own beliefs and creates room for other ideas to emerge (Anderson, 2007, p. 414).

Community

Community is an important element to being collaborative, as we need to understand that our individual thoughts and actions can always be considered part of a larger picture. Acting within this larger context can lead to new ideas and positions (Anderson, 2007, p. 414). This view is centered on a stance of relational responsibility and accountability, from us to others and from others to us (McNamee & Gergen, 1998, p. 414). Hence, limiting our thinking to how decisions and behaviors only effect our immediate situation can cut us off from considering and understanding our wider communities (Anderson, 2007, p. 414).

Creating Action

Creating action: talking, describing, and planning are not good enough. We must combine these steps in a way of coordinating with others to create action that maximizes the benefits that can accrue from collaborative ways of understanding (Anderson, 2007, p. 417). We need to take steps to secure structural and relational changes for the benefit of all involved. Creating action works on multiple levels simultaneously including personal and larger social levels (Smith, William, & Johnson, 1997, p. 8). Therefore, working collaboratively and creatively guides us to have an impact on our relationships at the large community level, which ultimately leads to change and directs us to move towards creating changes at the large societal level. (Smith, William, & Johnson, 1997, p. 8).

The collaborative life style is deliberate and thus we make a conscious effort to engage in behaviors that reflect this value in our lives. This includes the ways we engage with our clients when in therapy, with our colleagues, and with people in general regardless of where we are (George & Wulfe, 2007, p. 419). It is a stance that supports an overall collaborative style of being and interacting. To apply the collaborative elements and practices of valuing, acting mannerly, critical self-evaluating, building community, and enacting creative changes in multiple contexts reinforces and expands our vision of what being collaborative is and generates more ideas about how we might increase its impact in our lives (George & Wulfe, 2007, p. 419).

Conclusion

On the basis of reviewing literature on Collectivism, Individualism, and First Peoples cultures, I believe that the collaborative approach as style to therapy can be effective when working with individuals from diverse backgrounds. It is evident that social and cultural changes over the decades in every culture have altered entire lifestyles and interpersonal relationships

patterns (Chadha & Koushik, 2013, p. 303). In collectivist cultures, there has been more movement towards nuclear families from joint and extended families. Also, there has been an increase in urbanization, changes in roles with increased employment of women, migratory movements among the younger generations, and loss of the experience shared by elderly members in the family (Chadha & Koushik, 2013, p. 303). Ultimately these shifts have increased the stress and pressure on families, leading to an increased vulnerability to emotional challenges (Chadha & Koushik, 2013, p. 303). Although every family and individual's challenges are unique, they may be placed under the umbrella of increased defragmentation of society.

In the Individualist/western cultures, as Chadha & Koushik (2013) state, countries such as India within the developing world are impatient and intend to achieve within a generation, what countries in the developed world took centuries (p. 304). Thus, it can be implied that Individualist cultures are further ingrained in individuality and suffering from what Alexander (2011) calls dislocation. He views this as further movement from psychosocial integration, which is the goal of both personal and societal human development (Alexander, 2011, p. 14). The more people, individually and collectively, are unable to establish and maintain an existential sense of wholeness and community, the increased the likelihood that they will suffer from not just addictions but also the pathologies of modern life—depression, apathy, anxiety, self-harm and violence (Alexander, 2011, p. 14). When individuals and communities are struggling with such defragmentation, it appears unrealistic to focus on one area of mental health. The collaborative approach therapy empowers people regardless of the culture or background and helps them find solution to their challenges.

An example of the need to work collaboratively with people is when working with Aboriginal peoples, who have long argued that the solutions which have originated from within

their own cultures have been "more effective than the disastrous 'solutions' imposed by the majority culture" (Couture, 1987, p. 184) when it comes to therapy and counseling. Initiatives that originate in Aboriginal communities and espouse those communities' worldviews, cultural imperatives, and traditional approaches have proven to be most successful in meeting their peoples' needs and in facilitating change. A key aspect in de-colonization is empowerment — a process that facilitates access to personal, organizational, and community resources in order to have control over one's life (Hassenfeld, 1987, p. 8). Moreover, it is an ability that we all have, but which needs to be released..." (Rappaport, 1985, p. 17). One of the key aspects of an effective healing program which cannot be overlooked is that "the empowerment process in an Aboriginal community cannot at this point in time happen in isolation or without the collaboration of government agencies and other non-Aboriginal service providers" (V. Seymour, personal communication, June 1999). In order to facilitate community empowerment, all those who collaborate with Aboriginal communities in healing initiatives must understand and accept that Aboriginal peoples have practiced viable healing methods based on their worldview throughout their history, and that these methods must be recognized and accepted as equal to Western therapeutic approaches (Absalon, 1993, p. 52). Counsellors, therapists, and other helpers who work collaboratively with Aboriginal communities and/or Aboriginal clients must critically examine their role as experts. They must be prepared to relinquish control and learn, understand and accept realities and worldviews other than their own (Borg, Brownlee, & Delaney, 1995, p. 92).

As Anderson (2007) states therapy is a kind of human art and in which people participate and bond with others. Although I am a novice in the field of psychotherapy, I feel pulled toward approaches that empower people to be in control of their own lives. I am afraid to say that my

own unique approach to psychotherapy is in its infancy stage. However, the foundation relies on being with and collaborating with others, without holding power and a sense of expertise. As an infant learns to walk with the support of caring adults around her or the object that support her in the process, I find that working collaborating as a style and being informed about the collaborative approach will help me in learning to walk the path and move beyond my comfort zone. It goes without saying that my upbringing, educational background, and personal and professional experiences have shaped my worldview, which continues to evolve. As I continue along in the counseling field and work from the collaborative philosophical stance, I can anticipate certain impediments. Some of these obstacles may not be in my control, for example, the systemic challenges when working with the government agencies. In my experience working in a non-profit for the last 20 years, I have found that there seems to be an increase in the demand for mental health services especially for children and youth that agencies such as Child Youth and Mental Health can provide. Therefore, there seems to be a push in services to see more and more children, which worries me in regards to the collaborative work I would like to do. Nonetheless, my collaborative style will always be with me regardless of the agencies I work for.

Moving Forward and Looking Ahead

As I was learning and researching about collaborating as a style I stumbled upon a few questions that evoke a curiosity in me and leaves me wondering about the answers or if there are any answers? Some of these questions are: how do we live the collaborative style at home with family, close friends, and neighbors, communities, and the professional settings (Wulfe & George, 2007, p. 420)? Are there areas where a *little collaboration* might be helpful in, and complete dedication might be harmful? Is there a way that these ideas would influence the

world? I believe that collaborative relationships enrich lives far beyond their usefulness in the therapeutic context. My wondering if my way of being in this world and basing my therapeutic practice on the foundation of teachings of my father, the traditional medicine wheel, making collaborating as a style is enough? I believe that time will tell...

“Fire can warm or consume,

water can quench or drown,

wind can caress or cut.

And so it is with human relationships;

we can both create and destroy,

nurture and terrorize,

traumatize and heal each other”

(Perry, 2017, p. 1).

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