

A Conversation on Culture, Context, and Therapy  
within the Nuuchahnulth Nation

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### **Abstract**

In this master's thesis, I focus on the potential relational, cultural, and contextual variables that could be of consideration to non-aboriginal therapists working with first nations peoples on the west coast of British Columbia. This will be done through a combination of literature review examining the historical context in which the Nuuchah Nulth (people who live along the mountains) (Atleo, 2004) and other west coast first nation people find themselves today, the social and political issues that commonly effect this people, the therapeutic practices this people group have traditionally participated in, and a look at considerations other helping professionals have taken working with indigenous people. The research is qualitative, in the form of a case study, and ethnographic and phenomenological research methodologies. A main component of this thesis is an interview conducted with an elder of the Nuuchah Nulth village, Houpsitas located in the community of Kyuquot BC on Vancouver Island. The interview and following discussion explore her personal opinions on the challenges this community faces, their cultural heritage and how that could play a part in their healing and the perception of therapy within their particular community.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

It should be a goal of every counsellor and health care professional to have a grasp of the contextual and cultural challenges in working with any given population. With this goal in mind, it is also important to be able to recognize and evaluate our own culture and context. As a Caucasian male, having grown up and lived up until this point in the suburbs of Vancouver, BC, I am a part of what is commonly referred to as the dominant culture. I also come with my own cultural background, and contextual framework that informs my perception of virtually everything. Maria Rodriguez defines this idea as a person's worldview:

The notion of world view deals with a culture's orientation and relationship to ideas such as man, nature, spiritual beliefs, the universe and other philosophical issues concerned with the concept of being. Our world view helps us locate our place and rank in the universe and influences our beliefs, values, attitudes, uses of time and other aspects of culture. (2013, p. 34)

For those who have the privilege of working with the indigenous populations on the west coast of Vancouver Island, British Columbia Canada, it is important to know how their cultural experience, their place in time and space, and their world-view may influence potential therapeutic goals for clients, and shape strategies for counsellors. These often small, isolated indigenous communities on the west coast are often served by non-indigenous health-care professionals and therapists. To effectively serve these populations it is important to have a base knowledge of the culture and context to which they find themselves in. While these factors will be slightly different for each individual in each community, the Nuu Chah Nulth people share a rich cultural heritage that has

instilled in them a worldview that is uniquely theirs, and a history that is equally beautiful and painful, impacting their current state of being.

If we hope to be effective and sensitive therapists working in communities where we don't share culture, research on working with other aboriginal populations have shown that since indigenous “values and behaviours differ significantly from those of the dominant culture of Canada, it is imperative that non-Aboriginal counsellors working in the [indigenous] context understand and are able to apply principles in their professional practice with [indigenous] clients” (Wihak, 2003, p.8). While research has been done in the past with a focus of providing culturally sensitive therapy for the aboriginal population in general, there is a lack of material on working with specific people groups.

To address this lack of specific research, this thesis combines a literature review including, but not limited to: general history of the Nuuchahnulth people, the influence of colonization on day to day living, effects of residential school, systemic trauma issues that are common in small aboriginal communities, traditional views on therapeutic practices, and what sort of cultural therapeutic practices have been incorporated up to this point.

In recognition that “in Canada, people of colour who are not from the original founders of the Canadian state are called visible minorities...includ[ing] the original inhabitants—first nation” (France 2013, p.10), there is also a focus on unpacking some of the struggles the Nuuchahnulth face dealing with racism and discrimination. In Canada, minorities have been and continue to be subjected to three forms of decimation: individual, institutional and cultural. (France, 2013) Public perception of minorities, especially of the aboriginal population heavily impacts the ways in which individual

racism is expressed and felt. Institutional racism, as defined by m. Honore France “is communicated through established practices that perpetuate inequities” (France, 2013, p.17). Cultural racism involves believing in the inferiority of one culture over another.

The other key component of research involved in this thesis is an interview with an elder (originally planned on being a set of 3 interviews) from the Nuuchahnulth village, Houpsitas located in the community of Kyuquot on Vancouver Island, British Columbia. I have had the pleasure of being involved with child and youth summer camp programs in Kyuquot for the past 14 years. Through this, I have developed incredible working and friendship relationships with a number of elders and leaders in the community. Having expressed interest, and then requesting permission to conduct interviews with a few key elders in the community, I was granted permission to do just that, in hopes that it might open a conversation about what culturally and contextually sensitive therapy might look like in their community, as well as other small villages up and down the coast of Vancouver Island.

I travelled to Kyuquot, and sat down with an elder, asked them to speak on a number of subjects, including but not limited to: their perception and experience of struggles that the Nuuchahnulth face as a result of living in small reserve villages, their experience of relational and cultural variables that might be of consideration for therapists working with their people, their experience of traditional cultural practice that help individuals through times of pain, loss and grief, as well as how they might see culture fitting into therapeutic practices provided by non-aboriginal individuals.

### **Purpose of this Study**

The purpose of this study is to start a conversation around how therapists

(specifically non-indigenous therapists) might best serve aboriginal clients who are based on the west coast. By conducting an interview with an elder who has insight and experience of both the community as well as their nation's greater cultural heritage, we open that discussion. Unfortunately, as we look at culture and world view as being unique to individuals, one particular limitation to this research is that the interview that has been conducted cannot be used as if it were the opinion of the entire community, only that of the individual involved. It is the goal of this thesis to be able to combine the literature and existing research on the Nuu Chah Nulth, as well as the lived experience of the elders into a more expansive collection of information that might be useful for therapists working in these communities.

The goal of this thesis is not to give answers on how to include cultural practices, or even what should be involved in therapy with the Nuu Chah Nulth, but rather, as a way of opening a conversation on the topic of effective therapy practices within these communities for both therapists, as well as elders and health-care professionals serving these communities.

#### Structure of this Thesis

The remaining components of this thesis can be found split between four chapters. The second chapter will be a literature review examining the pre-colonial existence of the Nuu Chah Nulth first nation, the impact of colonization, contextual issues that plague aboriginal communities and current research on effective therapeutic methods being used in aboriginal communities. The third chapter will explore the research design and methodology of the interview conducted with an elder from the Houpsitas village in

Kyuquot, BC. The fourth chapter will be summary of the interview conducted, as well as a response to said interview. The fifth and final chapter will outline the limitations of the research and this thesis in general, as well as include a personal reflection on the process.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

To supplement and inform readers of background information pertinent to the interview conducted, this chapter will outline a number of variables relevant to the Nuuchah Nulth people, Canadian first nation's people in general, and therapy in small communities.

To lump all North American aboriginal peoples into one single grouping would be unfair to their unique heritages and cultures. That being said, they all can boast a rich cultural heritage teeming with community, tradition and life. That's to say that at one point, this culture could flourish without being quashed by waves of adventurous settlers out to "make it" in the new world. Those living on the west coast of Canada have had to live through an upheaval of culture and spirit that has pushed many in this population down into the urban ghetto of Vancouver's lower east side, and into hiding within the box-like confines of parceled out land, relying on alcohol and drugs like heroin and cocaine as a way of addressing the feelings of a phenomenon that Bruce Alexander, in his book *The Globalization of Addiction*, refers to as dislocation (2008). This feeling of dislocation also impact many aboriginal people's overall mental health, outlook on life and capacity to manage feelings of grief, loss and pain.

### Context

On the southern coasts of British Columbia, the aboriginal populations can be lumped into a couple different people groups based on traditional territories. These peoples groups are the Coast Salish, Kwakwaka'wakw and the Nuuchah Nulth (Jules,

2015). While each of these people groups can be further broken down into different communities and often into different language groups (like in the case of the Coast Salish), they all shared the common ties of the temperate climate, abundant natural resources, and because of this abundance, complex social structures and a high level of political organization (Harkin, 1998).

Pre-colonization life in many aboriginal communities on the west coast revolved around the collective soul of the community as a whole. Land was shared, nature honoured as the source of life, and the idea of isolation within a nuclear family was something foreign and impossible to achieve. In many communities, large family groups would share large, often ornate communal homes now commonly referred to as long houses. Many communities believed in guardian spirits, blurred lines between the living and the dead, transmutation between human and animal and complex interactions between souls (Harkin, 1998).

On the west coast of Vancouver Island, the Nuuchah Nulth people aimed to live in harmony with nature, specifically the sea, understanding the abundant blessing and potential danger that the ocean represented. This people group was formerly referred to as the "Nootka". This name "Nootka" was applied by the British explorer Captain James Cook, who mistakenly thought was the term the natives of the area used to describe themselves. "Nootka" actually stems from a word meaning "to come around" or "to circle about", apparently reflecting attempts to direct Cook and his crew into the sheltered harbour in front of the nearby village of Yuquot (McMillan, 9). The name Nuuchah Nulth was formally adopted by the tribal council in 1978, loosely translated meaning "all along the mountains" (McMillan, 1996).

The Nuuchah Nulth's traditional territory is some of the most beautiful and rugged terrain in the Pacific north-west. The outer coast of Vancouver Island is where mountains and rain forest descend to a spattering of sandy beaches, fjord-like inlets and large sounds. This "convoluted coastline offering a diversity of local environments and a great variety of resources" (McMillan, 1996). On the outer coast the Nuuchah Nulth people hunted whale, sea lions, seals, halibut and shellfish. On inside passages of the inlets and sounds, there was an abundance of salmon, herring and other fish. On land, the forests provided water fowl, deer, elk, bear and various berries and other plants.

The Nuuchah Nulth were the only west coast nation to practice whaling, a dangerous endeavour that saw the chiefs of their respected villages lead the hunts and perform pre-whaling ceremonies to determine the success (or failure) of the expeditions. "Chiefs were the leaders of the main collective ceremony, the *Tlukwana* (Wolf Ritual). This ritual involved the abduction of [whaling] initiates by 'wolves'...it was performed in the spirit of fun, and was seen as an entertainment provided by the chief for his people" (Harkin, 1998, p. 5). Even a few whales annually could make a significant contribution to the nutritional status of a village, which once caught would be divided out and distributed to the members of the community by the chief himself (Arima & Dewhurst, 1990).

### **Colonization**

In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the world got a whole lot smaller for the aboriginal peoples of the west coast. Explorers like James Cook, who "discovered" the Nuuchah Nulth people outside of Yuquot, and the Spanish explorers who made brief contact with the Coast Salish people brought a completely different way of existence right to the doorstep of the aboriginal communities of south western BC (Monks, 2011).

Shortly thereafter, small pox and other diseases ravaged communities up and down the coast, killing as much as 90% of the first nations population (Monks, 2011). The fur trade came to the lower mainland of BC, and commercial whaling ramped up on the outside coast of Vancouver Island (the traditional territory of the Nuuchah Nulth People). The fur trade brought more and more industry to the lower mainland, eventually leading to royal engineers arriving in the winter of 1858-1859. Crown representatives set up shop in New Westminster, and set out to survey territory traditionally occupied by the Musqueam, Squamish and other south western nations, and parcel off sections of land for sale. This was done with no consultation or through any negotiation process with the aboriginal nation that could have claimed ownership for thousands of years prior (Musqueam Band Council, 1984). Some land was set aside as reserves for the various bands, but even from the get go, the reserve land has never been sufficient to meet their needs. Traditionally the coast Salish were able to provide their people with all of their food and other necessary resources simply by living off the land that was considered to be under their control.

Much like the land and resources were being gradually taken away from the aboriginal communities in BC, their culture and way of life was being ripped from right under them, as seen by mandates like the banning of the pot latch and residential schools (Kirmayer et al., 2007). Because the resources and land were not sufficient in and of themselves to provide enough food and materials for clothing and shelter for the aboriginal people, many had to seek employment in mills and with commercial fishing operations (Spiwak, 2012). This was a drastic departure from their former existence. Moreover, their language and traditional cultural practices were either mocked out of

existence or in some cases, completely outlawed by the new, non-aboriginal government (Alexander, 2013). The potlatch for example, which were lavish communal gatherings were outlawed in part because they “were the antitheses of the economic system that British civilization demanded, in which goods must be sold in markets to the highest bidder, not given away ceremonially... were prohibited by law from 1884 until 1951” (Alexander, 2013, p.15).

On the coast, four whaling stations operated between 1905 and 1943. After WWII, a fifth station opened and operated from 1948 to 1967. The hunt targeted five species of whales; blue whales, fin whales, humpback whales, sei whales, grey and sperm whales. Whales would be caught off shore, brought into the stations, and then their fat would be rendered down for it’s oil, which was used as an accelerant, and then as a component in beauty products. Between 1905 and 1967 there were over 24,000 whales caught through these stations, leaving many whale populations at risk, even to this day (Nichol et al., 2002).

The whaling movement did a few things to the Nuuchah Nulth people. Traditionally, whaling provided a significant portion of their food for the year for coastal communities. Whaling was also a very sacred act that bonded the community and helped form the traditional hierarchy that existed in these villages (Ebert, 2014). Over hunting these populations of whales created a situation where any whale hunting is heavily scrutinized by activists and the general public. In many cases, while Nuuchah Nulth whaling is protected by treaty, the Nuuchah Nulth people have voluntarily stopped whaling in response to the overhunting by non-indigenous whalers in the early 20th century (Ebert, 2014). For a culture so rooted in tradition around whaling, being forced to

remove this component of their culture because of the mistakes of an invading culture seems a terrible injustice.

### **Residential schools**

The aboriginal population throughout BC and the rest of Canada have a historical past of hardship resulting from the effects of colonization and being forced into assimilation. The most well documented example being the residential school system where first nations children were taken from their homes to boarding type schools where they were ripped from their families and culturally rich societies where family was central, complex religious beliefs were the basis for numerous ceremonies, knowledge was passed from one generation to the next through oral traditions and family relationships were generally warm and supportive (Barnes et al., 2006). Being stripped from their homes resulted in cultural oppression, damaged social support, loss of tradition, and experiences of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse for many of the children (Kirmayer et al., 2007). Considering that “in the Nuu Chah Nulth worldview it is unnatural, and equivalent to death and destruction, for any person to be isolated from family or community.” (Atleo, 2005, p. 32), the significance of residential schools and the disservice it enacted on the aboriginal individuals throughout Canada (and for the Nuu Chah Nulth in particular) should not be understated.

### **Grief**

The ripple effect of colonization can be felt in generations of indigenous people to this day. Within Canadian first nations communities, the impact of residential school systems can be seen in the elements of their personal narrative including child-parent relationships, group-belonging, trust and socio-economic dependence, and in their

capacity to grieve (Richmond, 2007).

While there is little direct research that has examined first nations' peoples and grief, there are numerous aboriginal authors who have discussed the concept of a "soul wound" (Walters et al., 2002, p. 9). The "soul wound" refers to historical and contemporary discrimination and trauma, and their impact on the present health and grief of an individual (Spiwak, 2012). This impact of colonialism and the "soul wound" can be seen in symptoms of pain, guilt and psychological stress. One author, referred to as "Brave Heart" argues that indigenous populations (he references the Lakota specifically) experience what he describes as "impaired grief" (Brave Heart, as cited in Spiwalk, 1998, p.8). Brave Heart describes "impaired grief" "as resulting from the prohibition of indigenous spiritual practices, which inhibits the culturally specific ways or modes of working through normative grief" (Brave Heart, as cited in Spiwak, 2012, p.9). This concept can easily be viewed as sharing significant concepts and characteristics of grief, and also contribute to health issues such as PTSD, anxiety and substance abuse.

For many aboriginal peoples, before colonization, there were traditional grief and bereavement practices that helped individuals and communities mourn. In the Lakota people, mourning practices included visible signs of grief that communicated to the community that they were grieving the loss of a loved one. Close relatives to the deceased would cut their hair short to communicate their bereavement (1998). There were also ceremonies around enabling the bereaved to grieve and then re-integrate back into the community. In the Muscogee creek tribe the traditional bereavement rituals used to last upwards of a week and involves services, digging a grave by hand and use of

medicine for purification (Walker, 2007). Brave Heart argues that within his own people that many have been unable to resolve their grief in part because of prohibition of spiritual practices, and experienced complicated grief as a result (Brave Heart, 1998).

A striking problem in first nations communities that both contributes to and can be attributed to complicated grief is the prevalence of suicide, which is anywhere from three to six times higher than among the general population in North America (Lemstra, 2013). The suicide rate among aboriginal youth is particularly troubling and compounded by complicated grief. Many native youth, especially those on reserve are faced with economic uncertainty, lack of hope concerning the future, compounded traumas from physical and sexual abuse, as well as substance abuse. These problems are further compounded in many communities by years of cultural oppression that has disrupted and distorted transmission of traditional values and tradition (Minone & O’Niel, 2005). Adolescents lose touch with their communities, their cultures, and lose the capacity to deal with their own trauma and grief.

A significant component of working through grief that helps lead to positive change after a death or tragedy is the ability to re-integrate and find meaning in daily activities (Winokuer & Harris, 2013). As discussed, a huge problem for some first nations’ individuals is a lost sense of self and meaning by way of a number of variables, including a diluted sense of cultural heritage. One study showed that when a community worked to preserve and promote cultural practices that suicide rates among youth went down (Minone & O’Niel, 2005). Moreover, another study showed that when adolescents perceived that they were a part of supportive, caring community that they were better able to cope with ongoing grief and suicidal ideation (Spiwack, 2012). For a people who

were traditionally very supportive and community-oriented, it is easy to see that a big reason for such a large amount of complicated grief and excessive trauma is that those very communities are fractured.

### **Prevalence of Addiction**

There is a disproportionate number of aboriginal people represented in the drug addicted, prostituted, and perpetually drunk population in the lower mainland and within the reserves across BC (Alexander, 2013, p.17). Outside of the downtown east side, the substance misuse problem is just as much a problem on reserve. In many remote communities on Vancouver island where alcohol and drugs like cocaine and heroine are difficult to get a hold of, teens and adults misuse and are addicted to pharmaceutical drugs, huffing gas and propane, or sniffing glue and other household chemicals (Lemstra, 2011).

In the eyes of many, addiction is the product of chemical dependency brought on by bad choices and a lack of will. While chemical dependency has a certain level of validity, with extensive research suggesting that it contributes to addiction, there is an argument that can be made that at the root of addiction in the aboriginal population (and any other for that matter), is a much more systemic problem that comes from a culture of greed, power, and individualism that has wiped tradition, community and connection from a people group that were formally rich in spirit and meaning.

### **Dislocation**

Understanding the aboriginal community on the west coast of Canada, how its culture and environment looked like even a couple hundred years ago and being able to compare it to its current reality, it is easy to see that they have gone through what you

could consider a cultural genocide since contact was made by colonial explorers. Understanding the upheaval also should be the place we start when considering the potential root of addiction within the aboriginal communities on the west coast. Bruce Alexander makes a very compelling argument that dislocation, that is, being disconnected from land, community, meaning and tradition, is the root cause of many individual's addictions (Alexander, 2013, p. 57). For the Coast Salish people group that dominated the lower mainland and beyond, their dislocation involved having their land taken from them, their way of life being altered in a way that they would become incapable of sustaining them, and their culture stripped from them. Moreover, for many, they were taken from their families to attend residential school where their language was beaten out of them, and they were never given the opportunity to develop an understanding of what it meant to exist within a family setting.

Similarly, the Nuu Chah Nulth people had what could be arguably their most significant cultural practice (and source of food) taken from them by the whaling industry that ravaged their well being (McMillan, 1996), and stigmatized a practice that brought meaning and connection for entire communities.

Alexander (2013) highlights the concept of everyone's need for psychosocial integration. "Psychosocial integration' is a profound interdependence between individual and society that normally grows and develops throughout each person's lifespan" (p. 58). As individuals we are not psychologically self sufficient, and because of this, everyone needs a place in society, a sense of belonging, of community. For the aboriginal communities on the west coast, their sense of belonging can often seem forced (onto reserves) or non-existent.

Out of the pain that is created by dislocation (or lack of psychosocial integration), Alexander (2013) suggests that people struggling with dislocation often try to substitute psychosocial integration with addiction, (p. 62) which is a definition for addiction that involves an overwhelming involvement with any pursuit whatsoever (including but not limited to, drugs or alcohol) that is harmful to the addicted person to society, or to both (p. 29). Whether it be drugs, alcohol, shopping or religious zealotry, hurting individuals are known to drown themselves in a particular activity in an attempt (often subconsciously) to fill the hole created by isolation.

### **Culturally Sensitive Therapeutic Practices**

As a result of the high level of trauma and grief among first nations' peoples, there has been a push by elder groups to incorporate more indigenous traditional healing practices into services that serve these native populations. Many western therapeutic bereavement practices focus on the individual and their healing. This might not be an effective type of treatment for a people group that has a rich history of community based grief practices.

One of the main functions of traditional indigenous healing is the creation of a symbolic world in which the individual feels safe, familiar, and comfortable, thus each tribal culture has distinctive rituals related to art and healing. An example of this is during sand painting in ceremonies, the healer expresses Navajo symbols. As such, indigenous healing ceremonies and symbolic traditions are essential to healing practices (Libsett, 2007).

While not a traditional Nuu Chah Nulth practice, one particular example of an indigenous bereavement practice that is being integrated into new world therapy practices

is the sweat lodge. Throughout the world, and for thousands of years there have been healing practices revolving around cleansing through sweating (Schiff, 2006). Ancient Romans and Greeks had hot baths and utilized sweating techniques. Within western culture, there is the Scandinavian tradition of the sauna, and more recently, the practice of “hot yoga.” On a biological level, sweating releases toxins that are held in the body, and helps boost the immune system. For many North American indigenous people groups, the practice of sweating, or sweat lodge is carefully crafted around ceremony, and incorporates a spiritual component that many other cultures don’t address (2006).

In a study of sweat lodge ceremonies, researchers found that they produced positive change in participants, who demonstrated a wide range of benefits ranging from improved physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being (Schiff, 2006). Some participants cited feeling improved “spiritual connection” or connection with their past.

Another prime example of culture influencing clinical treatment within first nations populations is from a treatment center in northern Manitoba (Gone, 2009). In a study performed by Joseph Gone (2009), he met with staff and clients of this healing lodge to gain insight into the efficacy of mixed treatment models, combining western therapeutic practices with aboriginal approaches (Gone, 2011). The study, titled “the red road to wellness” found that the various aboriginal healing activities, which included attending cultural events like powwows, fasting camps, and pipe ceremonies helped foster a type of collective healing process.

The connecting feature of the efficacy of these treatment strategies was the promotion of cultural identity among the aboriginal people. If we consider the idea of connectedness as described by Alexander (2013), foster cultural identity and a sense of

community and belonging, can allow those struggling with trauma and long standing grief to re-capture a meaning within their day-to-day lives.

### **Summary**

The literature that was surveyed for this chapter only skims the surface of the cultural and contextual variables that are at play for the first nations people on the west coast. The Nuuchah Nulth people once had a rich heritage and way of life that allowed them to thrive in mind, body, and spirit amongst the beautiful backdrop of Vancouver Island. Unfortunately, their way of life and a lot of their culture was stripped from them during colonization. The effects of the Indian act, residential schools, as well as past and present racism had lasting negative repercussions for those living today. Those affects include abuse, domestic violence and suicide. The feelings of alienation and dislocation that infiltrate many Canadian First nations peoples did not pass by the Nuuchah Nulth.

All that being said, with careful consideration and education, there are valuable practices that may be included within the context of therapy and healing within first nations communities. The chapters to follow will outline and reflect on a personal account of life and healing from an elder from the Nuuchah Nulth community of Kyuquot. The interview conducted will provide a bridge between the literature provided and her personal experience of life as a Nuuchah Nulth woman living in a small reserve community on the coast.

### CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This present study is what I consider a hybrid study, mixing components of phenomenology and ethnography to examine the lived experiences of an elder of a small community as pertaining to therapy and healing. The participant is a first nation's individual from the Kyuquot band of the Nuuchah Nulth people group on Vancouver Island, BC Canada. She serves as an elder in the community and is heavily involved in the support and tradition teachings of the younger generations in the community. In the paragraphs to follow, I will go over the research design, methodology and all the variables to be considered.

#### **Phenomenology**

A phenomenological study is a design of inquiry where the researcher describes the lived experiences of a concept of phenomenon as described by the participants (Creswell, 2014). This method searches for a deeper understanding of psychological phenomenon through in-depth interviews in which the participant reflects on a lived experience (Beharry & Crozier, 2008).

#### **Ethnography**

Ethnography is a design of inquiry coming from anthropology and sociology where the researchers study shared patterns of behaviour and/or language and actions of a cultural group (Creswell, 2014, p.15). Most ethnographic designs are set in a way where observations are made over the course of a long period of time, combining simple observations as well as interviews. In the case of this research, we have taken the component of looking at a particular people group, but we have stuck to interviews.

### Research Design

While it would be a unique undertaking to have done a narrative study reporting on the stories of experiences the participants have had in regards to grief, therapy, and healing, ultimately it was determined that going the route of a phenomenological study (with ethnography undertones) would be a far more ethical design. Whereas narrative studies report on the stories of experiences of one or more individuals, a phenomenological study describes the common meaning for individuals of their lived experiences of a concept of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007. p.76).

Wertz (2005) states that phenomenological research has been performed for decades, that being said, the field lacks a formal process of its procedures or methodological norms to serve as a map for researchers. Creswell (2007) has borrowed thoughts from another researcher, Moustakas (as cited in Creswell's *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 2007) and developed the following format for phenomenological research:

- 1) "The researcher determines if the research problem is best examined with a phenomenological approach" (p. 81).
- 2) "A phenomenon of interest is...identified" (p. 81).
- 3) The researcher recognizes "and specifies the broad philosophical assumptions of phenomenology" (p. 81).
- 4) Data is collected from individuals who have direct experience with the phenomenon, usually involving interviews with multiple participants and sometimes observations like journals, or art (p. 81).
- 5) "The participants are asked two broad, general questions: what have

you experienced in terms of the phenomenon? What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of the phenomenon?" (p. 81).

Most open-ended questions are then asked. In this research, since the research is on such a broad "phenomenon", and presented to a lay individuals, the initial questions will not look exactly as recommended.

### **Participants/Sampling**

Since the decision was made to conduct this research as a modified phenomenological design, Creswell (2014) and Moustakas (1994) both specify that all participants have some form of direct experience with the phenomenon being researched. Since I have a long standing/ongoing relationship with a number of the elders and adult leaders in Kyuquot, I originally selected the participants based on their involvement (in varying capacity) with therapeutic practices in the community, as well as their general knowledge of the variables at play for any therapists who may come in to serve the community.

Creswell (2007) states that the number of participants in phenomenological studies have ranged from as little as one, all the way up to 325. That being said, he recommends studying three to 10 people. With that in mind, and knowing the limitations of a Master's thesis (as well as my own capacity to tie in interview material), I originally aimed to interview three individuals. To be eligible, the participants had to be over the age of 19, and have some experience with off reserve, non-aboriginal counsellors. Unfortunately, after setting up interviews and travelling to Kyuquot, for one reason and another I was only able to conduct an interview with one of the individuals.

With only one participant, one could pose the question “is one participant enough?”. Before answering that potentially debilitating question, you first need to consider the goals of this particular research as well as qualitative research in general.

Qualitative research is often considered a more of a personal, subjective form of research, because it often relies heavily on the interpretation of interview material by the researcher (Maxwell, 2013). This dynamic allows for a certain level of uncertainty throughout the process. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) write that “in a qualitative study, research design should be a reflexive process operating through every stage of a project” (p. 12), bending and adapting to the ever changing variables at play within the research process.

### **Interview and Related Procedures**

Before contacting any of the potential interviewees, the design and protocol of this research was submitted, reviewed and conditionally approved by the IRB (Institutional Review Board of City University of Seattle). The condition was based on the Band management in Kyuquot, BC giving written approval of research being conducted in Kyuquot. After contacting the Kyuquot-Checlaset first nations band management, written approval was given. Three preselected individuals who I had pre-existing relationships with and who had experience with off reserve counsellors were contacted by phone and by email with the following script: “Hi \_\_\_\_\_, I am calling to see if you might be willing to participate in some research that I am hoping to conduct for my Master’s thesis. I am doing a Master’s degree in counselling, and am hoping to write about some of the cultural and contextual variables that counsellors and other health care professionals might want to consider in working in communities like Kyuquot. I would like to conduct an interview

with you where I ask you a few questions and we discuss your experiences and opinions on the matter. If you are available and willing I will mail you a confidentiality form for you to read, and then I will collect it from you when I come to interview you.”

Once responses were received from the three individuals, they were sent a written informed consent form for the interview as well as the audio recording to fill out. Once confirmation of date and time were made, I travelled to Kyuquot to interview the participants. Unfortunately, as specified previously, only one participant was available for an interview. The interview started with explaining and expanding what the research was about, taking down basic information, small talk, and picking a pseudonym. The interview lasted approximately a half hour, was conducted in person in the community of Kyuquot. This interview was recorded as an audio file onto a computer, and later dictated by a dictation service. A set of interview questions formed the framework for the conversation, but I gave the participant permission to speak on their own terms. For a detailed list of the interview questions please see Appendix A.

Participants were to be given coffee, tea and snacks during and after the interview as a very small token of thanks for their involvement, but in reality, I was invited to her home where she had me over for dinner with her entire family. The interview was conducted after dinner was finished.

The audio from the interview was recorded on a personal computer, saved on a flash drive and stored in a locked cabinet for five years, as per the BC Association of Clinical Counsellors’ research standards. The interviews were transcribed by a transcription service, the transcription was then sent to the participant via encrypted email to ensure that the data accurately portrayed their experience and they were given the

opportunity to clarify or add to the data.

After the interview was integrated into this paper, and the Chapter 4 was completed, it was sent to the individual who had been interviewed. After she read through all that was written about the interview we had a brief phone conversation to discuss her thoughts on it. This brief conversation was recorded and stored in the same way as the initial interview was.

## CHAPTER 4 RESULTS

On January 4<sup>th</sup>, 2016, I travelled to the Houpsitas reserve in Kyuquot British Columbia to meet with an elder who for confidentiality purposes we will be calling Katherine. I have known Katherine for around 12 years, and have had the opportunity to get to know her and her family quite well over those years. I chose her because of her community involvement, for the leadership she provides and her overall understanding and concern for her culture.

I had intended to hold the interview over coffee and biscuits at the community centre on reserve, but when I arrived she told me that she would much rather have me over for dinner at her place with her family. I was welcomed as if I was an extended family member who had been away for a long while, and they fed me exceptionally well with fresh fish and chips (halibut that Katherine's husband had caught earlier that day).

Once we were done eating, she insisted that I conduct the interview with her husband and two sons watching because she hoped that they could derive value from our conversation. I asked her to sign an informed consent form (which she willingly signed) and we chose a pseudonym. Her choice was Katherine. I set up the microphone and recording device and we began to talk. The full transcript can be found as Appendix B at the end of this paper.

### **The Interview**

The nature of this interview was quite informal. It was more of a discussion than what might be expected of an interview as part of a research project. I think that this is an inherent reflection of what it is like to work with this particular population. One thing that I have become increasingly aware of as I have gone back to Kyuquot and other coastal

communities is the relational emphasis that permeates both the cultural values of the Nuuchah Nulth, as well as their communities.

In some ways, it seems like the world of clinical, professional relationships (like that of a psychiatrist or psychologist) don't hold the same weight in places like Kyuquot as much as it would in the city with a different population. It might be as simple as a lingering distrust of all things considered to be "colonial." The damage caused by aspects of colonization like residential schools, land allocation and cultural genocide are reasons to believe that this distrust exists at even a subconscious level in the minds of those who may have not even been alive through the terrible upheaval of their culture and of their people. For Katherine, she was fortunate enough to not have to deal with residential schools herself, but has no doubt of its lasting impact on her generation and generations after her.

For Katherine, some unique challenges of living in a coastal reserve community are tied to feelings (and the reality) of isolation. Kyuquot is a community of around two to three hundred people that is approximately four and a half hours from the nearest city centre. To get to Campbell river (or "town" as Kyuquoters refer to it as), where there is anything more than a general store, it requires a half an hour water taxi ride to a harbour on the mainland of Vancouver Island, a two hour drive on a gravel logging road, which is often impassable in the winter due to heavy snow and ice; and another two hours on a highway. She spoke of the logistical issues of living in a place with no roads in or out of the community, the cost of getting resources into their homes, and being cut off from the world if the Internet or phone go down (which it often does). From Katherine's perspective, the reality of physical isolation presents logistical as well as emotional

isolation. This would seem to fall in line with what research has shown about the level of suicidal ideation being exponentially higher in remote communities up north compared to the greater Canadian population (Spiwack, 2012).

Kyuquot and other coastal communities on Vancouver Island are currently serviced by counsellors, social workers and other health professionals who fly (float plane) or drive in for a day at a time and return on a weekly or biweekly schedule. While I was in Kyuquot to conduct the interview, I saw the schedule for health professionals, and it looked like there were a couple of groups that came in together on a rotating schedule every two or even three weeks. Katherine thought that only having them in the community on such a relatively infrequent basis was ineffective. As a relational culture, I wonder if small communities like Kyuquot would be better served by professionals who are there on a more regular basis. If we consider the concept of the therapeutic alliance, a culture that is in many ways more relational than that of the dominant culture might require (or prefer) closer relationships with those who are providing counselling (and other health care) services. Richard Atleo, (2004) writes in his book about the Nuuchahnulth worldview that in traditional teaching, “a person in need is taught and encouraged to depend upon neighbours, and this interdependence is considered one of the strengths of a traditional Nuuchahnulth community” (p. 7). I question the ability of a health care professional to be considered a neighbour when they are only within the communities for a fleeting moment every couple weeks.

An interesting aspect of the interview revolved around the ideas of cultural practices and their role in the lives of those living in Kyuquot. Katherine spoke about their pre-colonial ways, where “boys were taught to hunt, the girls how to take care of the

kids”, and that “everybody had a role were governed by [their] chiefs” that took care of everything. The concepts of purpose and meaning came to mind when I was talking with her. Atleo (2004) writes that “Nuu Chah Nulth community strength is directly related to the practice and observance of teachings”, so for both Atleo and Katherine, a bit part of the general well being of the community is tied to tradition.

Katherine also made reference to it being tougher for kids “these days” to grasp culture because of all everything modern coming to the community. Even within the last 15 years there have been significant changes in Kyuquot. Only a small handful of people had satellite TV in the year 2000, now there is cable television available to the community. Moreover, on an arguably more significant level, they have only had semi-reliable Internet service on reserve for the past seven or eight years. The Internet opens up an entire world to those who use it, who, especially in remote communities like Kyuquot, would otherwise not have access to. That alone is bound to create an interesting dynamic that may impact the way tradition and normalcy is viewed in the community. Web content like social media (facebook, twitter, instagram) allow users to connect with other people, organizations and groups from around the world, leaving some users longing for what they might be missing out on while in their current situations. For individuals in remote communities, this fear of missing out has the potential to impact how community members view their own communities and their own relative isolation.

I would also suggest that within Katherine’s general comments about traditional roles within the community and them being governed by the chiefs, that she is also referring to the very strong fishing a whaling traditions of the Nuu Chah Nulth that help define and sustain the people, making them such a prosperous nation (Nichol et al., 2002).

While Kyuquot is fortunate (for the time being) in that fishing is still a viable source of income through the sport fishing lodges in the area, the fishing process is far less about tradition and meaning, and much more about fitting into the “free-market” society that crept into Nuuchah Nulth territories during colonization. I’m not sure you can consider a day of sport fishing a cultural practice. Bruce Alexander writes that “a society structured by free-market economics generates enormous material wealth and technical innovation and, at the same time, breaks down every traditional form of social cohesion and belief” (2008, p.12).

Katherine also touched on the use of traditional Nuuchah Nulth language and its role in a healthy community. She made an interesting point about her “in-betweeners” generation that was not old enough to have been taught first hand by their parents (many of whom were taken away to residential schools), and not young enough to benefit from new school curriculums that aim to backpedal on the cultural genocide, and incorporate traditional language, history and cultural practices back into the lives of the students. These comments run parallel with the research of Minone and O’Neil, (2005), who found that when schools and communities worked towards preserving and promoting cultural practices that negative mental health issues like suicidal ideation were less prevalent. Katherine considers herself fortunate in that she is able to benefit from being involved with the local school, and play a role in delivering some of the traditional language and cultural practices back to the new generation.

One aspect of our interview that shouldn’t be understated are Katherine’s feelings about traditional cultural practices, how they were basically stolen from her people, and

how they are working to reincorporate them into the lives of the people in Kyuquot and other Nuu Chah Nulth villages. She spoke about the Canadian government enacting the Indian act, taking away regalia, and banning the potlatch. Having her reference all this stands to reinforce the significance of these acts, that are mentioned at length in wide spread research on aboriginal health and wellness like that of Kirmayer (2007), Alexander (2013) and others. For Katherine, these cultural practices that were stolen are all important components of her heritage, and consequently, they are working to bring them back. For as long as I've been involved with the community of Kyuquot, it has been evident that their sense of community is at it's best when they are involved in cultural practice like the potlach, or their ceremonial canoe journey that takes teams from multiple communities on the coast on a trip down the coast to Washington every summer. There seems to be a yearning for cultural cohesion and significance from the people in Kyuquot.

One interesting cultural practice that Katherine mentioned that I had previously known nothing about was the idea of jumping in the water. Kyuquot is an isolated community with the Houpsitas reserve located in a sheltered bay on the west coast of the island. There are many small islands within a few kilometers of this bay, as well as many rivers that cascade off the mountains that line this section of secluded coast. While I was there to conduct the interview with Katherine, the community held an informal swim to commemorate the New Year. I would venture to guess that at least three quarters of the community came down to docks to either participate or watch as they all jumped into the freezing cold ocean. Katherine mentioned that the rivers and ocean played a significant role in another ceremony they have with the young men and women in the community.

She describes it is a sort of cleansing of mind and soul, much like how sweat lodges are spoken about in other aboriginal communities, as mentioned by Schiff (2006).

A theme that came up throughout the interview was the interconnection that exists between the sky, the sea, and the people. This also seems to be a fairly common theme in the research that I have found referencing the larger aboriginal population across Canada. For many first nations communities, the land in which they traditionally lived off of was the means of which they were sustained. For the Nuu Chah Nulth, the combination of the mountains, rivers and especially the ocean provided everything they needed to survive. Moreover, it served to stress the connection between the people, animals and nature in general (Harkin, 1998).

The interview with Katherine, though relatively informal, was incredibly meaningful and valuable to me personally as well as for the use in this paper. While I would like to say that the content discussed is applicable for all Nuu Chah Nulth communities, and individuals, this, in reality is only a small picture of the potential variables in play for those living “along the mountains”, on the west coast of Vancouver Island.

### **Response**

After writing this summary of the interview, I contacted Katherine and asked if she could read what that I wrote and then we could have a conversation so that I might be able to add her reflections to my thesis and change or delete aspects of the writing as she saw fit. She obliged, so I emailed her the pages for her to read through. The following day, we had a very short phone conversation about everything that I had written about our encounter.

After some pleasantries and small talk about how her and her family was doing, she told me that she was very pleased with what I had written, and she was happy that I was attempting to articulate something so personal to her. She also expressed her desire for other individuals who plan on practicing as therapists in first nations communities to question their education, and keep an open mind to learning about the culture of the people that they are serving.

She also said that she had not previously considered how a non-native therapist might work to be more effective working with small communities like Kyuquot, but also stressed that the most important thing that they could do is try and find a deep connection with the people they are working with. Building trust through community is a very important part of working with small communities.

## CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

Much like most indigenous peoples throughout Canada, the Nuu Chah Nulth people of Vancouver Island boast a rich cultural heritage that is both empowering and enlightening for its people. In many ways, being connected to this culture is a seemingly vital component of what makes for mental and spiritual wellness. In the interview with Katherine, it was interesting to see her thoughts on how learning aspects of language and tradition was of immense importance to finding wholeness and meaning.

Within the narrative of re-establishing culture for the coming generations, there is an unfortunate interplay that exists between the Nuu Chah Nulth culture and the repercussions of colonization. The introduction of the free-market way of thinking and doing business, the allocation of land and resources, the attempted cultural genocide, residential schools and more.

By the time many first nations children enter their teen years, they will have already been told a number of narratives and stories about who they are (Denis-Friske, 2013). For some, they will be told stories full of pride and celebration; of a heritage that is rich in wisdom, empowerment, culture and honour. Other stories will be told through the “eyes of [the] dominant culture that has no interest in recounting the recent history of cultural decimation or in reflecting the incredible courage and resiliency of First Nations people who have collectively survived unthinkable horrors” (Denis-Friske, 2013, p. 10).

Perhaps the most unsettling narratives are told through the perspective of the youth’s own eyes, reflecting unprocessed experiences shaped by their own stories of disregard, powerlessness and injustice. Katherine believes in instilling that first narrative through education, a narrative that is something to be proud of, one that includes

traditional ways of being; of fishing, hunting, potlatches and the Nuuchah Nulth language.

On a much broader scale, therapists working in Canada, when given the opportunity to work with aboriginal individuals (youth in particular), a positive goal of therapy should be to help them foster a sense of personal identity and pride, and allow them to see their own strengths. A precursor to this is gaining an understanding of history and context. One way that has the potential to help change the lingering negative effects of colonization and the discrimination that comes with that is to acknowledge the past and help them move towards a better future.

For youth in particular, they “benefit from an awareness of issues surrounding colonization, since many will still feel the effects from many generations of demoralization, socioeconomic struggles, and discrimination” (Gone, 2009, p. 7). I think that anyone working within this particular population should educate themselves on these types of issues, as the knowledge might help inform later treatment. As Katherine expressed a desire for, depending on the context we get to work, we might consider therapy that centres on an educational component around mental health awareness, identity and culture. Researchers like McKeough (2008) express that when working with first nation’s youth in particular, these cultural teachings can be fostered more effectively through more hands on techniques that harkens back to a more traditional way of going about learning.

A possible (and exciting) application of this (depending on the facility the therapist works at, and the particular community they are working in) may mean both counsellors and youth “getting into nature and engaging in activities such as traditional

methods of hunting, fishing, preserving language, conducting ceremonies, rather than being lectured or reading about such activities in a classroom setting” (Potvin-Boucher, 2014, p. 10). Further education around cultural healing practices like sweat lodge or water cleansing would be incredibly beneficial. It might be advisable for counsellors to connect with elders in the community that they find themselves working in to learn the particular unique practices that people in that community take part in.

### **Limitations**

For this particular paper, the overall goal was to provide a number of potential considerations for health-care professionals working in coastal first nations communities as reflected in both the literature and the personal account of someone who actually lives in one of these communities. If we look at the idea of saturation, which is a notion of derived from Glaser and Strauss’s influential account of grounded theory where “theoretical saturation is described as a process in which the researcher continues to sample relevant cases until no new theoretical insights are being gleaned from the data” (Baker, 2014, p. 6). If we examine the concept of cultural and contextual variables for even small communities, the lived experience of its people, while sharing some significant components, will be fairly different from one individual to the next. In small reserve communities like Kyuquot, there are a lot of individuals who have lived off reserve in other towns and cities for a period of time, some who have lived in large cities like Vancouver and Toronto, and other who have not even been to a town larger than Campbell River. There are some who have lived through residential schools, some who lived in foster care throughout their childhood, and others who lived with their two parents on reserve for their entire life, unimpeded by physical dislocation.

What I am attempting to articulate is that in the case of this particular study, I think that the idea of theoretical saturation, while a potential goal, might not be entirely feasible, and that the single interview that I have conducted validates a significant amount of the literature that has been included in this paper. When asked about when interviews are enough, Adler and Adler (2014) respond, “The best answer is simply to gather data until empirical saturation is reached; however this is not always possible or practical” (p. 43). While the intention was to meet with multiple elders in Kyuquot, the logistical reality of that did not pan out, and I feel that the nature of this paper does not necessarily require there to be more interview content because of the very personal experience that each individual comes with to a counselling session. Brannen (2014) writes that a single interview may be sufficient if it is unique and not comparable to other cases, and I would argue that at some level, the interview with “Katherine” provides a perspective that is going to be unique to her great context within the community she lives in.

I believe that an altered phenomenological research design is appropriate for this topic, because the practice of therapy/counselling within small aboriginal communities is something that happens on a regular basis, but is something that very little research has been written on. While using the phenomenological design lends itself to a lot of internal validity based on individual interviews, it garners almost no external validity. This design assumes that the phenomenon of “therapy in small aboriginal communities” has a underlying concept that will tie the interview together with the literature that has been reviewed, since we are dealing with a very personal, and very contextual subject, it is almost as if we are conducting a separate study on this subject’s personal experience of

therapy. It would also be very unwise to make assumptions or assert the voices and opinions of the participant as something that can be applied to whole communities.

### **Personal Reflections**

An interesting dynamic throughout the research process has been working with content concerning a community of people, and a people group that I have a vested interest in. When I look back 14 years ago to when I first went to Kyuquot, I was naive to the reality of what it was like to be someone of first nations heritage living on the coast in a small reserve community. Their unique culture and context that informs what life looks like for them. All coming with it's own unique struggles and capacity for amazing and beautiful relationships.

On the evening of the first day I ever stepped foot in Kyuquot, a teen in the community died by suicide. I saw a small community in mourning, without the knowledge or the capacity to be helpful in any way. That first trip inspired a longing within me to work towards being able to one day find a way of helping those who mourn and grieve. In many ways, that trip was the genesis for my journey towards becoming a therapist.

I consider it a great privilege to be welcomed with such open arms into the community of Kyuquot. It is clear how much community means to the people there, and I can't help but reflect on how I have been changed by being there year to year. People like Katherine are helping to bring restoration to a culture that has been down trodden and stripped of a lot of its tradition. The idea of restoration and wholeness in Kyuquot, and for the Nuuh Chah Nulth people is as much about regaining culture lost, as it is about moving forward.

While I have certainly not crafted anything here that resembles a handbook that might be able to be used for counselling in Kyuquot or any other Nuu Chah Nulth community, my goal was to work towards starting some sort of collection of considerations from both history, research and personal narrative that might help engage the question of how to best work with this beautiful people group, who have such a rich history and culture, but who have endured so much, and fought so hard to hold on to what they can.

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## Appendix A

Having lived in Kyuquot what do you think are some of the unique challenges facing the Nuuchah Nulth peoples living on reserve?

In your experience what are some of the relational variables that should be of consideration to therapists working with Nuuchah Nulth first nations peoples?

In your experience what are some of the cultural variables that should be of consideration to therapists working with Nuuchah Nulth first nations peoples?

In your experience what are some of the contextual variables that should be of consideration to therapists working with Nuuchah Nulth first nations peoples?

How might a therapist from outside of the community learn about the above?

Are there issues specific to your community that should be considered when working in a counselling context?

What does the role of culture and community play in your understanding of therapy?

Do you know of any traditional cultural practices that help individuals cope with pain, loss and grief?

What role should culture and cultural practices have in therapies provided to the community? How might this look?

## Appendix B

## Interview:

**Tristan:** So, having lived in Kyuquot, what are some unique challenges facing the Nuu-chah-nulth people living in the village here?

**Katherine:** The challenges living on the reserve, especially in isolation, is mostly getting in basic food and being cut off from the rest of the world. When we have tsunami warnings or the power outages, people can't get to us because there's no road access to Kyuquot. Also the cost of living. Although I've never lived in town, so I can't compare. Regardless, this is my way of life, I choose to live here.

**Tristan:** In your experience, what are some of the relational variables that should be considered for counselors working in places like Kyuquot.

**Katherine:** Counselors, as in...

**Tristan:** Like say I came up as a counsellor

**Katherine:** Clinical counsellors?

**Tristan:** Yeah, clinical counselors, therapists. When I'm dealing with people in town, I could be dealing with one individual with a bunch of neighbors, but here, given the community, it's more complicated.

**Katherine:** Yeah, it's such a small community and everybody knows everybody. You mean counselors dealing with issues in our community?

**Tristan:** Yeah, so if I came in and said I had someone who comes to me because they were dealing with "such and such", what should I keep in mind?

**Katherine:** We've had many good counselors come and go, but the biggest problem we face as a community is that they will come, they'll come in, meet with the individual who needs help, and then they'll leave. The biggest issue is that a counselor will come in once a week, or once every other week, leaving the client hanging until the next visit.

**Tristan:** Right, right. So do you feel like there's a unique opportunity being here as many years as I have, I've seen how family is so important to everyone. It's not very common in town to have a house where everyone can come and go, it's pretty great. In your experience, what are some cultural variables that should be considered by clinical counselors who come in?

**Katherine:** Protocol?

**Tristan:** Not exactly, more along the lines of cultural heritage, compared to working with some regular old white guy in Vancouver.

**Katherine:** We were talking to our kids one day up at school, during a cultural practice, the boys were singing, girls were dancing. My brother was leading the singers and my sister leading the dancers, trying to teach them the way we were taught. If it's a little bit tougher for the kids these days to grasp those meanings of our culture, I think with all the "modern" everything around us. [laughs] We had to have a chat with our kids one day that we're all learners and all teachers, no matter who we are. We have aunties and grandmothers and grandparents, and even at our age, we're still learning, and they're still teaching us. It goes on and on through generations. All we're trying to do is teach our kids what ways are proper. With life in Kyuquot, our boys are taught to hunt and fish, because that's our way of life.

Counselors come in with all their degrees and certificates and their qualifications to do this or that, but once they come here they learn something that can never be taught in an institution.

**Tristan:** I think I've been lucky enough to learn a lot from you guys.

My next question was about how a therapist from the outside might learn the culture, but I guess just being here might be enough to know.

**Katherine:** We're a welcoming community, ready to help each other and visitors. We've never chased anyone away. You have something to offer, and we have something to offer. The focus is always on the youth and the elders, from our generation anyway.

**Tristan:** In your experience, with other communities up and down the coast, do you think that it's pretty common, or is Kyuquot special?

**Katherine:** Yeah, we've talked about that yesterday actually. Some of our staff went to [another Nuu Chah Nulth community]. They walked into a dinner for their staff meeting. Now, I'll just use our staff as an example. We learn to work together and work together as a team, because we're there for our kids, and then we support each other. With us, once in a while we'll do random dinners, and just hangout together and do activities throughout the year so that they feel part of the community, which we want them to feel. So when a couple of our staff when to [another Nuu Chah Nulth community] at a staff dinner, it was very different to how we just get together and mingle and share stories, having fun and playing games.

**Tristan:** Community is definitely a big thing here. What do you think the role of culture and community plays in your understanding of therapy or counseling? Say someone is grieving, so how important is the community and culture in the process?

**Katherine:** I believe it's big. I'll use our recent loss as an example. She was an elder, and her husband is where he can still teach us the way it was done back in the day. A lot of the way the ceremony went was like a church, a church funeral ceremony. But it was like bringing her home, and we gave her a cultural send off, components within the ceremony that would not be in a Catholic church, or any other church. So one of our elders told us,

“without language we have no culture.” That’s something we’re trying to do, teach our kids our language. We are the missing link between the elders and the youth.

There was a time my uncle said that “we have to just do this, we have to learn.” Since 2011 we’ve been doing language classes, trying to stay at the same level as our kids.

Because our elders know it, and our kids were being taught it. But we were the inbetweeners, we need to learn in order to hang on to that portion of our culture that is really important, the language. It’s integrated into ceremonies and everything. Everything is connected between the sea and the sky, everything is connected somehow, and that’s what we’ve been taught.

**Tristan:** That’s cool. I’ve noticed, in my research, I’ve done a lot, and you guys have a very rich grasp of culture. Even being here for the past 15 years, I haven’t seen even a small footprint of what that culture has been. You have a rich culture for sure. It’s unfortunate that it’s slipped away a bit, but it can be gained back.

**Katherine:** There’s a history there that isn’t very nice, why we lost so many teachings. The generation above us was taught. The boys were taught how to hunt, the girls how to take care of the kids. Everybody had a role and we were governed by our chiefs and they governed in a way that took care of everything. Every chief was given a territory to care for, chiefs of Rivers, chiefs of different areas, etc.

All that was taken away, I guess when the Canadian government came and thought they were taking care of us, and the Indian Act came in. They took away all our ceremonies and regalia.

**Tristan:** Not a pleasant time.

**Katherine:** Their generation suffered the most immediately, but then our generation is still impacted by what happened to them. My dad's generation was in residential school, so a lot of them weren't taught parenting skills, they were taught the wrong way. What bit of culture of language and culture we know, we're trying to get back to.

**Tristan:** There's a lot of writing and talk that the residential schools were a massive disservice. Are you able to look into Kyuquot and see that negative impact upon families?

**Katherine:** Yes.

**Tristan:** Do you know of any cultural practices that help individuals cope with pain, loss, grief?

**Katherine:** Yes. Some are similar to what we did today, jumping in the water. We have a ceremony where we bathe in the river or ocean. It's cleansing, and it's like our spirit is uplifted. You see the world differently after.

Also, before 2008 we helped the kids with a potlatch, because in our culture there are many potlatches for different events: coming of age for young men and women, there's celebration of life, marriage, etc.

In 2008 we decided as a staff we'd help out kids with a specific potlatch that was a celebration of each and every one of their lives. Our elders came up throughout the year, teaching us how to do that, as well as the bathing ceremonies. We took the girls to an island, and the boys to the river, a cleansing of your soul and spirit, preparing for what we had to do for the potlatch to do it right, so that was a teaching we taught.

In 2009 we did invitations and all the schools in the district came, by then we had regalia for all our boys and girls, boys had drums, families shared songs to show the kids that they were hosting. They also gave homemade gifts away throughout the year. Because it was so successful, someone from the Ministry of Education came to the school district, we had to have an enhancement agreement in place. The potlatch idea became part of that agreement, where each school in the district would host a potlatch. We've gone through that cycle now, and it's our off year.

With the elders that we have, they teach us so we can carry on and teach our children and grandchildren how to do things properly. It's going to make a big difference in the success of our nation.

**Tristan:** Then, as a non-Native guy who has a heart for this community, do you think that there's room for outsiders to be able to provide therapy within counseling in an effective way, even if they're not part of your culture?

**Katherine:** Yeah, I believe so. If the heart's in the right place everything will work out.

**Tristan:** One thing I've been really appreciative of Kyuquot is the willingness of the teachers to share the cultural stuff, and we've been part of musical events, and potlatch, and it's a big blessing of whoever's been able to come in.

I've done a lot of research on counseling process in Native communities, and there's not a lot of writing about it. It's going to be different in each community.

**Katherine:** As close as we are to other communities, we've seen a big difference in our way of life. Even Marilyn [a Caucasian woman who co-owns a fishing lodge in the area], she came in the winter, but before she always came in the summer, visiting for twenty years this is her first winter.

**Tristan:** I'm really happy I came when I did, not in the summer, to get different insights and see how the school's been run.

**Katherine:** It's an open invitation, doors are always open we tell people, free breakfasts a day a week, and lunches two days a week. We tell people to share a meal, and it's is always open.

**Tristan:** Cool, thank you so much.