

**“Reservationization”: “After This Nothing Happened”**

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**Abstract:**

There are many answers to why Indigenous youth take their own lives; research is showing us that when we look back, we can find our way forward. Plenty Coups was born in 1848, and although his “life ended” in his early twenties after the buffalo died, he went on to garner many achievements and lived to be 84 years old. After the buffalo died, the lack of understanding and honest empathy between Euro-Canadian and Indigenous peoples, the steady decline of deep community connections, the loss of multiple generations of children to social services, and the ensuing violence, generated what Michael Lerner termed, “surplus powerlessness” across many territories, leaving next generations bereft. A decline caught and sometimes exploited by anthropologists like Abraham Maslow. Today, Indigenous peoples are healing the trauma, resolving their grief and reclaiming their cultural and ceremonial practices in day-to-day life. Indigenous children are being raised at the drum, singing the songs of their ancestors, correcting anthropological narratives, and telling their own stories. *Something is happening*, and the reclamation of our languages, values and cultural knowledge is restoring positive meaning to the lives of our children, and they will live, and Indigenous peoples will be here to fight another day.

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*Plenty Coups refused to speak of his life after the passing of the buffalo, so that his story seems to have broken off, leaving many years unaccounted for. "I have not told you half of what happened when I was young," he said, when urged to go on. "I can think back and tell you much more of war and horse-stealing. But when the buffalo went away the hearts of my people fell to the ground, and they could not lift them up again. After this nothing happened. There was little singing anywhere. Besides," he added sorrowfully, "you know that part of my life as well as I do. You saw what happened after the buffalo went away." (Lear, 2008, p. 2)*

Our focus on understanding the reasons behind youth suicide was re-galvanized while reflecting on Indigenous mental health work in remote fly-in reserves, and reviewing a paper entitled, "After This Nothing Happened: Indigenous Academic Writing and the Chickadee Peoples' Words" (Koptie, 2009). The paper had been conceived in 2008 during a graduate writing retreat led by one of Canada's most important Indigenous authors, Lee Maracle (University of Toronto), and guided by Elder Pauline Shirt (Toronto). The paper centered around exploring and expressing the value and experiences of on-the-ground social work in a region with high rates of youth suicide, child welfare apprehensions, home brew/moonshine alcohol abuse, as well as an unfolding opiate dependency crisis. As an Indigenous student, Koptie had started this academic dialogue in an attempt to achieve some graduate school enlightenment on how and why Canada's colonial inertia had created the pathos/pathology, marginalization and despair he later found in remote northern communities, and while working in the Sioux Lookout District.

For Indigenous post-secondary students, Koptie (2009) had described the graduate studies experience as a "Dickensian" tale:

*It is a tale of two extremes; the best of times and the worst of times mostly simultaneously, as each glorious lesson learned carries the lonely burden of responsibility to challenge the shame and humiliation of each racist, ignorant and arrogant colonial myth perpetuated. Like Oliver Twist we want more.*  
(p. 144)

When approached by the Dean of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE/UT) for an opinion on Indigenous issues, Koptie stated he was not returning to graduate school to debate cultural or pedagogical accommodations and knowledge exchange in a time of

Truth and Reconciliation, but rather seeking explanations for witnessing community members cut down a ten-year-old boy in a remote fly-in Ontario First Nation. The boy had been bullied sufficiently enough to try and hang himself; fortunately he survived the attempt. Koptie felt the deeper meaning of this child's act was an unconscious attempt to protect his younger siblings from lateral violence, a legacy of the Indian Act and the placement of Indian Agents on reserves to administrate "Reservationization" (A.D. Fisher, 1984). Was this what was being reflected in the boy's entire life experience and that of his young peers? At 1 AM in the morning, during the crisis intervention, the boy offered a brutal observation on "after this nothing happened" (Lear, 2008). He wanted to know "why adults have children when they do not want to look after them" (Community Interview, 2004). It seems Plenty Coups had already delivered a prophetic answer.

For this paper, we found ourselves once again discussing the reasons youth choose death over living on reserves where "nothing happens" and questioning whether the "after this nothing happened" statements of Plenty Coups still held considerable purchase and meaning for the lived experience of contemporary Indigenous youth. In 2008, Lear had captured many of the tragic historical circumstances Canadian Indigenous rural and remote youth continue to endure in his remarkable book *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation*. In it, Plenty Coups' recounting of what he witnessed amongst his people reverberates with a timeless lament about life after the buffalo went away; "After this the Crow people became depressed; things ceased to matter to them. It did not take much time for despair to settle within his community or for them as if nothing happened" (Lear, 2008, p. 3). Since reading Lear in 2008, a plethora of our own reading, researching, and academic writing has provided the writers of this paper with a wide pathway to better understand the impact of Canada's one-sided portrayal of its colonial past.

As social justice workers, we were also drawn to Michael Lerner's idea of Surplus Powerlessness (1986) each time we discussed the memory of this ten-year-old child hanging by an electrical cord – a memory which often returns, as far too many traumatic social work interventions in rural and remote Ontario communities do. Possibly the most difficult experience of witnessing this suicide attempt was the shock and horror on the faces of the crowd attending to this young boy; even though death by suicide in remote northern Ontario is not a rare occurrence, the high rate of attempts and successful suicides often overwhelm key community members and social service workers. Those who have the capacity to respond to this kind of crisis are often called upon far too

often to volunteer for crisis intervention in neighboring reserves as well, but this means leaving home communities and spending weeks away from family, which becomes yet another challenge for those with the requisite skill sets to intervene. Those strong enough to help are often suicide survivors themselves and carry the tragic, and too familiar, backstory of each untimely death deep within themselves. The pervasive sense of powerlessness manifesting over and over again eventually becomes its own insidious form of trauma. The hopelessness and helplessness of multiple generational losses of young people in remote Indigenous communities makes recovery from what is happening extremely hard for everyone. Dependency on often demoralizing outside resources and insensitive attitudes impede the ability of community members to empower their youth to seek help. Koptie, while meeting with young bystanders to this boy's suicide attempt, recorded feelings and beliefs from them of not being able to find someone to communicate with when something was wrong (Community Interviews, 2004). There was also a double jeopardy of adults expressing an inability to inquire if everything was alright as a way to monitor youth well-being. The authors are now asking themselves, is this fatalism a manifestation or confirmation of long-standing "surplus powerlessness" (Lerner, 1986) generated by the emotional and spiritual detachment and hopelessness expressed so long ago by Plenty Coups? A man who died in 1932 after a long life steeped in Western knowledge and language, respected leadership, the acceptance of diverse spiritual practices, and very different life experiences in his own youth.

A combined sixty-five years of community development work in southern Canada and work in remote fly-in reserves has left us with deep humility, but also with deep frustration. We too carry "soul wounds" from our experience. Eduardo Duran (2006) in his book *Healing the Soul Wounds: Counselling with American Indians and other Native People* expressed this well, when he wrote that knowing hidden truths creates the burden to make sure something does not happen again. We understand that 'knowing lies never admitted' is soul wounding. The following story about a twenty-five-year-old man in a small isolated northern community illustrates how far the trauma of suicide can reach into a community:

Fifteen friends started grade one together in their community of fewer than four hundred people. They shared good experiences of growing up, enjoying outdoor childhood adventures, and gaining lessons on living in the bush. Unfortunately, they also bore witness to the collective pain of violence, physical and sexual abuse, and substance abuse. Within their first twenty-five years, nine friends had died by suicide and accidental death. Alcohol,

mostly unsafe and homemade, locally called "Home Brew", played a sad role in each of the tragedies. Of the six remaining young men now in their early twenties, three continued the self-destructive patterns of their lost friends, while three were struggling to live sober. Those three had made the choice to become gospel singers. They moved back and forth between sobriety, alcohol misuse, and self-harm with an overpowering dread of "who is next" and "why not me?" In 2005, one of these young was brought to Koptie, because for several months prior he had been intoxicated and wandering through the community with a rifle, threatening suicide. He was encouraged to live and to find a way to build a dialogue on what he had suffered, because it would be liberating to himself and his family to find and rebuild that lost communal support. We believe it is imperative that Indigenous community members and scholars transfer their knowledge, experiences, and skills back into their communities, because threatening situations trigger an overwhelming sense of despair in many members and their social justice workers, and they can help each other. Recurring suicide ideation and attempts, successful suicides, and community violence have prevented the historical roots of trauma from being talked about and addressed within many of the nations across Canada, making unresolved trauma and grief a persistent threat (Wesley-Esquimaux & Smolewski, 2004).

Another story comes from a group of Elders, keepers of community wisdom, who shared their theory on suicides. Their community has had one of Canada's highest rates of completed suicides. Elders in this community have a story that mirrors the narrative within Anthropologist Abraham Maslow's 1938 Blackfoot experience. Here in Ontario, a community was forced off their traditional territory to make way for one of the world's most productive gold mines. Another grim example of Plenty Coups' and "after that nothing happened" circumstances. Today they live on poor land and their refusal to co-operate with the Canadian state set off a long-term struggle where they were excluded from certain benefits under the Indian Act, because the government wanted them relocated from the mining zone. Their right to fish in the lakes of their territory were removed and transferred to local tourist interests. Those same lakes are now polluted with chemicals used in mining, similar to the Alberta tar sands model of extraction. The Elders claim the men were unable to resist the external forces brought to bear on their rights and turned to alcohol to remedy the shame of disempowerment. Their lives became, in the eyes of their own Elders, a display of self-loathing and self-contempt. Maslow's research also chronicled the effects of alcohol and offered critical observations on the broken relationships between women and men, parents and

children when it was used to assuage hurt. He observed shifting intergenerational values on cultural exchanges between the settlers and the Blackfoot in Alberta, which also included the use of alcohol. The process of addiction was introduced very early in the contact and colonization process (Waldrum et al., 1995). Changing economic structures and practices were deeply steeped in the use and abuse of alcohol as a way to disenfranchise the Indigenous population (Saggers & Gray, 1998). Maslow's brother-in-law, anthropologist Oscar Lewis (1942), wrote a monograph edited by another famous anthropologist A. Irving Hallowell entitled *The Effects on White Contact Upon Blackfoot Culture with Special Reference to the Role of the Fur Trade*, which offers invaluable lessons on the use of alcohol as a currency in the fur trade and subsequent treaty making. Indigenous children began living out the pain of an existence bereft of pride and self-sufficiency because of that currency. There are many more stories that can offer valuable lessons from inside each community that has lost touch with its historic origins and beliefs. Herein lies an alternative perspective on the genesis of family and sexual violence, where the "after this nothing happened" scenario actually means what did happen veered far away from the lives their ancestors knew and thrived in.

In his book, Lerner (1986) identified contemporary dynamics as "feelings or beliefs held by oppressed change agents which lead to perceptions of more powerlessness than the real circumstances require, especially in a social and political context" (p. ii). He suggested that activists (or social workers) can become isolated as they fight against the entrenchment of colonial evidence-based best practices, which have a clearly sustained advantage over the disadvantaged. Lerner (1986) noted:

*Our powerlessness may be hidden and mystified, but it nevertheless shows up in very hurtful and destructive ways. Because stress is a problem that has potentially explosive social consequences, a tremendous effort is made by the dominant society to mystify us about its causes and lead us to blame ourselves for the stress. (p. 27)*

He also demonstrated how the psychological problems activists and social workers might experience, such as vicarious trauma and feelings of powerlessness, may have

more to do with judging ourselves for our perceived inability to mediate the tragedies we suspect arose through past, present and future political decisions. A review of James Daschuk's 2013 book titled *Clearing the Plains*<sup>1</sup> leaves little doubt of the political machinations of the Canadian government when it came to finding ways to gain access to coveted lands and resources. The forced creation of rural and remote reserves through the 1876 Indian Act may well have contributed to Indigenous "surplus powerlessness", but what does it mean today? Lerner suggests having a negative self-image is a kind of "surplus powerlessness" that we each need to work through. It means Indigenous people must do multi-generational inner work to recover and restore what is regarded as healthy human efficacy. Failure to do the work, which Ramsden (2003) called, "a melancholic journey of self-discovery" instead leads to "activist bypassing" (Lerner, 1986), when devotion to healing our communities becomes a way of avoiding our own deep internal work. We cannot as nations regain power to resist and rebel against colonial excesses when we are hurting too much to challenge and correct Canada's colonial past. As a people, we have been disempowered by the overwhelming resentment now visible in our national struggle for Truth and Reconciliation. The global power imbalances forced on Indigenous peoples by colonization must be mitigated by Indigenous peoples themselves as the push for self-determination accelerates. So many social, physical, mental well-being and spiritual injustices arose from Canada's colonial myths. These myths have led to Indigenous youth choosing death, drug addiction, or gangs and jails over living in communities where that "nothing" continues to happen. At least nothing that might have a positive effect on their ability to choose freedom from the burden of addictions. Koptie, with Indigenous author Lee Maracle, developed the concept, "inferiorizing Indigenous communities and intentional colonial poverty" (Koptie, 2010) to articulate the government-dictated exodus to reserves for Indigenous people. Here, they were expected to disappear or assimilate into Canadian mores, thereby allowing for the taking of territory and the unfettered exploitation of resources.

Abraham Maslow visited an Alberta First Nation where he wrote about the Blackfoot and the decline of their lifeways. Maslow had been sent by renowned anthropologist Ruth Benedict in 1934<sup>2</sup> to capture, observe

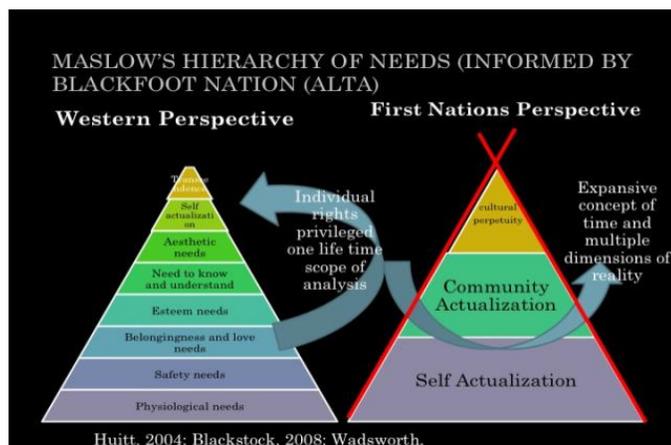
the narrative is so chilling that it leaves its reader stunned and disturbed.

<sup>2</sup> A remarkable introduction to cultural studies, *Patterns of Culture* made history in exploring the role of culture in shaping our lives. In it, the renowned anthropologist Ruth

<sup>1</sup> *Clearing the Plains* is a tour de force that dismantles and destroys the view that Canada has a special claim to humanity in its treatment of Indigenous peoples. Daschuk shows how infectious disease and state-supported starvation combined to create a creeping, relentless catastrophe that persists to the present day. The prose is gripping, the analysis is incisive, and

and preserve anthropological data, “before civilization destroyed the Indians way of life and its very existence.” Today, this research on past “on-the-ground” events and experiences inform modern Indigenous scholars on how the history of Canada was manipulated and interpreted through Euro-centric eyes. It also gives them an opportunity to correct false assumptions and tell their own story. The fact that western Canada was given a great deal of attention for field research in past centuries by significant social scientists is a remarkable legacy for Indigenous researchers to help redefine culture and right relations. The legacy of their work also becomes a contextual framework for exposing Canadian assimilation strategies. Frankly, an Indigenous perspective on definitions, or “patterns of culture” is justified given the tendency of anthropologists from that era to stratify groups from ‘primitive’ to advanced Western ‘civilization’. Maslow witnessed on-the-ground impacts from colonial policies that resulted in stolen lands, stolen children and collective marginalization. He saw the results of the Indian Act at a community level, and he saw the results of treaty violations. According to his notes and journals, his work began to evolve from lessons gleaned from Blackfoot tribal teachings. Unfortunately, he also managed to appropriate their life model, which eventually became known as “Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs”<sup>3</sup> (R. Heavy Head, personal communication, October 2008). Maslow would eventually come to appreciate the value of the Blackfoot worldview and its contributions to

asked to leave the Blackfoot community for inappropriate research methods and for personal reasons possibly related to his conduct during a Sundance Ceremony. This is a story requiring deep consideration by Indigenous scholars as Maslow’s theories on self-actualization and a hierarchy of needs were considered by Blackfoot Elders to have been culturally appropriated from their “Tepee Teachings”. Ryan Heavy Head (personal communication, October 2008) researched Maslow’s story because the Kainai (Blackfoot) people have been gaining steady access to these early Blackfoot “narratives” within safe spaces and challenging the distortions of their worldview. Heavy Head (personal communication, October 2008) refuted Maslow’s interpretation of what he calls the Blackfoot Paradigm, outlining the concepts of Kitawahsinnoo (Our Nourishment), Aitapissko (Place with Presence), Aoksisawaato’p (Dialog with Creation), Aokakio’ssin (Awareness for Survival), Innaihtsiyyssin (Co-Existence/Non-interference), Ainna’Kootsiyo’p (Mutual Respect/Conservation), Ikkitstaan (Sacred placement or Offering), and the Aatsimihka’ssin (Reconciliation/Ceremony). Heavy Head reminds outsiders that local Indigenous languages hold complex worldviews that require careful cross-cultural appraisal. Maslow finally acknowledged this in his journal entries twenty years after his foray into the field.



his psychology theories on human behaviour and human social organization. During that time though, he was

Maslow would go on to become one of the 20<sup>th</sup> century’s most significant humanist social scientists, while Plenty Coups’ iteration of “after this nothing happened” continued unabated in the Blackfoot territory of Alberta and across Canada. Field notes from Maslow’s six-week research trip, and later journal recordings by his research team Lucien Hanks and Jane Richardson-Hanks, demonstrate that his experience on an Alberta reserve had an important impact on the development of his concepts of humanistic social psychology. Indigenous author and scholar Lee Maracle teaches that Maslow’s theory is in fact an upside-down triangle. Indigenous people actually hold an opposing worldview to Maslow, where all life and the living earth are considered sacred, and until we fully appreciate sacredness we are unable to determine our real needs.

Benedict offers an in-depth look at three societies—the Zuñi of the southwestern United States, the Kwakiutl of western Canada, and the Dobuans of Melanesia—and demonstrates the diversity of behaviors in them. Benedict’s groundbreaking study shows that a unique configuration of traits defines each human culture and she examines the relationship between culture and the individual. Featuring prefatory remarks by Franz Boas, Margaret Mead, and Louise Lamphere, who calls it “a foundational text in teaching us the value of diversity,”

this provocative work ultimately explores what it means to be human.

<sup>3</sup> **Maslow's hierarchy of needs** is a theory in psychology proposed by Abraham Maslow in his 1943 paper "A Theory of Human Motivation" in *Psychological Review*. Maslow subsequently extended the idea to include his observations of humans' innate curiosity.

There is a poignant story of Maslow watching a toddler struggle to open a large door: he is confused as he observes the adults patiently waiting for one full half-hour for the child to find a way to open the large door, and then when the child succeeded they praised him for his achievement. Regarding Blackfoot parents, Maslow noted, "I would say the Blackfoot Indian respected the child more than the American observer [did]." (Hoffman, 1988, p. 126).

Maslow's work remains an important record for Indigenous scholars from at least two perspectives. It confirms inherent cultural resilience against the historic traumatic experiences of colonization for Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island. It also raises ethical questions about scholars distorting Indigenous knowledge to enhance their own hierarchical worldviews. The chronicle of his experiences among the Blackfoot "Indians" of Alberta provides an intriguing record of how the study of "primitive" people in the quest for scholarly knowledge can distort Indigenous realities and irrefutably harm them.

The debate is not so much about Indigenous contributions to modern cultural psychology but about the undermining of Indigenous peoples economically, socially and politically in the name of land acquisition and knowledge theft. Maslow would become the father of motivation while the Indigenous peoples of Alberta would descend further into cycles of dependency, despair and loss. By 1967, only one generation away from his 1938 six-week visit, Maslow was hearing from a new generation of social science graduate students about addiction and violence becoming the new social norms of the Alberta Indigenous population.

By 1984, Maslow wanted to know what had happened to the community he had visited. On hearing descriptions of marginalization and despair, he arranged for a graduate student, A. D. Fisher, to revisit and report on social circumstances in the community since 1938. A. D. Fisher would answer with a demand for an explanation regarding the poverty, despair and hopelessness he witnessed. Maslow was upset with the anthropological data coming from his student and implored him to make his finding public and get those truths into the academic literature. Fisher responded with an essay entitled, "Indian Land Policy and the Settler State in Colonial Western Canada" (1984), and his writing remains timely for our current struggle for reconciliation between Indigenous peoples and Canada. Like many of us, he wanted explanations for how and why the outcome of "*Reservationization*" for the Blackfoot had turned out to be Indian underdevelopment in the bountiful land of Alberta. Learnings from Maslow (1978), Lear (2008), and

Lerner (1986) have provided a contextual framework for this paper and perhaps, if what we have observed through our own community engagement and social work experience is true, for the future of Indigenous community service.

Mental well-being and addictions workers in Canadian Indigenous communities, including those doing work in Ontario on a current mental well-being project titled Increased Access to Structured Psychotherapy (IASP), have adopted evidence-based Aaron Beck Institute for Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) practices. Oversight of the demonstration sites for IASP/CBT is positioned within multiple Ontario hospitals and faith-based mental health services. However, early experience with this pilot project demonstrates a continued cross-cultural ignorance and arrogance and institutionalized dominant culture approaches to reducing individual and community distress. There continues to be resistance to the acceptance and incorporation of Indigenous participants' experience of the historical and intergenerational impacts of colonization through the *Reservationization* of their people through time. There is no real understanding of what the atrocity of unrelenting child removal and cultural destruction means to the health and well-being of subsequent generations. Indigenous people are going through yet another process of nation building with the current Liberal Government, but what has changed? Indigenous participation in these pilot projects fall under systemic models already challenged by cultural competency and cultural safety. Professional schools continue to send out new doctors, nurses, psychologists and social workers ostensibly to improve the wellness of the Canadian population, yet they continue to lack an understanding of the cultural devastation unleashed on Indigenous people through residential schools, mass child apprehensions during the sixties scoop, and structural inequities in education, health care and natural resource wealth. Richard Layard and David Clark (2014) discuss how fifty years of massive social progress has not alleviated twenty-first century distress around the world. They note how improving access to evidence-based psychological treatments can enhance mental well-being and social well-being. They advocate for making mental well-being a vital component of public policy that can alter millions of lives globally if done with sensitivity and acceptance of the cultural basket of people's lives. Yet, the critical shortfalls in training through the medical model are evident across the social determinants of health (Fiedeldey-Van Dijk, Rowan, Mushquash, Dell, & Hopkins, 2016). The entrenchment of disadvantage, distress and despair remain embedded in social science research, according to these well-respected authors,

*...depicting those with addictions as trapped in complex connections involving drug use, crime, violence, emotional instability, financial hardship, low education, deviance, social processes associated with the crack market, and other factors compounding risk. ... These lists also narrow the focus to individuals as victims, who are simultaneously responsible for surmounting addiction individually. As deficiencies the identification and conquering of these challenges point to evidence. (Fiedeldey-Van Dijk et al., 2016, p. 5)*

Once again, it's truly as if nothing happened after the dislocation, marginalization and *Reservationization* of Indigenous peoples across Canada for centuries, at least from a Euro-Canadian perspective. Lots happened, and much of that "happening" was to the distinct disadvantage of Indigenous peoples and has had a devastating effect on their children. As traditional lifeways, communal and spiritual visioning, language and cultural practices, and Elders' teachings fell away, youth began to look in other places for their identities. Fiedeldey-Van Dijk and colleagues (2016) challenge the myth of creating well-being based on evidence-based medical model policy and practice in their paper, "Honouring Indigenous culture-as-intervention: Development and validity of the Native Wellness Assessment™". They knew, and we know, the only thing that will truly work to stem the tide of suicides, mental illness and identity loss will be the absolute (re)installation of culture as intervention, culture and language as foundations to the truth, and the reconciliation of misplaced helping with those who have suffered the violence of benevolence (Wesley-Esquimaux, 2011).

So, where else have we looked for clues to better describe and understand what has to happen to break the "after this nothing happened" narrative of Plenty Coups in Lear's (2008) book? What about the "on-the-ground" social work experiences in regions with high rates of suicide, child welfare apprehensions, home brew/moonshine alcohol abuse, as well as a rapidly unfolding opiate dependency crisis prompting unrelenting numbers of youth suicide in Indigenous communities? As alcohol and drug abuse became a way to cope with life's traumas through creating and sustaining a numbing process, we saw children being taken from their homes in increasing numbers. Today, as Indigenous peoples grapple with new substances such as oxycontin, fentanyl, morphine, and suboxone, families are descending deeper into separation and poverty of spirit. When people experience intense feelings of anger, fear, shame and guilt and do not possess healthy coping strategies to address these negative

feelings, they may well respond by seeking the numbing effects of alcohol and drugs. The drinking and zoning out through heavy drug use may be acting as a mechanism to control the overwhelming emotions or triggers they experience to events that lead to traumatic recall and fear (Saggers & Gray, 1998). For Indigenous people, alcohol may be used as a coping mechanism because the losses and trauma Indigenous people experience are often longstanding or deeply historical, and we now know, more epi-genetically transmitted (Bombay, Matheson, & Anisman, 2009), more violent and more sudden. Historic losses and experiences have generally not been recognized as traumas by mainstream society. All of this means trauma combined with unresolved grief, whether historic or contemporary, may well have a greater generational impact upon Indigenous peoples and their children than has been previously acknowledged (Restoule, 2013).

Indigenous peoples have also become increasingly aware of the policy and practices of industries such as the Children's Aid Society. These agencies have built an astonishing amount of power and privilege within their ranks, and they use this power gratuitously in the monitoring and apprehension of Indigenous children. They have done this for over seven decades and we can see the effects of that power imbalance right across Canada. The replication of childhood trauma and loss is readily discernable throughout "Indian country" both inside and external to community. The ability of Indigenous social justice workers to stem this tide has been challenged by the individualization of Indigenous peoples through external interference and use of the medical model for care.

Wesley-Esquimaux has spent considerable time exploring the context of unresolved historic and contemporary impacts of trauma and grief on Indigenous peoples and the value of culture and language to provide healing (Wesley-Esquimaux & Smolewski, 2004). The idea of trauma-informed practice has finally taken hold and more and more authors and community service workers are getting up to speed on what trauma-informed care might actually mean for the First Peoples of this country, and how traditional knowledge can help. In addition, Wesley-Esquimaux's work on "wise practices" through the Banff Centre in Alberta from 2008 through 2013 opened the possibility of using "our own ways" even wider, and what should be an obvious endorsement of "those ways as healing ways" has traveled as far as Australia.

The steps past understanding what historic trauma meant and how it was generated, to its manifestation in contemporary community, led naturally to the lived experiences of children and elders. Assessing impacts on

the youngest and the oldest then led to Indigenous teachings and who gives and receives the foundations of identity, and how pertinent information is transmitted intergenerationally through the environments in which we live (Aguiar & Halseth, 2015). Aguiar and Halseth (2015) note that "... early childhood experiences provide a 'learning environment that serves to program the quality of maternal [and family] behavior that will be displayed toward the next generation'" (p. 17). Transmission of trauma always takes place in a social environment, and it is always assumed (and proven through the ACE study) to have a major impact on children. It is true Aboriginal children of today did not directly witness the death, terror and suffering of their ancestors, but many have witnessed death, terror and suffering in their own lives since birth. Research has adequately demonstrated that many children, youth and adults have witnessed the rampant domestic violence, alcoholism and drug addiction of their parents, who witnessed the lack of self-esteem, cruelty, poverty and unresolved grief of their own parents through the intergenerational transmission of dysfunctional behaviours (Herman, 1997; Krystal, 1968). According to Kellermann and Hudgins (2000), traumatized parents influence their children not only through what they do with them, in terms of actual child-rearing behaviour, but also through inadequate role modelling. As pointed out by Bandura (1989), children learn things vicariously by observing and imitating their parents. Children of traumatized parents may be assumed to have taken upon themselves some of the behaviours and emotional states of their parents into their own adulthoods. This matrix of unhealthy family relations frames the process of memory transmission and locates this social phenomenon on an individual level, thus affecting every person in Indigenous communities and beyond. This is how universal trauma enters the lives of our children and affects how they live and die today (Wesley-Esquimaux & Smolewski, 2004).

Bourdieu's (1986) work on Habitus also helped to inform the way Indigenous youth were being shaped by environmental experiences. "*Habitus* is one of Bourdieu's most influential yet ambiguous concepts. It refers to the physical embodiment of cultural capital, to the deeply ingrained habits, skills, and dispositions that we possess due to our life experiences" (Routledge, 2016, para. 9). If those manifestations are good and strong, youth coming out of these environments will have a better chance of thriving and using the skills and nurturing they receive to choose effective life pathways. If, on the other hand, their life experience is highly detrimental and they are challenged by unreliable adults or subjected to various forms of abuse, the skills they will have learned may not be readily adaptable to places such as educational institutes or urban environments. Research completed by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation (1996-2013)

demonstrated when abused children grow up in unhealthy First Nation, Metis or Inuit families and communities, they learn specific behaviours and build defense mechanisms to protect themselves. These behaviours and defense mechanisms can be seen as healthy and dysfunctional at the same time. They are healthy because they help the individual survive untenable situations; and unhealthy because the individual invariably ends up imbalanced and/or continues to blame himself or herself for the abuse experienced. They may lack trust and may act out the abuse experienced in a variety of dysfunctional ways. They may be unprepared to navigate adversity outside of their own experience. In fact, the tools they use may be detrimental and relatively useless to their success in new social settings.

Looking at Indigenous children meant looking harder at the potential or limitations of their environments and experiences and questioning whether or not those experiences were adverse, or supportive and loving. With thousands of Indigenous children being raised in foster or adoptive care, there is an important need to unbundle their lives from conception through aging out of "care" and to really examine the resultant lives they are living. Bourdieu also noted that, "Habitus is neither a result of free will, nor determined by structures, but created by a kind of interplay between the two over time: dispositions that are both shaped by past events and structures, and that shape current practices and structures and also, importantly, that condition our very perceptions of these" (Bourdieu 1984: 170). In this sense habitus is created and reproduced unconsciously, 'without any deliberate pursuit of coherence... without any conscious concentration' (ibid: 170). What were and are the forces creating habitus for our children and what effect is this having on the ability of Indigenous peoples to create what Shawn Ginwright (2018) calls "healing-centered engagement" over the continued use of trauma informed care? (6). For those children remaining in family circles, was their circle healthy or wrought with parental addictions and with distant or inaccessible grandparents and extended family? We can see the results of healthy parenting and positive access to older generations in many educational institutions now and in those raising children within extended "traditionally based" or "wise practice" family circles. Although, the expression of childhood resiliency has become a larger question for further research as well. Indigenous people are proving change is possible, no matter the origin of their experiences, and we can see this manifesting in present time examples of healthy young people. However, for children subjected to in-utero addictions, whether alcohol or pain killers, or those apprehended by social workers, the replication of broken values and identities has continued unabated. We see the effects in our jails, and in the next generations of

children going into care. We concur with Ginwright's (2018) proposal that the best way to depart from "the lens of harm" persistently marking too many Indigenous youth is by focusing on "asset driven strategies that highlight possibilities for well-being" and seeing young people as more than "the worst thing that happened to them" (6).

We have begun the work of introducing blended models of care into the families and training opportunities we are presented with. The papers and books generated by the Adverse Childhood Experiences<sup>4</sup> (ACE) study from 1995-97 have contributed an additional lens for Indigenous community to look through and utilize. We understand intergenerational affect cannot be addressed without knowledge of how environment effects behavior and adulthood beliefs and actions (Lipton, 2015). Emerson (2008), a Dene scholar, suggests "an Indigenous critical lens involves a critique of both the settler and Indigenous worldviews since one must also scrutinize one's own belief systems and practices. He invites a remembering of Indigenous roots of harmony, beauty, balance and restoration of ties to all Creation, as in the well-known phrase, "All Our Relations". This requires critical thinking in "an Indigenous world that is laden with conflicts, tensions, and contradictions stemming from modern vs. traditional, western vs. Indigenous, oppressor vs. oppressed and colonized vs. decolonized dynamics" (p. 32). The Indigenous concept of justice is also closely tied to the notion of restoring community harmony. This approach is based on a belief in the interconnectedness of all aspects of life (Bopp & Bopp, 1997a; 1997b). Hence, in the traditional way, the victim, the abuser and the community all have an important role to play in resolving disputes and healing the wounds. The goal is to restore social harmony. These approaches are as useful in addressing violations of community standards related to sexual behaviour as they were and are in many other areas of community life and practice.

Over 30 years ago, Wesley-Esquimaux, working with nine First Nations on personal and community well-being, designed a Circle of Trauma to help generate discussions with youth and other community members on healing. The Wheel illustrates there are events that can send people reeling, and events that can send people healing. The inner circle shows how when a child is traumatized, but has little or no power to address the source, their survival is contingent upon sending it down into their unconscious or unawareness, where it may become the genesis for self loathing, inner pain, suicide ideation, and addiction.

For a child, depending on age, addiction can mean an over consumption of food, escape into books and video-gaming, excessive cleaning of self or surroundings (Obsessive Compulsive Disorders), silence, early promiscuity, or any number of age-related addictions, and create numbness of affect. They may reject "help" or even the family relationships around them, focusing on pets or outside friends, until as they grow older the trauma begins to manifest as physical issues, getting lost in ego or behaving in ways that are rejecting and troublesome, and finally experiencing flashbacks or intrusive memories of the event that sent them reeling. These events can be related to any kind of violence, the loss of a parent through death or divorce, sexual or physical abuse, the death of a companion animal, or any number of things that may more dramatically affect a child. The event that sends us healing and into the outer circle may be the birth of their own child, a marriage, a pet that opens our heart, or even a death that causes us to take note and change our ways, or perhaps the influence of a new parent figure or respected mentor.

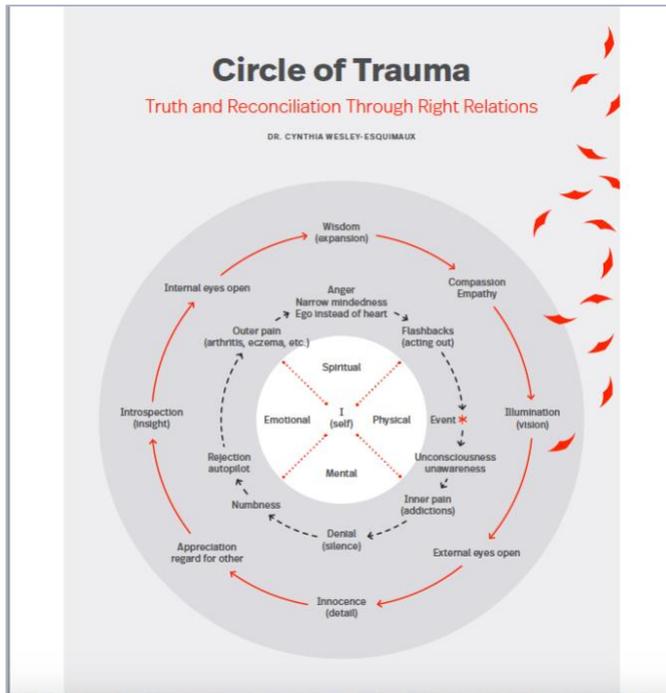
Sometimes it is what many of us perceive as somewhat more mundane happenings that can trigger trauma memories from our childhood: the breakup of a teen relationship, the leaving of a parent through divorce, the birth of a sibling or an early pregnancy. The event doesn't have to be dramatic, but clearly dramatic events can happen in families already stressed by external and interfering colonial powers, insensitive social workers, or provincial or federal political dictates they have no control over, but directly affect their lives. The point of the circle illustration was and is that there can be a return to traditional teaching and there can be restoration of health and well-being. The circle of trauma provides context, the decisions Indigenous people make today in regards to their choices and the well-being of their children, can provide transformation from Plenty Coups' "after this nothing happened" to a spiritual, mental, emotional and physical manifestation of Indigenous lifeways that reflect a before-contact reality.

<sup>4</sup> The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study is a research study conducted by the American health maintenance organization Kaiser Permanente and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Participants were recruited to the

study between 1995 and 1997 and have been in long-term follow up for health outcomes.

Figure 1: Circle of Trauma<sup>5</sup>

Dr. Lipton's work on epi-genetics and the forces of environment on peoples' response to life circumstances have also contributed to understanding how Plenty Coups' observation on "after this nothing happened" can still be playing itself out in contemporary Indigenous



lives. If epi-genetic responses to environmental events can play themselves out for as many as fourteen generations past the initial trauma, and be heavily dependent on the choices each generation makes, then our ability to pay very close attention to pre-conception, conception, pregnancy, and the first six years of life at a minimum is critical to keeping our youth alive, and actually doing great nation building.

Today, Indigenous scholars are expressing a strong voice in re-interpreting the last 200 years of traumatic history and the marginalization experienced at the hands of Anthropologists such as Abraham Maslow, a plethora of social scientists, and too many insensitive social justice workers. Waldram, Herring, and Young (1995) note in their study on Indigenous Health in Canada, unresolved and unrepresented trauma can have intergenerational impacts, and that epidemics were not simply medical events, but had far-reaching consequences for Indigenous societies ... "In some cases, whole communities were decimated ... epidemics spurred on community break-up and migration ... and among the survivors, the loss of a significant number of community members altered

leadership roles and disrupted the existing social structures ..." (p. 260). Before contact with European invaders, Indigenous peoples had their own cultural world-views that were objective and stable social facts to each and every individual born into their societies. Their sacred universes were well articulated and their spirituality was validated in a variety of social situations, thus reinforcing its own stability in a continuous social process. Indigenous people's world-view, however alien to the newcomers, was an objective system of cultural meanings by which people, past and future, were integrated into a coherent cultural biography. In this biography, passed from generation to generation through means of social transmission, every Indigenous child could locate herself or himself in relation to other members of the society or to the world outside, and could position himself or herself within the social order and within the sacred universe (Wesley-Esquimaux & Smolewski, 2004). Indigenous peoples are lifting and reclaiming the challenge of cultural and ceremonial restoration and language reclamation across Canada. The prevention and cessation of suicide in our young can only happen when we fully understand the prophetic meaning behind Plenty Coups' "after this nothing happened" and understand that the journey backwards into who we truly were meant to be is the only true way forward.

Finally, modern implications of almost forgotten stories of struggles to reverse social decline, poverty and marginalization require more Indigenous-led research. We cannot reconcile our ancestors' fight to cling to traditional life-ways in the face of forced assimilation and ecological destruction until we ourselves speak fully to the injustice and human rights violations and crimes against Indigenous humanity. We cannot expect a different response to those factors in our children unless we as Indigenous peoples are prepared to focus everything we have on nurturing, protecting, and developing the next seven generations. We are here to fight another day.

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<sup>5</sup> Figure 1. The "Circle of Trauma" was conceived by Dr. Wesley-Esquimaux in the mid-1990's to visually illustrate

why it is important to do the 'inner work' of identifying critical life events blocking healing and holistic well-being.

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