A Narrative Inquiry into the Experiences of non-Aboriginal Counsellors working with Aboriginal Peoples.

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Abstract

With a call for non-Aboriginal counsellors to develop a better understanding of the health issues facing Canada's Aboriginal peoples, future counsellors need to have a strong understanding of the changing social conditions and focus beyond existing paradigms of mental health care. Culturally relevant therapy is needed to engage with issues of poverty, unemployment, racism, and injustice (Nuttgens & Campbell, 2010). In this narrative inquiry study I explored the experiences of non-Aboriginal counsellors working with Aboriginal clients. I engaged with two counsellors, Bob and Liz, over a period of several years, in three to four conversations between two to three hours at a time. The conversations were transcribed verbatim and analyzed for narrative threads. Observations and field notes were collected, and reflections were incorporated into this study. Three narrative threads have been identified a) stories to live by, b) humility and c) being called to the work. It is important to understand non-Aboriginal counselling experiences across time, place, and diverse social contexts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). These experiences are embedded within life histories of people that raise questions about counsellor education and support. In order to provide effective and culturally relevant services counsellors may be required to step outside their current roles to include advocacy, outreach, prevention programs, psycho-educational and other forms of community based interventions. It is imperative for helping professionals to become educated on Aboriginal culture, cross-cultural practices, as well as multicultural counselling theory, indigenous psychologies and social justice action. Listening to the experiences of Bob and Liz also made visible the significant gaps and a lack of evidence informed teaching practices.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Amanda Bowden. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received ethical approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name: “A narrative account of cross-cultural counselling” No. Pro00035666. No part of this thesis has been previously published.

Chapter four of this thesis has been submitted for publication as A. Bowden, V.Caine, and S.Yohani “A Narrative Inquiry into the Experiences of non-Aboriginal Counsellors working with Aboriginal Peoples”. I was responsible for the collection and analysis as well as manuscript composition. V. Caine was the supervisory author and was involved with concept formation and manuscript composition.

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Introduction

> *I felt like Hermione Granger. Every two seconds my hand would fiercely jut into the air, I would squirm in my seat trying to control myself and call out, "But professor, you completely glossed over the impact of intergenerational trauma…what about the Indian Act?...the 60's scoop?… the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)?" Where was the political, historical, cultural or social context? I could tell my classmates were getting annoyed with my constant interruptions. I was furious, red faced, and could hardly contain myself. I was incredulous that this was the only 'multicultural' assessment lecture (entitled Assessment with Aboriginal North Americans) that we would receive in our year-long individual assessments class. Just when I thought it could not get any worse the lecturer responded to my questions regarding the intergenerational impact of physical, sexual and emotional trauma of residential school survivors by stating that the abuse was yet to be proven. Without waiting to be called upon to speak I started to talk about the 2005 class action suit, the TRC and what was currently going on across Canada but my words were not heard. I was cut off. Silenced. At this point I stopped raising my hand and stopped asking questions. (Memory of class lecture February 2012).*

I share this memory of my experience because it provides an important context of my personal and institutional schooling experiences, experiences that motivated me to engage in this research. As I came alongside counsellors who work with Aboriginal[1] clients, I wondered about their early life experiences and the influences that brought them to work with Aboriginal people. I wondered how their psychology training/education impacted their work with Aboriginal clients? I wondered what had shaped their ongoing counselling experiences? My hope was to inquire into their understandings of their experiences of cross-cultural counselling using narrative inquiry.

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[1] The term Aboriginal is used to describe the Indigenous people of Canada, including First Nation, Métis, and Inuit, who have experienced colonialization, cultural oppression, forced assimilation and absorption into a global economy with little regard for their autonomy or wellbeing (Kirmayer, Tait & Simpson, 2009). It should be noted that Aboriginal people in Canada come from very diverse backgrounds, with great cultural and linguistic diversity, with an enormous range of values, and community lifestyles (Kirmayer, Tait & Simpson, 2009). The term Aboriginal is not meant to be all encompassing, rather it is used to acknowledge the shared historical relationship and legacy of economic, political and social problems resulting from European colonialization and Canadian Governmental policy and laws.

From the onset of this study I realized that I needed to be attentive to my stories. I draw on my experiences and engage in this narrative inquiry by inquiring into my autobiographical stories and the interconnected and nested experiences in which I live. Autobiographical writing is a way to write about the whole context of a life (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and can be used as field text. Exploring my early childhood experiences, education/training and life stories were constructed through autobiographical writings with the hope of becoming in-relation to cross-cultural counsellors.

As I engage in my narrative beginnings I am mindful that our cultural, familial, historical, political, personal, linguistic and institutional stories profoundly shape us. These are stories we live by, and stories we live in (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). As we slide backward and forward in time, and in and out of places, Clandinin (2013) posits that the stories are interwoven and intertwined into who we are and who are becoming as we move and live in the world.

> *Our Stories are always in relation, always composed in between, in those spaces between time and people and generations and places. As we tell our stories and listen to participants tell their stories in the inquiry, we, as inquirers, need to pay close attention to who we are in the inquiry and to understand that we, our selves, are part of the storied landscapes we are studying (Clandinin, 2013, p.30)*

Looking Backwards: Institutional Stories

One of the main reasons I chose my graduate program was because it offered training in two areas: counselling and individual psycho-educational assessment. In the thesis-based school psychology and counselling stream students attended the same classes and were taught together except each had a different required course (introduction to school psychology and group counselling). The first year of studies focused on counselling (basic skills, issues, attitudes, and theories) and involved a supervised

psychotherapy practicum in the education clinic. The second year focused on individual psychological assessment and included another supervised clinical practicum. At the time, upon completion of a master's degree in educational psychology, regardless of program stream, students would be trained and ready to enter the community and practice psychology with two very useful skill sets.

After the first week of school I realized that it would be challenging for me to finish my degree in two years. The course load was heavy, and this did not yet include the required practicum hours that started six weeks into the first term. Without family in the city and limited financial resources for childcare, my courses and client hours needed to be scheduled within the hours of my son's school day. In order to graduate I realized I would need to do a third year of study to fulfill my elective credits and complete my thesis.

> *It was the psychotherapy practicum that filled me with fear and trepidation (I could not believe we would actually be counselling real clients only 6 weeks after starting grad school)!!! I remember feeling anxious and absolutely petrified when conducting the phone interview to see my first client. My hands were sweaty and I talked a million miles a minute (something I do when excited or nervous). I felt completely unprepared even though we were told over and over that "the therapeutic relationship is key"...I had no idea how I was going to pull it off.*

At the time I had no interest in doing 'talk therapy'…I was there to learn how to become a clinician and do psycho-educational assessments. Even though I knew it would be a great skill to utilize when needed, doing psychotherapy was not part of my career plan. I was going to be a school psychologist not a therapist. The tensions I experienced during my first year of graduate school had lasting effects on both the development of my personal and professional identity, as well as on my future career goals. I never thought counselling training would have such a monumental impact in my life.

What initially seemed frightening and overwhelming turned out to be a life changing experience. I know it sounds cliché but I had found my calling. Psychotherapy came naturally to me, and I absolutely loved working one-on-one with clients. We were encouraged to become effective therapists by adopting a 'system of psychotherapy' (Truscott, 2010). Initially I gravitated towards Feminist Therapy, because I naturally practiced from a collaborative, egalitarian, conscious raising, and social justice perspective. My Riot Grrrl[2] roots and women's studies classes (still) greatly influenced the lens in which I view(ed) the world. As the year progressed, a classmate presented on Multicultural Counselling Therapy, which was not included in our required text, but stimulated me enough to find out more. It was another theory that closely aligned with my worldview and my overall approach to working with clients. It became another system of psychotherapy I embraced and practiced.

A huge component of psychotherapy training was reflection and self-awareness. Through these ongoing processes I became aware of my passion and grateful that counselling was taught as part of the curricula. It had provided me with the experience of actually 'doing' psychotherapy, something I might never have had the opportunity to do otherwise. And I would have never known how much I loved doing talk therapy with clients.

During my second year of study (individual assessment), I quickly realized that I preferred counselling. I had been accepted into the school psychology program but came

[2] Riot grrrl is an underground feminist hardcore punk movement that originally started in the early 1990s, in Washington, D.C., and the greater Pacific Northwest, noticeably in Olympia, Washington. It is often associated with third-wave feminism, which is sometimes seen as its starting point. It has also been described as a musical genre that came out of indie rock, with the punk scene serving as an inspiration for a musical movement in which women could express themselves in the same way men had been doing for the past several years. Riot grrrl bands often address issues such as rape, domestic abuse, sexuality, racism, patriarchy, and female empowerment (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Riot_grrrl).

to learn my passion lay in counselling. It's funny, I remember one of my undergraduate mentors trying to convince me to go into counselling and at the time I had shrugged her off. I had this vision of school psychology: how I would practice and who I would become as a psychologist. This vision was radically unhinged by the end of my first year of studies. When I had started graduate school becoming a clinician was developing into my story to live by. Becoming a school psychologist was an integral part of both my personal and professional identity, it was how I viewed my (present and future) self, and it was difficult to come to terms with the fact that it was not a good fit for me.

Assessment was challenging. Not only academically rigorous, but it forced me to question my worldview, my core values and beliefs (this is explored in more depth later). We were told to 'remove our counsellor's hat and put on our clinician's coat' and I found this transition difficult. Over the course of the year I learned to view assessment as a useful skill but not something I wanted to do.

I was given permission to write a counselling informed thesis, (opposed to a school psychology one). At one point I had inquired into changing programs but was discouraged and told it would be easier to do when applying to the doctoral program. For the remainder of my graduate studies I was given special permission to "customize" my studies to include both a qualitative research methods and a multicultural counselling class, which were not typically offered to school psychology students. As I navigated my path, I was thrust into the borderlands, as my landscapes irrevocable shifted and I negotiated between the two genres of psychology and groups of students (never really fitting in with either).

I had attended a talk/healing circle on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission[3] (TRC) that was taking place across Canada during my first year of studies. This experience not only impacted me on a profound level, it also inspired the focus of this research. During my undergrad studies I had taken numerous race and culture classes along with aboriginal courses (Native Self Government) and 'thought' I had a comprehensive understanding of Canadian history. I knew about the Indian Act[4], Residential Schools[5] and had heard about the 60's scoop[6]. I was 'aware' of the systematic

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[3] The TRC is a component of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement. In 2015, The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) finished it's six year operation mandated to "reveal to Canadians the complex truth about the history and the ongoing legacy of the church-run residential schools and guide" and "to inspire a process of truth and healing, leading toward reconciliation"(p.27) The Commission was required to hold seven National Events; to gather documents and statements about residential schools and their legacy; to fund truth and reconciliation events at the community level; to recommend commemoration initiatives to the federal government for funding; to set up a research centre that will permanently house the Commission's records and documents, and to issue a report with recommendations (Honouring the truth, reconciling for the future: Summary of the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, p. 27).

[4] The Indian Act was created in 1876 continues to mandate and institutionalize the lives of Aboriginal people in Canada by the federal government. The act defines First Nations people as wards of the Crown and subjects that the state has a responsibility to care for. The Indian act includes creating social categories of "status and non-status Indians", restricting movement, & the prohibition of Aboriginal cultural ceremonies and traditions such as the Sundance and Potlatch (Kirmayer, Tait & Simpson, 2009). The act also fails to acknowledge matrilineal descent and excludes many Aboriginal women (and their children) who marry non-First Nations men. The Indian Act has imposed restrictive and racist notions of membership, citizenship, political participation and legal structures that were not prevalent in Aboriginal communities before colonialism.

[5] Over the span of 100 years, over 100,000 Aboriginal children were forced from their homes and "subjected to an institutional regime that fiercely denigrated and suppressed their heritage" (Kirmayer, Tait & Simpson, 2009, p.9). Indian Residential schools (IRS) were created in the 1870's by the federal government and run by churches in most Canadian provinces and territories. They were created to "assimilate and educate" aboriginal children into Canadian society "for their own good". More than 150,000 First Nation, Métis, and Inuit children were forcibly removed from their families (by police or Indian officers) and placed in residential schools. The children were forbidden to speak their languages, practice their cultural and spiritual traditions and were punished for doing so. They were subjected to physical, sexual and emotional abuse at the hand of their "educators" (Regan, 2010). Milloy (1999) articulates that the violent premise of re-socialization through residential schooling was "to kill the Indian in the child" and "in the end all the Indian there is in the race should be dead" (p.42). Aboriginal children (and communities) were denied the basic human right to maintain their cultural identity and transmit their traditions.

[6] Beginning in the 60's (and lasting for almost three decades) large numbers of Aboriginal children were taken from their families and communities and placed in foster care or adopted into non-Aboriginal families. Aboriginal parents were viewed as "incapable of educating their children with proper European values" and in the 1960's the federal government handed over Aboriginal health, welfare and education over to the provincial government. Kirmayer et al. (2009) point out provincial services emphasized the

oppression, marginalization and genocide of Aboriginal people in Canada. I had learned the effects of intergenerational trauma and healing the soul wound. I had read about the abuse in Indian Residential Schools (IRS). But this was the first time I actually witnessed stories told by people who had attended IRS schools. I saw and heard how these experiences impacted not only their lives, but also the lives of their family and community members. Unlike the readings in my previous coursework, I was learning from people sharing their real life experiences. This was not just words on paper - these were stories told to be witnessed by others. This was raw emotion …tears … heartache … sorrow … remorse and pain. I wondered who these people were? What was their history? How did it impact their present life? How did they imagine their future?

At the end of the event, the main speaker, who was the coordinator of the TRC and IRS Health Supports program for Alberta, called for action by all Canadians. She spoke of how healing was all of our responsibility and how non-Aboriginal people need to be involved. For me, this meant education, awareness and social change. It meant acknowledgment, taking responsibility, and action. It meant doing my part as a Canadian, and a person in the helping profession to advocate for social justice, healing and change. This experience was the basis and inspiration for my thesis. I also began to wonder who the other witnesses, listeners, healers and story-tellers were, and how these stories might be impacting their lives as I looked around the event.

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moral attributes of individual parents and focused on improving care of children and the prevention of child neglect which resulted in children being taken from their families and placed in foster care. With Aboriginal families, neglect was linked to poverty and other social issues, yet there were no family reunification services. Social workers opted to place Aboriginal children in long-term foster care or adoption into non-Aboriginal families. Kirmayer et al., (2009) points out that in the 1970's one in four "status Indians" could expect to be separated by his or her parents.

At the end of my second year I had been given permission to take an interdisplinary qualitative methods class and found a spring intensive that I hoped would help me get started on my research. I had a (counselling) supervisor, a topic idea, and I knew I wanted to do qualitative research but I was not set on any particular methodology. Once again, when I least expected it, my life was irrevocably changed and I found inspiration.

I was emotionally and physically tired when I wandered into the health science building. I was still reeling from my assessment course and knew I needed to focus and get started on my thesis. Getting out of the education building was a desperately needed change of space, pace and place. This three week qualitative course turned out to be one of the most intense, thought provoking, soul searching, reflective courses I have ever taken, and although it focused on various kinds of qualitative methods, it awakened me to narrative inquiry.

While working through the readings, the in class activities and small works in progress groups, my narrative autobiographically situated beginnings began to unfold. I realized that my position on my professional knowledge landscape was largely shaped by my past life experiences. As I shared my stories of who I was, and wondered about my past life experiences, questions arose and tensions surfaced. I awakened to the questions of: who was I as a person? Who was I as a mother, a daughter, a graduate student, a psychotherapist? As I engaged in the writing and telling of my stories, I began my narrative inquiry.

Rationale For The Study

For over 100 years, Aboriginal children were removed from their families

> *and sent to institutions called residential schools. The government-funded, church-run schools were located across Canada and established with the purpose to eliminate parental involvement in the spiritual, cultural and intellectual development of Aboriginal children. The last residential schools closed in the mid-1990s. During this chapter in Canadian history, more than 150,000 First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children were forced to attend these schools some of which were hundreds of miles from their home. The cumulative impact of residential schools is a legacy of unresolved trauma passed from generation to generation and has had a profound effect on the relationship between Aboriginal peoples and other Canadians. Collective efforts from all peoples are necessary to revitalize the relationship between Aboriginal peoples and Canadian society – reconciliation is the goal. It is a goal that will take the commitment of multiple generations but when it is achieved, when we have reconciliation - it will make for a better, stronger Canada (Truth and Reconciliation Website:* http://www.trc.ca/websites/reconciliation/index.php?p=312).

During the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions' six-year time frame, over 6,500 survivors of Indian Residential Schools (IRS), their family members, and people who felt impacted by the schools and their legacy came forward to publicly share their traumatic stories of sexual, physical, and emotional abuse. Survivors of IRS have articulated how their experiences have an intergenerational component as it has not only affected their lives, but has negatively impacted the lives of their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren (Regan, 2010; Honouring the truth, reconciling for the future: Summary of the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).

One of the recommendations from this class action suit was the assurance that survivors and their families would have access to mental health services during and after the TRC through the First Nations Inuit Health Branch (FIHB)[7]. Although the TRC's final national event was held in March 2014 in Edmonton, Alberta, the provision of promised mental health support services for survivors (and their families) indicates a

[7] http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fniah-spnia/nihb-ssna/benefit-prestation/crisis-urgence/guide-eng.php#a21

huge need for inquiry into the benefits and importance of competent multicultural counsellors working with Aboriginal people dealing with intergenerational trauma in Canada. Even though the last IRS closed in 1996, approximately 80,000 former students are alive today and new data from the National Household Survey (NHS) show that 1,400,685 people reported an Aboriginal identity in 2011, representing 4.3% of the total Canadian population. Aboriginal people accounted for 3.8% of the population in the 2006 Census (http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/130508/dq130508a-eng.htm). The purpose of this study was to better understand the experiences of non-Aboriginal counsellors working with Aboriginal clients.

Literature Review

> The issues that face Aboriginal people in Canada are quite unique from any other ethnic or racial group, personally, politically, and socially. All aspects of wellbeing are fused with these intricate aspects, which makes effective counselling a challenge. Essentially, counselling training as it stands now does not have a solid foundation that would make counsellors effective with the majority of clients that now not only are in need of effective counselling, but are demanding culturally competent counsellors both within and outside the Aboriginal community. All minorities face the prospect of dealing with a Eurocentric counselling paradigm that starts with a worldview and knowledge base that stands as a barrier to effective counselling services (Frances et al., 2004, p.1).

As a result of colonialism and assimilist government policies, Aboriginal people in Canada have suffered from the devastating effects of genocide and intergenerational trauma. When compared to non-Aboriginal Canadians, Aboriginal people experience a disproportionate amount of mental health issues (Nuttgens & Campbell, 2010; Blue et al., 2002; Kirmayer et al., 2009; McCormick, 2009; France et al., 2004; Wihak & Price, 2006). Many Aboriginal people view current mental health services as ‘inaccessible and culturally insensitive’ especially because they are provided through contemporary

western based service delivery (Nuttgens & Campbell, 2010). France and colleagues (2002) found when compared to Caucasians, Aboriginal clients were twice as likely not to return after their first counselling session. Barlow and colleagues (2008) posit this attrition is the result of the deep-seated historical and ongoing power differences and mistrust of white healthcare professionals by Aboriginal clients.

There are over one million First Nations people in Canada, including Inuit, Dene, Métis, and 49 distinct Amerindian cultures (such as the Dakota, Cree and Haida) who live in 633 communities and speak over 53 different languages. Although there is much diversity between First Nation cultures, values such as non-interference, sharing, respect for elders, harmony with the land and social responsibility are shared between groups (Blue et al., 2002, p.4).

When working with Aboriginal clients, Blue and colleagues (2002) describe the following *models of existence* (based on equality, connectedness, and harmony between humans and nature), *the medicine wheel* (situates humans in relation to the universe and signifies unity and balance in all life), *working with Elders* (the importance of relinquishing a counsellor's role as an expert, having elders supply structure and basis for learning and focus on community healing practices), *generosity* (understanding how social status is gained from giving not hoarding), *Mistapeo* (communication with the spirit world), *rules of behaviour* (including non-interference, non-competitiveness, emotional restraint, sharing, suppression of ambition, flexibility with concept of time, not punishing and using respectful methods with children, not expressing gratitude, correction by gentle teasing/humor, protocol: following rules, and respect), *family* (the importance of extended family*), healthy functioning* (balancing the four aspects

represented by the Medicine Wheel: physical, emotional, spiritual and intellectual), and *successfully living in both worlds* (navigating acculturation in a post-contact context).

According to Blue and colleagues (2002), even though a wide range of counselling models exist, non-Aboriginal therapists' methods must not impose unhelpful or even harmful Euro-centric techniques on Aboriginal clients and their communities and need to be based on deep respect, be beneficial to the community, and embrace spirituality.

> Non-Aboriginal counsellors need to develop a counselling approach that is appropriate to the range of traditional and non-traditional cultures, the counsellor must be flexible, increase self knowledge, be oneself, avoid theoretical dogma, and of course listen, listen, listen (Blue et al., 2002, p.19).

Current literature illustrates how attaining a historical and socio-political understanding of Aboriginal people in Canada is necessary for cultivating a shared worldview in counselling (McCormick, 2011; Blue et al., 2002; Kirmayer et al., 2009; Nuttgens & Campbell, 2010; Wihak & Price, 2006; France et al., 2004). Knowledge of key government policies that have affected the lives of Aboriginal communities (such as the Indian Act, IRS, 60's scoop etc.) is imperative for non-Aboriginal counsellors in order to help provide understanding as to why Aboriginal people often feel alienated from Canadian (mental) health providers and institutions.

Nuttgens and Campbell (2010) offer a socio-political and historical rationale for attending to the key cultural differences when working with Aboriginal clients. Their approach is grounded in three domains of multicultural competence including self - awareness, knowledge of the other and therapeutic practice. They provide a comprehensive overview of important multicultural concepts such as ethnocentrism,

racism, white privilege, as well as a historical view of the 'remnant effects of colonialism born of assimilist government policies', including The Indian Act, residential schools, the 60's Scoop and culture retention. They further argue that multicultural competence requires choosing interventions that are respectful of a cultural group's intact beliefs and values regarding health and healing.

When counselling Aboriginal people, France and colleagues (2004) argue, "the lack of understanding of the historical, political and social aspects of oppression and how it disrupts counselling practice has been one reason why counselling has not been as effective as it could be" (p. 2). McCormick (1996) articulates effective counselling with Aboriginal peoples cannot take place without knowledge and respect for an Aboriginal worldview and value system and successful counselling differs from Euro-American approaches.

Research indicates in large urban areas where Aboriginal people are minorities, Aboriginal clients usually prefer Aboriginal counsellors (Blue et al., 2002). In these urban settings, non-Aboriginal counsellors must establish both a helping relationship as well as an attempt to compensate for any harm they might inadvertently cause to client identity. This can be accomplished by "liaison with cultural resources such as elders, community ceremonies and Aboriginal friendship centers" (p. 12). Conversely, Blue and colleagues (2002), point out in communities where Aboriginals are the majority, a non-Aboriginal counsellor may be effective by providing opportunities to practice skills and teach children how to interact with people from a different culture.

Blue and colleagues (2002) illuminate non-Aboriginal counsellors need to be flexible and adaptive in their counselling techniques. Counsellors working with

Aboriginal clients must be committed to understanding the historical and (unique) cultural characteristics of their clients, develop competencies dealing in non-verbal communication (i.e., comfortable dealing in silence), have tolerance for ambiguity and finally, need a deep understanding of their own values and biases.

Incorporating a social justice perspective by attending to stories of oppression and subjugation (Blue & Darou, 2005) is also important when working with Aboriginal clients. Nuttgens and Campbell (2010) argue "mental illness is often entwined with the effects of poverty and racism and attributable to historical and current social injustices levied against Canada's Aboriginal people" (p. 124). Counselling techniques need to include changing social conditions and focus beyond traditional paradigms of mental health care. Culturally relevant therapy is needed to address the issues of poverty, unemployment, racism, and injustice (Nuttgens & Campbell, 2010).

Multicultural Competencies for Counsellors

Over the past two decades Canadian counsellors have been increasingly called upon to work with diverse client populations whose needs may not be met through existing counselling models. Both the Canadian Counselling Association (1999) and the Canadian Psychological Association (1996) have created ethical guidelines that encourage the use of multicultural counselling practice and emphasize the importance of working with all clients in a non-discriminatory manner (Collins & Arthur, 2001).

Vera and Speight (2003) argue that the counselling profession's use of "white, middle-class models of human development and behavior" (p. 255) fail to represent the needs of historically disenfranchised communities. They point out that this encouraged the development of multicultural counselling competencies in the USA "to provide

guidelines for ethical counsellor practice from multicultural and culturally specific perspectives" (p. 255).

Constantine and colleagues (2007) note that these multicultural counselling competencies were developed as "an independent social justice movement devoted to increasing the relevance of mental health practice, research, and training to diverse populations" (p. 34). They note that the "broader field of psychology was challenged to adhere to these 'aspirational' guidelines to promote multicultural competence in various dimensions of professional practice (p. 34).

Multicultural competence, is generally defined as:

> The extent to which counsellors possess appropriate levels of self-awareness, knowledge, and skills in working with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. In particular, self-awareness entails being cognizant of one's attitudes, beliefs, and values regarding race, ethnicity, and culture, along with one's awareness of the sociopolitical relevance of cultural group membership in terms of issues of cultural privilege, discrimination, and oppression. The knowledge dimension of multicultural competence refers to information one has about various worldview orientations, histories of oppression endured by marginalized populations, and culture-specific values that influence the subjective and collective experiences of marginalized populations (Constantine et al., 2007, p. 24).

Multicultural counselling requires multidimensional thinking, tolerance for ambiguity and involves assigning equal importance to others' cultural values, beliefs, and respect for the ways of being and traditions of others. Jun (2010), a multicultural counsellor, argues that when a counsellor is not aware of their own beliefs, values and biases, they are not aware of how they might be affecting their client. This unawareness can result in marginalization, discrimination, prejudice, stereotyping, engaging in racist, heterosexist, ablest and/or classist oppression, which can negatively impact the client's physical, emotional and psychological welfare.

Social Justice Action

Kennedy and Arthur (2014) argue that although counselling psychologists (both in Canada and internationally) have taken an active leadership role in the areas of multicultural issues and prevention, the movement has been criticized for "its lack of attention to issues of power, racism, sexism, homophobia, social injustice, and economic oppression" (p. 189). They state that there has been a call for counsellors to strengthen their commitment to social justice in professional education, research, and practice. They posit counsellors have begun to embrace a social justice orientation to counselling, which "moves beyond the multicultural movement to ensure the voices and needs of historically marginalized groups are attended to in the research literature, within therapeutic practice, and in society at large" (p. 189).

Arthur and Collins (2014) point out:

> Social justice has been a foundational value for the professions of counselling and counselling psychology, based in the historical roots of vocational counselling at the beginning of the last century. The emphasis on social justice has resurfaced in the professional literature during the past decade. There is growing recognition that people's health and well-being may be positively or adversely influenced through economic, social, and political structures, as well as educational and organizational systems. In addition, differential access to services, resources, and social capital is most often tied to membership in particular non-dominant groups, typically associated with gender, ethnicity, age, ability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and/or religion (p. 171).

Kennedy and Arthur (2014) state the goal of social justice action is "to ensure that all individuals have equal opportunity to reach their personal, social, academic, and career potential, free from barriers in society" and that "this perspective is grounded in the belief that every individual has the right to quality education, appropriate health care

services, and equal employment opportunities, regardless of ethnicity, race, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, economic status, and other individual characteristics" (p 188).

Arthur and Collins (2014) posit the overall aim of social justice practice:

> Is to minimize oppression and injustice in favour of equality, accessibility, and optimal developmental opportunities for all members of society. Social justice is about the elimination of any aspect of social structures or organizational practices that contributes to domination or oppression: it follows that counselling psychologists have a professional responsibility to address systemic and social change. However, there are also strong developmental roots in social justice for fostering people's development and potential. The latter view is highly consistent with a foundation of counselling psychology to address health promotion, illness-prevention, and helping citizens to achieve positive mental health and well being (p. 188).

It's important to note that this infusion of multicultural counselling and social justice action may require counsellors step outside of their traditional roles "to act as teacher, advocate, organizational consultant, social activist, and other roles designed to impact the systems of oppression that precipitate client distress and ill health" (Arthur & Collins, 2007, p 41).

Constantine and colleagues (2007) identify nine specific social justice competencies for counsellors to consider as they work with increasingly diverse cultural populations:

1. Become knowledgeable about the various ways oppression and social inequities can be manifested at the individual, cultural, and societal levels, along with the ways such inequities might be experienced by various individuals, groups, organizations, and macrosystems.
2. Participate in ongoing critical reflection on issues of race, ethnicity, oppression, power, and privilege in your own life.
3. Maintain an ongoing awareness of how your own positions of power or privilege might inadvertently replicate experiences of injustice and oppression in interacting with stakeholding groups (e.g., clients, community organizations, and research participants).
4. Question and challenge therapeutic or other intervention practices that appear inappropriate or exploitative and intervene preemptively, or as early as feasible, to promote the positive well-being of individuals or groups who might be affected.
5. Possess knowledge about indigenous models of health and healing and actively collaborate with such entities, when appropriate, in order to conceptualize and

implement culturally relevant and holistic interventions.
6. Cultivate an ongoing awareness of the various types of social injustices that occur within international contexts; such injustices frequently have global implications.
7. Conceptualize, implement, and evaluate comprehensive preventive and remedial mental health intervention programs that are aimed at addressing the needs of marginalized populations.
8. Collaborate with community organizations in democratic partnerships to promote trust, minimize perceived power differentials, and provide culturally relevant services to identified groups.
9. Develop system intervention and advocacy skills to promote social change processes within institutional settings, neighborhoods, and communities. (Constantine et al, 2007, p. 26)

Dimensions of culture such as age, social class, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, race, religion, language, national origin, ability, and their intersections have a profound effect on clients' worldview, how they are viewed by other people, and their general sense of health and well-being (Brown, Collins & Arthur, 2014). As the population of Canada continues to grow and become even more diverse, multicultural counselling practice should not only examine race and culture, but needs to emphasize the intersection of race, class, gender, socio-economic class, sexual orientation, and physical ability and disability. A holistic perspective on multicultural counselling, requires practitioners to embrace social justice action(s) in order to provide ethical practice to diverse clients from their socio-cultural historical contexts while acknowledging their multiple identities and truths.

> Adopting a social justice value in counselling practice implies a commitment to cultural competence and a broad systemic conceptualization of clients…The emphasis on cultural competence is substantiated by the experiences of non-dominant groups of people in Canadian society who continue to experience sociopolitical and systemic oppression. It has been suggested that counselling psychologists should work from a culturally responsive or multicultural framework that is grounded in a multisystemic perspective of client problems, including not only individual concerns but also the needs of groups or communities. More specifically, professionals would need to be active in addressing social injustices, inequalities, and oppression, taking action toward social change and attending to the needs of groups of people who experience oppression. This would also include advocating with or on behalf of clients,

> communities, and change programs, and empowering others to engage in self-advocacy, resist oppression, and make social change (Arthur & Kennedy, 2014, p. 194).

As I come alongside counsellors who work with Aboriginal clients, I wondered about their early life experiences and the influences that brought them to work with Aboriginal people. I wondered how their psychology training/education impacted their work with Aboriginal clients? I too wondered what had shaped their ongoing counselling experiences. My hope was to inquire into their understandings of their experiences of cross-cultural counselling using narrative inquiry, a relational methodology.

Part II *Life in turmoil*

One night my husband and I were watching a movie (it was supposed to be a dark comedy), and in one scene a man gets brutally raped. We were both totally caught off guard with this plot twist and as I looked over to see my husband's reaction (to see if it emulated mine of shock) I see tears…

running down his face.

I remember trying to be calm and comforting on the outside, but absolutely filled with terror on the inside. As I held him, trying to soothe his distress I pieced together the jumbled fragments of his stories and of our stories.

Methodology

Narrative Inquiry

> Narrative inquiry begins and ends with a respect for ordinary lived experience. A Deweyan view of experience allows for the study of experience that acknowledges the embodiment of the person living in the world. However, the focus of narrative inquiry is not only on valorizing individual experience but is also an exploration of the social, cultural, familial, linguistic and institutional narratives within which individual experiences were, and are, constituted, shaped, expressed and enacted. Understood in this way, narrative inquiries begin and end in the storied lives of the people involved. Narrative inquirers study the individuals experience in the world, an experience that is storied both in the living and the telling and that can be studied by listening, observing, living alongside an other, and writing and interpreting texts. Through the inquiry, we seek ways of enriching and transforming that experience for themselves and others (Clandinin, 2013, p.18).

Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding and studying experience and it is both a methodology and a phenomenon (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). It is a relational inquiry that provides a way for people to share and make meaning of their experiences. Narrative inquiry is an approach to the study of human lives conceived as a way of honouring lived experiences as a source of important knowledge and understanding (Clandinin, 2013, p.17).

Engaging in a narrative inquiry requires collaboration and the building of relationships. Clandinin and Caine (2013) illuminate that ‘amidst these relationships, participants tell and live through stories that speak of, and to, their experiences of living’ (p.167). They posit that the relationship with participants requires being attentive to ethical tensions, obligations and responsibilities throughout the inquiry process. This attention to relational ethics is at the heart of narrative inquiry.

Clandinin (2013) articulates that narrative inquiry is a deeply ethical project, and the ethical cannot be separated from the living of the inquiry. She states “relational ethics

live at the heart of our work as narrative inquirers" (p. 30). This is exemplified in the commitment to relationships and acknowledgment of living in collaborative ways to re-compose and negotiate stories. Clandinin and Caine (2013) point out that, "as we attend to our relational responsibilities, we attend to issues of equity and social justice, which inform the significance of our work" (p. 169).

Research relationships are always entered 'in the midst' by narrative inquirers. This means 'in the midst' of researchers and participants ongoing professional and personal lives, in the midst of their institutional or organizational lives as well as in the midst of their social, political, linguistic, and cultural lives (Clandinin & Caine, 2013; Clandinin, 2013). As researchers we must engage in intensive autobiographical narrative inquiries in order to help us understand who we are, who we are becoming in relation to the phenomenon and our participants.

Our participants are always met within the midst of their lives, which are shaped by attending to past, present, as well as "unfolding social, cultural, institutional, linguistic and familial narratives" (Clandinin & Caine, 2013, p.170). Because we meet in the midst we must recognize that there will never be a final story. Clandinin and Caine (2013) point out that each story begs for a new story to be told, for the experience to be retold and relived.

The process of narrative inquiry is composed of engaging with participants in the ongoing relational inquiry space, or field. This is done by listening to individuals tell their stories, and creating field texts (including field notes, transcripts of conversations, journals and photographs composed or co-composed by researchers and participants) as well as writing both interim and final research texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Field

texts are shaped into interim texts, which are shared and negotiated with participants before being composed into final research texts for public audiences.

Negotiation of relationships and exploring the research puzzle marks entering the field. Clandinin and Caine (2013) illuminate that negotiations are an ongoing processes throughout the inquiry and explore purpose, transitions, intentions and texts. Research conversations are the basis of the collaborative process of exchanging information, ideas, and building understandings that lead to co-authored, in-depth, intimate, narrative accounts that are context bound, told over time, and attend to place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Looking for resonant threads across narrative accounts is the foundation for research texts.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) propose thinking about experiences in a three-dimensional inquiry space. On the first dimension past, present and future creates a sense of temporality. On the second dimension, interactions between personal and social forces occur. On the third dimension, the place or context of inquiry is represented. A narrative inquiry occurs at the intersection of these dimensions with certain people, at a certain time, in a certain place. It should be noted that these intersections do not stay fixed over the course of the inquiry. Situational contexts and personal landscapes change, people move forward with time, and places interact as deeper understanding is gained. The inquiry is always in the midst and being negotiated.

> Even though our lives meet in the midst as we begin the inquiry together and even though we leave in the midst as final research texts are composed we realize that the relational space of telling and retelling stories has shifted who we are as we continue to relive and retell our stories long after the inquiry in the field ended (Clandinin & Caine, 2013, p. 170-171).

During my inquiry, I strived to remain aware of issues surrounding temporality. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) encourage inquirers to remain aware that both researchers and participants are always situated in a particular moment, temporally, spatially, and relationally. Writing from a narrative perspective requires acknowledgment that although one can reflect upon their experiences they can never fully disconnect from their situation. Throughout this study, research journaling was utilized for reflective purposes (in order to encourage and cultivate reflexivity and wakefulness).

I participated in reflective practices in order to undertake a narrative inquiry, with the intention of cultivating self-awareness, social, political, and cultural consciousness, as well as ownership of my perspective, in order to acknowledge the impact on the inquiry process. This reflexivity involved continually questioning my actions and understandings, along with awareness of my life experiences and how these influence the inquiry process.

I hoped to become and remain autobiographically conscious (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) throughout the study by exploring and discovering my personal boundaries that were representative of my own history and expectations. This process entailed becoming cognizant and remaining wakeful of possible tensions between my narrative history and my participant's stories, as well as understanding my story in relation to the participants in the stories they lived, told, retold and relived (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Lugones' (1987) concept of world traveling, requires traveling back in time and place in order to gain understanding of (who I was, as who participants were across their life spans) how we experience discontinuities among the dominant cultural, familial, historical, political, and social experiences we lived in. Lugones (1987) illuminates that

only through traveling to other peoples "worlds" can we shift our understanding and travel with loving perception (p.8). Through my wonderings, I explore how "we inhabit worlds' and travel across them and keep all the memories" (p.14). As I world travel (and move between multiple worlds), the construction of images begin to unfold, awakening me to who I am, who others are, and how we navigate various contexts over various places and across time. As I world travel back in time to the place and relationship(s) I was trying to establish in my participants world(s) through conversation, I was attentive to time, place, and the people who were storied (with)in their stories (Clandinin, 2013, p111).

Inquiry Process

Coming to the Participants

My two participants were recruited through community consultation. Criteria for participation in this study included a) non-Aboriginal counsellors must have worked with aboriginal clients for at least a six-month time period, and b) counsellors must have a graduate degree in psychology, and registered as a psychologist. Participants also needed to be willing to participate in at least three research conversations and review the co-composed narrative accounts.

Through participation in community events, and by developing relationships within the counselling psychology community, I had the opportunity to invite potential participants to my study. Posters were also distributed through these networks and participants were given the choice to contact me. Since I was interested in learning more about a specific population my participants were selected using purposeful sampling.

Conversations with participants occurred in places of their choosing and in addition to a signed informed consent form, ongoing dialogue and collaboration informed the study. Research conversations were tape recorded and transcribed.

Being in the field: Constructing field texts

I used in-depth research conversations using guiding questions, autobiographical writing, and photography to gather counsellor's cross-cultural narratives. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) recognize that field texts, commonly referred to as data, are understood to be interpretive. Utilizing multiple sources of field texts allowed me to gain more complex insights. These detailed field notes also formed part of my field texts and inquiry.

Moving from Field Texts to Interim and Final Research Texts

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe one of the most difficult transitions in narrative inquiry is moving from field texts to research texts. My conversations with the participants and my personal research journal entries were descriptive and close to the experience. In narrative inquiry interpretation of field texts take place over the course of the study and data collection and analysis are not considered mutually exclusive activities. To facilitate the process of inquiry, the transcripts were listened to numerous times and the field texts were read and re-read with the intention of familiarizing myself with the contents, as well as viewing them in relation to each other.

My narrative accounts were written in relation to the three-dimensional inquiry space. The Interim texts were written in different forms and were situated between field texts and final research texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Analysis involved reading,

re-reading, writing, reflecting, continued conversations, collaboration and negotiation with my participants.

I began to look for patterns, narrative threads, tensions, and themes both within and across narrative accounts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). For each participant, an individual narrative account was constructed to reflect their experiences of cross-cultural counsellors. These narrative accounts were co-constructed and negotiated with participants and final research texts were created for public audience.

Part III Coming to Counselling

During the first year of my graduate studies in educational psychology, I was invited to attend an *information event* held at the University of Alberta with the intent of educating students and faculty about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) events that were taking place across Canada. An Elder led prayer and ceremony that initiated the event, followed by a historical overview of Canada's treatment of Aboriginal people. The truth and reconciliation process that was beginning to take place across Canada was described and explained. After setting up the political, cultural and historical background of Aboriginal genocide in Canada, members of the community were invited to share their stories. Aboriginal community mental health workers (called health resolution workers) were present in order to provide support to both the speakers as well as members of the audience.

What astounded and resonated within me, aside from the raw, detailed stories of violence, rape, neglect, and the continuation of the circle of abuse, was the reaction to this information by my fellow classmates. Shock … disbelief … and horror …were my fellow students reactions/emotions to witnessing the atrocities recounted by experiences of residential schooling. The story that seemed to have the greatest emotional impact (and caused the most vicarious distress) was recounted by a 50-year-old Cree man. He articulated that this was only the third time he had openly shared his life story with others. He told us about being taken away from his parents at an early age and described being repeatedly sexually and physically abused by priests and nuns. He explained how his rage and hurt culminated in sexual violence towards other children in the school. He informed us that when he left school at 16 years of age he moved back in with his parents who both grappled with alcohol and addiction issues. He articulated that they had no idea how to parent. He acknowledged how the circle of physical abuse and addiction was passed down from his grandparents to his parents, to him and he passed it on to his children. The man's raw and detailed story triggered an incredibly emotional reaction in everyone. His gruesome accounts of being both a victim as well as a perpetrator of violation and abuse gave face to the survivors of residential schools in Canada.

The catalyst for me was not the shared stories of trauma and abuse (although heart wrenching and upsetting); it was the call for action and involvement by all Canadians for all Canadians. These words were spoken by a Cree woman who one of the organizers of the event. She spoke passionately about the responsibility of all Canadians to get involved with healing, to help educate and perpetuate change. Her words resonated within me.

Part IV Coming to my Research Puzzle

i spent the next year submerged in my studies

multicultural counselling
therapeutic relationship
trust, empathetic listening
circumstances counted and recounted

in the midst
finding feminist and multicultural models
to explore my white, female, heterosexual, fully able, middle class upbringing

i questioned my role
*how **would I/i not** perpetuate the white, male,*
post colonial, Euro-ethno-centric values

bumping up against assessment training
against formalistic and reductionist patterns
mandatory coursework

i wanted to shift ethnocentric ways of doing
how were others working across difference?
how did non-aboriginal counsellors work with aboriginal clients?

i have struggled with tensions regarding my place in this work
how could i conduct my inquiry in a respectful and honorable way

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Chapter Two: Bob

Screenplay

Cast:
Amanda B: Narrator/Inquirer
Bob: Narrator/Participant

Part One: Beginnings

AMANDA

Bob was first recommended to me as a possible research participant by another participant. Liz sent me his information via social messaging and recommended that we befriend each other. As I navigated through his page I was shocked to realize that we had met before at a St. Patrick's Day concert. The venue at the time was packed and it was difficult to converse but we were informed (by our mutual friend) that we would totally 'hit it off' as we both were into "psychology, working with at risk youth, social justice, etc." I think back to this moment and I wonder about how friends storied both Bob and I. What kind of work was Bob doing? Who were the youths he worked with? How did he come to work with Aboriginal clients? What were his experiences? I wondered now if our shared interests would carry us in a relational way in this inquiry. At the time we attempted to talk to (more aptly yell) each other over the live music but it was difficult. We ended up exchanging emails before leaving and I had every intention of reconnecting with him. It wasn't until Liz sent me his information and I recognized his picture on Facebook, that I remembered forgetting to contact him. As I write about our beginning stories, I remember my guilt and how I had hoped that it would not shape my beginnings with Bob.

Despite this initial sense of guilt, I messaged him along with sending a friend request and reminded him that we had met in person last St. Paddy's day and named our mutual friend. He wrote back immediately and confirmed that we had indeed met, and added me to his friend list. I had not only asked him to be my *virtual friend* but also inquired if he would be interested in being a participant in my research. We chatted infrequently for the next couple of weeks, liking each other's statuses, commenting on stories etc. As Bob and I began to talk back and forth, I could sense a nervousness and anticipation building in good ways. I wondered why Liz had recommended Bob as a participant. What did she see in his practices; in him as he worked with Aboriginal clients? What were his experiences? How were his experiences alongside Aboriginal clients shaped over time and in different places and social contexts?

A couple months later, once my grad course load had lessened we decided to arrange a place, date and time for our first conversation. The text, which follows below, is a narrative account in the form of a screenplay from the transcripts of our conversation, field notes (which include e-mail conversations), and images.

Forgotten Street. Day
Fade in.

It is a cool crisp spring morning in a northern prairie Canadian city. Spring is a misnomer as there is still dirt laden snow on the ground, a cool chill in the air, and the downtown streets are filled with jacket, scarf, mitten and tuque clad people on their way to work. (Bob Dylan song is playing in the background).

A woman (Amanda, the narrator) walks out of the train terminal, looking bewildered and searching for an address (she glances up at the buildings). She waits for the pedestrian light to turn green and crosses the street. Her eyes light up as she sees a coffee shop (the destination). She enters the busy coffee shop, looks at her phone (realizes she is 15 minutes early), and manages to snag the only free table left (located in the back right corner by the counter). Amanda scans the café, but does not see Bob in the crowd. She places her book bag on the table, unzips her down coat, hangs it on back of the chair and gets in line to purchase an espresso. The line moves slowly and once she receives her soy latte fifteen minutes have passed. She sits back down at the table, opens her bag, places the audio recorder on the table, and rifles through a stack of papers. Amanda organizes the papers into a neat file and places them across from her (consent form facing up). She checks her phone again this time it is 15 minutes past the hour. She sips her latte, checks the emails on her phone, and taps her foot impatiently.

Voice over.

AMANDA

Self -reflection: *Where is Bob? I wonder if he forgot about our meeting. I should have emailed him last night to remind him/confirm our morning coffee meeting. Perhaps he had a client emergency? But I also wonder if he is worried about sharing his academic/professional experiences with me in a public space? It is one thing to sit and "shoot the shit" and share stories with a buddy, I wonder if it will be completely different to open up and share life history and professional experiences knowing that you will be recorded and your information /experiences /stories will be used as research. I am not sure if it is Bob who might worry about this, or if that is me who worries about this. I try to think back and if there has ever been a time where I tape-recorded a conversation. I wonder if our conversation will be weird and formal? In our correspondence so far (mainly through email or messaging) we seem to have easy, open, informal dialogue. Will this continue when we meet face to face? The café is pretty busy this morning...even though he picked this location for our meeting place, I wonder if this is the best place to meet? But most of all I wonder will I be able to hear his stories?*

Voice over ends.

Approximately another 15 minutes has passed, Bob is now 30 minutes late and Amanda decides to send him an email.

Pan in to phone screen.

Amanda typing:

```
Hi this is Amanda, I was just checking in to see if you were still available to
meet at the café this morning.
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A couple of minutes later she receives an email.

Pan into phone screen.

BOB

(response via email):

Uuuuuuugh!!!!!! I've been looking forward to chatting all week... I don't know HOW I FORGOT! I'm so sorry. I'm generally really good with being mindful of my schedule.
Crap. Crap. Crap. Would Friday at 4pm work?

AMANDA

(response via email):

No worries...it was totally my fault as
I should have sent you a reminder email.
I cannot meet this Friday (I am actually interviewing another participant).
Can we reschedule for 2 weeks from today? If not, let me know another date & time that works best for you.

BOB

Sounds good! It's in the planner...I will be bright□eyed and ready! And their coffee is about the only coffee in town that wakes me up...so the stars are aligning!

AMANDA

Awesome Bob!!! I will see you then!!!

Amanda signs out of email. She finishes her latte, packs up her belongings, bundles up in her winter gear and leaves the café.

Self-Reflection: *On the train ride home I feel a huge sense of relief that Bob simply forgot about the meeting and still wants to share his experiences with me. His email reassures me that it was a misunderstanding and that he is still eager to chat. I wonder if this communication mishap will make our next meeting awkward or uncomfortable? If anything I feels like I have gained a valuable lesson in confirming coffee chats the night before they are scheduled to happen.*

Fade out.

Part Two. Second time's a charm Café.

Day

Fade In.

Two weeks later Amanda is back at the café, she is sitting on a tall black chair at the same back high bar table at the back of the shop. A yellow file folder is neatly placed in front of her, along with a pen and audio recorder. She slowly sips a large latte and scans the busy café. There is a large line of people waiting to be served and every seat in the café is taken. There is world music playing in the background but it is hardly heard over the loud din of people talking, and coffee machines grinding. She glances nervously at her phone, picks it up and checks the time, and her email for new messages (while doing so she opens and rereads the email that Bob sent the night before confirming their morning meeting).

Voice Over

AMANDA

Self-reflection: *Why am I so nervous about this meeting? I made sure to email Bob a reminder note last night and received confirmation that he will be here this morning and I have no doubt that he will show up... yet I still feel a bit anxious. I wonder if having access to each other's social media lives will influence our conversation. I am not really worried that our conversation will be awkward and stiff but I wonder how comfortable Bob will be opening up and sharing his life experiences with me, especially when I am privy to his private life through social media. Being his "friend" definitely gives me insight into his personal life and highlights similar interests we share. We both have a passion for social justice issues, including human and environmental rights, as well as a love for political music and art. I feel that these common interests connect us on a personal as well as professional level. It also makes me realize that the information there is not full public access, and I will need to be mindful about balancing his personal information shared by him online with information provided in our "research" conversations. The café is absolutely packed this morning (and incredibly loud)! I am not so worried about the actually space, it is comfortable, and informal. I do worry that my tape recorder will not pick up our conversation!*

Voice over ends.

Pan in.
Café door opens.

Reconnection

Bob walks in, scans his surroundings, sees Amanda in the back corner and walks over. He is in his late 30's, blond, blue eyed, dressed in a blue wool pea coat, tuque, and wrapped in a scarf. He is carrying a white rectangle poster and gives it to Amanda. She smiles, and takes the photographic print. He hangs his coat on the back of the chair and sits down. Amanda examines the black and white photo of three aboriginal women dressed in traditional garb, staring, not smiling into the camera.

Self-reflection*:The photograph is incredibly powerful and visually striking. The women appear to be 3 generations from the same family. They look incredibly proud and angry at the same time. It feels like they are staring into the camera challenging the observer. I wonder if it was taken at one of the recent Idle No More events around town? Is this one of Bob's photographs?*

BOB

This is for you. I feel guilty for missing our last meeting. I was thinking I should bring something to say I am sorry.

AMANDA

Wow! This is incredible!!! Thank you so much! But you really did not have to bring me anything. Believe me, I understand how life gets busy. Is this one of your photos?

BOB

Yeah, it's mine. (He pauses reflectively) I might sound totally pretentious but one thing that is killing me about art in this city, and photography in specific, is that nobody is documenting anything. It's funny, I can appreciate photos for the sake of beauty, but I'm a huge fan of saying something. Joe Strummer, John Lennon and Bob Dylan are my idols. When I was recently asked to display photographs at a coffee shop and I did not know what to put up. I chose this photo, because it says something to me. For a redneck guy that had no exposure to Aboriginal people and only to stereotypes, these three women challenge any kind of thinking I might have had. So I hope it might have that impact on others.

AMANDA

I was actually at the mall too with my son but I did not take any photos.
It is great that you had the opportunity to be able to document/ photograph the Idle No More events in the city. How were you embraced by the Aboriginal community when taking pictures at the protests?

BOB

I just moved freely. I honestly don't think of differences at all, I'm not even cognizant. But occasionally I am reminded of differences, like with photographs. There was one Elder who I recently photographed; it was fascinating, [I could see in the photograph of him that he was trying to figure out who I was][8] he was looking over his shoulder at me trying to figure out who I was. At that moment I was like, oh right, I'm white, so I asked him if it was okay for me to post his picture. He said yeah.

AMANDA

Self- reflection: *I was at the same event to show my support but I felt like an outsider looking in. I was very aware of my white skin and the fact that I am not an Aboriginal. I wonder where Bob's comfort moving freely comes from? I know that he has been working with Aboriginal youth for a couple of years, and I wonder if this experience has provided him with connection to the community and an invitation to participate in cultural activities?* It was amazing to be there, offer support and witness the power of people!

BOB

Being there was one of the most miraculous moments of my life... all those people standing proud at the mall, no shame! It's a long way from forcing Aboriginal kids into residential schools [and from the residential schools' dictates of suppressing culture via shame and punishment]... it's a significant milestone act of recovery if you ask me) [to express their culture so proudly/without shame...or that their culture still exists despite the schools'/federal government's measures].And people en mass getting it, that they can make real social change. So yeah, when I woke up this morning I was like should I bring you something to say I'm sorry? Then I was like, oh, I have that photo, and then as soon as I looked at it I thought, how pertinent is that? The work that you did, and what's close to your heart.

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[8] All red text in this chapter is edited text included by Bob in the co-construction of his narrative account.

AMANDA
Thank you so much. I absolutely love it. Let me grab you a coffee before we begin (she passes him the yellow folder). Here are some forms you must read and sign before we begin.

They continue to chitter-chatter for the next 5 minutes.

Amanda gets in line to grab a black drip coffee for Bob.

Self-reflection*:As soon as Bob walked in the café with a huge smile on his face I instantly felt relaxed and knew that our meeting would not be awkward or uncomfortable. Our conversation feels like two old buddies catching up over lost time, not an interview for a thesis. On a side note, I absolutely love the photograph he brought me. I cannot wait to frame it, and hang it over my workspace. I think it will provide inspiration for my writing!*

Pan in on photo print on table.
Slowly fade out.

Coffee & Conversation

Fade in.
Amanda and Bob are sitting across from each other at the coffee table. It is small two-person booth surrounded by people on both sides. Amanda is sitting on a bench with her back against the wall, and Bob is directly across from her. She places the audio recorder in front of him and pushes record.

AMANDA
(Laughing and in a mock professional voice) Why don't you tell me about yourself?

BOB
My name is Bob, my occupation is psychologist PhD, I just opened my own private practice, and 1.5 days per week I work as a counsellor at an education centre for at- risk youth. It serves kids between 15 and 20 years of age and 98% are Aboriginal.

AMANDA
How is your private practice working out?

BOB
Better than I could have ever guessed in a million years. It's funny in school they tell you hard how it is to do but I am building up clients and love having my own practice. I'm also on the First Nations provider list so I'm starting to see Aboriginal clients.

AMANDA
So you also work with Aboriginal youth at the centre and see Aboriginal adults in your

private practice. How do you get on the Aboriginal provider's list?

BOB

You need to know an Elder or have an Aboriginal person testify that you are familiar with their culture and that you're a good counsellor. You need people to vouch for you. And now because I am on the list I am getting referrals from Aboriginal clients.

AMANDA

Tell me about the education centre. What do you do there?

BOB

I am one of 3 school counsellors, two are psychologists, and the third is a guy who just came up through the streets. There are three of us and we see kids struggling with truancy, stress, PTSD[9], and FAS[10].

AMANDA

So did you finish your PhD in counselling before you started working there?

BOB

I actually started working at the education centre 7 years ago in the middle of my PhD. They contracted me there. At the time I was studying adolescent resilience and wanted the centre to be involved in my research study. Unfortunately they would not let me conduct research at the centre but ended up offering me a job as a counsellor three days later. It's funny I think back and remember how terrified I was... I had enough experience working with at- risk youth where I was generally mellow but I still walked into the school with pre-conceived notions of working with Aboriginal kids.

Childhood Re-visited

AMANDA

Self- Reflection: *I wonder where this feeling of being terrified comes from?I'm curious to find out about his childhood, family life and formative experiences that have influenced his decision to become a psychologist and how he started working with Aboriginal youth)* ***.****I wonder where these pre-conceived notions originate and how Bob deals with these tensions that have shaped his past stories?*

What were your preconceived notions of Aboriginal people?

BOB

I had little to no early experience of Aboriginal people whatsoever right through grade 12. It is funny when I think of my childhood the first thing that comes to mind is exposure. I hate to say it but I was a premier redneck. I was born and raised in a small town where I just adopted hook, line and sinker whatever stereotype was said about Aboriginal people. Whatever piece of misinformation was being spread was never

[9] Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
[10] Fetal Alcohol Spectrum

questioned. My early impression of Aboriginal people was based on stereotypes and assumptions that they were drunks, not capable and I hate to say it dangerous.

AMANDA

Self-reflection: *I totally respect his honesty and candor about his "redneck" upbringing...I think it takes a lot of courage to admit the fact that he believed the stereotypes that he was exposed to in his youth. I wonder if it is hard for Bob to talk about this?****)*** Where did these stereotypes originate?

BOB

It was a combination of peers and family. I have an uncle who's completely racist, and biased. My grandfather was the same way. They were completely misinformed and had little to no exposure to Aboriginal culture. I remember my peers having little respect for Aboriginal people and assuming there was a level of truth to the stereotypes surrounding Aboriginal culture. I just assumed there was a level of truth to it. Ironically and thankfully becoming connected and exposed to Aboriginal people and their culture is something, which I'm eternally grateful for. It's one of my favorite parts of the psychology part of my life.

AMANDA

(*Thinking to herself: Should I share the fact that I also had a racist grandfather and experienced a nasty bout of peer racism during my junior high school years? I know how embarrassing and shameful it is for me to admit this to others? I do not feel comfortable talking about it...but I think I will share my experience as well. I feel this personal disclosure will not only help to build our relationship, but will also show that it is possible for our stories and personal landscapes to change over time.)***I also had an incredibly racist grandfather. It is definitely a skeleton in my closet. Fortunately, I was lucky that my parents did not subscribe to the same racist beliefs. My siblings and I were taught to treat everyone equally and not to judge others. You obviously do not hold the same beliefs as members of your family (or old high school peers), when did you get this exposure to Aboriginal people?

BOB

My first real exposure was when I started working in a group home in the city during my under graduate degree. I was studying psychology and a friend was a supervisor looking for staff. She encouraged me to apply what I was learning in school in a real life context. I said no way they scared me man. I thought I would get beat up, the kids would be mean to me, and the next thing you know I finally gave in and said all right I'll do it. Even though, I did not have a lot of motivation at the time I really started enjoying it. And then a year later she started bugging me saying there were a lot of job opportunities up north on reservations that would open a lot of doors here in the city. I did a lot of soul searching and ended going up North. It was my first real exposure to Aboriginal people. I was coming from a small town and bracing for the worst. It was kinda like taking a huge trip and going to the airport but you're not sure where you are going.

AMANDA

Living and working up north must have been a life changing experience for you. I can imagine that your 'redneck beliefs' were seriously challenged and revised from this experience. Not only that, but venturing into the unknown for self knowledge, and growth is incredibly brave.

Self-reflection: *I think about how Bob challenged his pre-conceived notions and 'go into' the unknown. I'm not sure if I would be able to do this. Not because I have a problem challenging my beliefs, I think it would be venturing into the unknown that would deter me**).** To leave one's established comfort zone, the space in which you feel competent and safe, for self-growth sounds incredibly daunting. I wonder if in order to do this, one's past experiences and beliefs need to be re-storied? Does venturing into the unknown help create new personal and professional landscapes that not only challenge the past but help with the creation of the many possibilities of the imagined stories of the future?*

Revelations

BOB

I did not know what to expect...I thought it could be rough and slightly dangerous and all I had were these stereotypes floating in my head with little exposure. BUT it was a fantastic experience for me. My team was 2/3 Aboriginal and we worked with kids ages 7 to 13 years of age with serious behavioral issues. I had two huge revelations. The first happened about 3 weeks after I got there when I committed to a one year contract and the staff knew I wasn't just there to make a buck. Until this time some of the people I worked with were cold and distant to me and didn't really give me the time of day.

AMANDA

Until you proved that you were there for the long term?

BOB

Yes, once I committed to working there for one year it was mind-blowing... they literally took me into the centre of everything and protected me. It was wonderful. My co-workers and I started hanging out and that is when the real cultural exposure started. The breakdown of all my past misinformation started happening when I sat down with them and chewed the fat like with anyone else. I realized they had the same problems and concerns as everybody else.

AMANDA

Self-Reflection*:It sounds as if Bob's exposure to Aboriginal culture not only forced him to re-examine his past, but forced him to re-think and re-story his relationship with Aboriginal people. I wonder how this affected his relationship with his family and if this shift in consciousness impacted his own self-identity?*

Challenges 1

AMANDA

Did you experience any difficulties working up North?

BOB

Yeah...you could really feel the animosity sometimes. There'd be the occasional Aboriginal person who did not like me for no good reason... or at least no good reason I knew ...I was verbally laid into and threatened for no reason at all.

AMANDA

Self-Reflection: *Thinking to herself: anger and animosity makes sense with the historical treatment of Aboriginal people in Canada. I wonder how some trusted non-Aboriginal people to come in to their communities, while others did not? How did some cultures sustain their language, customs, ceremony and culture? What are the responsibilities of non-Aboriginal people working within these communities? How would people make sense of these difficult histories?****).*** Do you think the anger/animosity was because you are white skinned, blond haired and blue eyed?

BOB

Yeah...could be... I really did not know the cause of the hatred and threatened violence towards me. One day I was driving a kid to his psychiatrist and we stopped at a gas station. An First Nation man [he was Dene Tha']owned the station...[and on this particular day]he'd had too much to drink and it was 7 in the morning. It all seemed ok until I went into pay. Just out of the blue he said "you better watch your back, I'm gonna get you."It was for no good reason [the only one that I could think of was that I was caucasian, on a reserve, with one young First Nation kid under me supervision]. Knowing that the average family on the reserve numbered close-to/above 100 people,I went back to the group home and told the [several female staff who were First Nation]staff, I said "I think I have to leave." [I really did think that someone was going to get me!]

AMANDA

Self-reflection: *Deciding to step outside his comfort zone, relocating to an unfamiliar location, and confronting a situation that Bob articulated had terrified him in the past, must have been incredibly challenging for him. The idea of venturing into the unknown, or unfamiliar territory must have been frightening and somewhat isolating for Bob, especially when threatened with personal harm. I wonder how easy it would be in these moments to fall back into some stereotypical thinking?* It must have been frightening to be threatened, especially in an unfamiliar place. Did you end up leaving?

BOB

No. The next thing I know one of my co-workers hands me the phone and said it was the chief. He asked me what happened, I told him, and then he informed me "not to worry about it." [I think that he also said that, "everything is taken care of" and implied that he'd already spoken to the other fellow and settled the matter]. [One year later]The next thing you know I am playing slow-pitch with the guy who threatened to kill me. It made me realize the power of their system is still intact, and the powerful role women hold in their communities. [i.e., that 3 First Nations women could have the Chief on the phone within an hour...that he was completely debriefed on the situation...that he'd already settled things...AND that he also had that kind POWER! It was more-or-less him saying "it's done." Wow-moment].

AMANDA

So once you spoke with the Chief you felt like your safety was no longer jeopardized and you could stay in the community. Tell me about your second revelation?

BOB

It was realizing the power of the Aboriginal culture. One of our mandates was to expose their kids to as much culture as possible, so we were constantly taking them to tea dances, round dances, and sweats. One wonderful moment that stands out is when I went to a tea dance and there must have been 500 Aboriginal people going around this huge fire in the middle of the night. I was one of the only three Caucasian people and I was standing on the sidelines and I was not sure if I should make a gesture, you know get involved as a sign of respect or not do anything as a sign of respect. All of a sudden I felt a hand in mine pulling me into the circle and I looked down and it was this little 8-year-old boy I worked with. So the next thing I'm going around this ring, I'm the only white guy and getting into it and getting blown away by it. [Sure Enough] it's funny I looked up and it was the first time I saw the Chief, [on my side of things...there was enough time to think, "Is this OK?" / Caucasian guy dancing with young First Nation kid...not unlike the gas-station scenario...except that I was surround by a few hundred First Nation people!]. ... he looked at me [straight in the eye], and gave me a nod that said it was good. [thanks for your continued allowing of me to process these moments! - I guess that I didn't say it, but the 'third' experience was him unexpectedly ringing me on my birthday. I was all alone, the buzzer went...I though, "who could that be"... he said, "It's Chief_____...I hear that it's your birthday...and that you like apple pie." He took me to a diner...and was deeply interested in my perspectives of the challenges facing the First Nation kids at the residential centre...as well as what could help them. Profound. Guh. We sat for about 2 hours, I think.

AMANDA

That is incredibly powerful. Once again it seems like your lived real life experience; going up north and living and working on a reservation, participating in Aboriginal ceremony and being exposed first hand to Aboriginal culture not only changed your perspective, but also created a path for your future work in psychology.

S***elf-reflection:*** *I still feel awkward when asked to engage in aboriginal ceremony. I never know what to do, or how much to participate, and worry I will do something wrong or cause offence. I think I feel much more comfortable witnessing the event (which could also be perceived as disrespectful). I wonder if living and working in an Aboriginal community helps break down this awkwardness by exposing and engaging non-Aboriginal people to their cultural practices?****)***

BOB

Yeah, it completely challenged and changed my perspective. Even today my exposure to Aboriginal people continues to grow daily as I work with kids at the centre. For a small town white guy I realize that I had everything wrong.

AMANDA

But do you realize how huge that is? You actually went outside your comfort zone into the unknown and challenged the messages of your childhood. Not only that, but you continue to do so on a daily basis working with Aboriginal youth.

Ceremonies

AMANDA

Do you ever incorporate things you learned up north (i.e., ceremonies, smudge, etc.) working on reservations in your private practice or at the education centre?

BOB

Not really, I just have a healthy respect for them. A lot of kids at the education center engage a lot of culture, and they have cultural stuff at the school, there are kids who do drumming every lunch break, nobody told them to be there, they just pick it up. From my experience if a kid is really engaged I get really excited. It has got to be seriously helpful (pause... thoughtful reflection). It's funny, I have Scottish ancestry and I never realized until talking to Aboriginal kids how much I draw on it as part of my identity. I have a family story that goes back hundreds of years. Our clan's motto was *invictus maneo* which means we remain unvanquished, which essentially means we don't respect authority much, which is kinda our history. As highlanders we faced extreme hardship when the Scottish king decided to move us out of our lands, move us to the borders and displace us. We had absolutely no skill for living at the borders as we'd only known highland living for generations and all of a sudden what we do is fall back on the easiest way to survive by pillaging towns. We raided towns on the north side of the border and in England and eventually got strong enough and really good at fighting on horseback that the king decided to hire us. Every once while I'll share this history with the kids because I realize that every time I've been through hard times I always think I have it in my blood to deal with it, it almost feel like a genetic thing.

AMANDA

So sharing your stories and life experiences helps build relationships with the kids you work with? ***Self-reflection:*** *I wonder if this disclosure ever backfires and alienates Aboriginal kids who do not have an empowering history to draw on? I wonder how Bob's stories would be different had his family history been one of cultural genocide and oppression? I am also curious how learning about Canada's historical treatment of Aboriginal people has influenced the stories Bob choose to share with his clients?* [This makes me think that I've (finally) started reading-up on First Nations history....just read a biography on Red Cloud, the great Sioux Chief...who formed the ONLY force that has every beat the US military on it's own soil...and forced a concession from that government. One thing that I share with some youths is that Red Clouds father was an early victim of alcoholism... and that Red Cloud later had no tolerance for alcohol being on his land. He'd burn alcohol wagons if he saw them. As the greatest Sioux War Chief...I found it interesting that he also was reluctant to conduct military operations without consulting with a two-spirited Sioux (for various reasons...you have to read it). He also never signed a treaty and used "treaty-signing" invitations as a method of sizing-up the military force of a given opponent (e.g., he figured out that he could hit

someone with about 8 arrows in the time that it took to reload a canon). Guh...I'm getting started. In any case, the US military never did beat him...and there seems to be lots of history that might relate to modern issues that you see in a highschool/cultural pride!]

BOB

It dawned on me that a lot of kids don't have this to draw on with, this positive family history, but they do have the opportunity to take their culture back! It comes down to resilience building again, and offering hope. Hope is everything, the belief that there is a future and that they can create a beginning of everything. At the educational centre we get to see the kids accomplish their education and take back their culture! You see them take pride in themselves, and experience this young generation doing all the things their grandparents were not allowed to do [e.g., speaking their own language, wearing cultural regalia, singing, etc].I hear the worst stories about kid's family members being taken away and tortured at residential schools [for speaking their own language, wearing cultural regalia, singing, etc].

AMANDA

The intergenerational effects of cultural genocide against Aboriginal people in Canada...

BOB

Yes definitely. This is where I try to come in as a counsellor and try to inject some new information or some new ways of looking at it. I gotta tell you, one of my favorite experiences that happens at least every other month is I'll have a kid look at me and say, "This ends with me... I'm going to be the last kid in my family to hit, scream, abuse drugs, date crappy boyfriends etc." [Reinjecting info...I'm now discussing the Indian Residential Schools with more kids...by their request!E.g., first order of business was the government disrupting coping that had been refined and passed-on over thousands of years via songs, stories, and dance. Then we'll get into the common abuses...trauma symptoms...and they'll reportedly see the behaviours of their parents and grandparents differently...often, compassionately or empathetically].

AMANDA

Wow! It must be amazing to see your kid's take this stand and stop the circle of violence, addiction or abuse. Do you work with extended family members or relatives with the kids?

BOB

No that's my limitation. I just mostly stick with individuals in the school setting. We do try to bring the parents in and use the same processes to hopefully help them understand their kids, and get ideas how to support them.

AMANDA

It must be incredibly powerful to see such positive life changes and youth empowerment.

BOB

Yeah for real! It is mind-blowing to see the changes and powerful resilience working

with the kids at the school. We have kids that come from drug houses that are way behind developmentally and they end up graduating from high school.

AMANDA

***Self-reflection**:I wonder about the families involved? What is it like for them to have their children be given educational opportunities and support they never received? In the work of counsellors, I wonder how important it is to have the families be part of this journey?*

School vs. Life Experience

AMANDA

You not only have experience working and living up north, and counselling at-risk Aboriginal youth you also have a PhD in counselling psychology. Do you think that your university training adequately prepared you to work cross-culturally with Aboriginal clients?

BOB

It's funny...when I think about this I don't think I was prepared. I kinda just brushed through grad school just trying to get everything done. All I needed was one cross-cultural counselling class in order to graduate, which is pretty sad considering that immigrants are the fastest growing population in the city. They're going to be a significant portion of any counsellor's caseload potentially.

AMANDA

You only needed one cross-cultural training course to graduate with a PhD to practice as a psychologist in Alberta?

BOB

Yes... Just one semester class.

AMANDA

It blows my mind, in this day and age, that in my program (school psychology) we are not required to take a cross-cultural course in order to graduate. It is considered an elective.

BOB

I personally wish it were mandatory, 'cause the odds of being exposed to Aboriginal clients and culture in this city is 100%. [First Nations and Métis are the fastest growing populations in Edmonton...and already the largest populations of their kind in Western Canada? Odds are pretty high that cross-cultural training will be useful for the practitioner!] At least having some understanding of different cultures, even if you do not work with them directly, like for referrals, would be incredibly helpful! You know, it was one of the better courses I took at university with a lot of "ah ha" moments. I'll say in my private practice I have a lot of people come in that are East Indian and there were parts of that course that definitely helped me understand different issues they might be dealing

with, such as acculturation issues. It's great to have a basis of understanding, and a mindfulness of helping people from other cultures. As for the kids at the education centre I realize that I am still figuring out how to be most helpful to them and I'm still realizing what my limitations are. Doing individual work seems to be helpful to the kids; identifying what is wrong and becoming aware of it and hopefully they will pass it on to their community.

Pan Out.

Amanda picks up her paperwork and quickly glances over her research puzzles/ questions to make sure she has not forgotten to ask anything. While doing so she notices that they have been talking for over an hour and a half and she still has one question left. Amanda apologizes, and asks Bob if he would like to keep on chatting or take a break? They laugh about the fact that time has flown by (the conversation felt like minutes not over an hour). Bob decides he'd like a smoke break and figures they can keep on chatting for another 30 minutes (before he has to go to work).

Bob stands up, buttons his jacket, and puts on his toque and mittens. He exits the café. While Bob steps outside Amanda reflects upon the conversation, trying to make sure that they have covered everything. She realizes the café is completely packed and quite loud, but hadn't noticed this while engaged in conversation with Bob. She is grateful that they have an easy, relaxed rapport, and excited that he has openly and candidly shared his experiences with her. She takes out her field book to jot down these notes and as soon as she opens to a fresh page Bob returns to the table. He takes off his winter gear and sits back down at the table.

Skills

AMANDA

I know we have been chatting for a long time, and I appreciate all your shared stories. I have one last question for you today. Based on your experiences what skills do you think are important to be an effective cross-cultural counsellor?

BOB

I think one of the greatest friggin' teachings that anyone has ever passed down to me (and there is a handful of them) is "I don't know"... no ego, getting comfortable with not knowing the answers and being able to tell the kids, the staff, whomever, that you don't know but you are open to figuring it out, and being educated. I'm not the expert, every kid's unique and I just ask questions and try to figure out what is going on and what the factors are.

AMANDA

Okay...so acknowledging that 'we are not the experts' and always being open and receptive to learning new things is incredibly important.

BOB

Another part involves cooperating readily with whomever's involved with the kids. So youth workers, outreach workers, other counsellors, social workers...just straight across, like the Beatles, whoever has good ideas you just kinda run with it. (***Reflective pause...)*** Another important skill that I think is essential and it's not focused on in grad school whatsoever, and I've had to develop on my own on the fly with a lot of pain is communication skills with other colleagues. Being able to raise issues with colleagues in a helpful way that's super cool and resolves things is not only helpful but is also essential. At the Education centre, it can be a crazy environment, and we have created a space that not only helps the kids but we have a rule of thumb that shit will happen at some point. From this assumption we try to encourage each other to be kind to ourselves, live and learn; we all make mistakes. On the flip side we are full of encouragement and hold each other to a high standard. At the end of it, communication is helpful and there is a level of peace, stability and functionality in the program because shit gets talked out, worked out and we have good working relationships, but more than anything it creates a level of safety that keeps people loose. Oh and keeping a sense of humour about things is also really important!

AMANDA

This is great! The practical real life things you are not taught in grad school...

BOB

(***Reflective pause***) It's funny, I guess I also fall back to the information I was taught in the cross-cultural class. Once again I embrace the idea that I don't know everything, I'm not the expert. I try to encourage my clients to fill me in on what they are going through, what's it like, and how they see it. The professor told us there's always two priorities in cross-cultural counselling, the first is empowerment, and the second is connection. I focus a lot on empowerment, and encourage connection with others. I always ask kids about who they can talk to, encourage connection with elders/cultural activities. Connection with others is key. Finally, I tend to reflect a lot, it helps me keep open-minded, honest, and open. Always be ready to be corrected, know you are not the expert, and always have humility.

AMANDA

I actually just finished that course. It was not considered mandatory in my graduate program, which I also find mind-blowing, so I took it as an elective. I have to say it was the last class I needed to graduate and ironically the most useful, informative, and interesting class I've taken in the past 3 years of my program. I know you need to run. I just want to thank you for taking the time to chat with me.

Bob stands up and starts to put on his outside gear.

BOB

I've enjoyed talking to you too... it has provided me with an opportunity for reflection and self appraisal of my professional practice.

AMANDA

I'll send you out an email to set up another coffee chat in the near future.

They give each other a goodbye hug and promise to keep in touch on face book.
Bob exits the café.

Amanda packs up her belongings, puts on her winter gear and exits the café. As she walks to the train station she smiles to herself thinking about the conversation she just had with Bob.

AMANDA

Self-Reflection*:I cannot believe how we lost track of time. Our coffee chat lasted over two hours, but honestly felt like only 20 minutes had passed. Bob was engaging, easy to talk to, and eager to share his experiences. It did not feel like a research interview, rather two colleagues or old friends sharing personal and professional experiences. His passion and love for his work comes through in both his words and his photography. When I have my own practice I hope that I exude the same excitement and passion for what I am doing. I am grateful that Bob was so open and willing to share his stories with me, especially the more difficult ones about his family history. I wonder if he would have been comfortable sharing these difficult life stories if we did not have an existing relationship or if our conversation had been conducted as a more formalized interview?*
Fade out.

Part Three: Follow Up

Two weeks have passed since Amanda and Bob first met in the café. Amanda contacted Bob via email a week afterwards and asked if they could meet for a follow up conversation. Once again Bob chose the location for their second meeting, and they met at the same café.
It is 9 am on a busy Tuesday morning and the place is packed. Amanda arrives before Bob and manages to find a small vacant two-person table wedged in between two large tables full of people. The atmosphere is buzzing, espresso machines whirling, loud chatter and laughter is heard while customers talk to each other.
Although it is April it is still below freezing outside, and the ground remains covered in snow. It feels like spring is never going to rear her lovely head. Amanda slowly peels off her outer gear layers and hangs them over the back of her chair. She walks to the counter and situates herself in a long coffee queue.

Café. Day
Fade In.

Family & Tensions

AMANDA

Self-reflection*:Iam excited to meet with Bob again...especially since our meeting last time was not only incredibly informative but it also felt like two acquaintances hanging out and catching up. The conversation had a laid back, easy, and informal feeling about it (not a rigid, standardized, clinical, or formal feeling of a 'research interview'). The*

dialogue easily flowed between us in the past and I wondered if this would be same today. After reading and re-reading Bob's transcripts and my field notes I thought it was important to meet again to continue our conversation. I was left with many wonders regarding Bob's experiences that continued to evoke my curiosity as well as cause tension. I call them wonders because I was left with a sense that there was so much more to inquire into from our previous chat, and yet they are tensions because I feel the subject matter is touchy, personal, intimate as it involves fleshing out family relationships as well as discussing aspects of spirituality. I wondered if these topics could be shared between us, as these topics did not seem like subject matters openly shared with strangers. My first curiosity involves wanting to know more about his family. I found it curious that Bob had talked at length about his racist grandfather and uncle, but did not mention his parents or if he had siblings. I wondered if they shared his grandfather's views, were they even involved in his life (or childhood) and if so, were they supportive of his career and the clients he has chosen to work with? As was thinking about these wonders, I realized how much Bob had drawn me into his familial stories and experiences. One of my other wonder or tension surrounds ghosts. Bob had mentioned ghosts and spirit medicine numerous times in our previous conversation. The Atheist in me required clarification... elaboration... more information...in order to attain some understanding. And I too wondered how these shaped Bob's practices, when did he begin to attend to spiritually, and was this connected to particular places?
[I'll just say it - my standard question after learning that a First Nation kid has lost a significant other is now, "Have they made contact yet?" I always get an answer. I could talk about this for days.]

Bob enters the café.

He sees Amanda in line and walks over to her. She asks if he is still drinking black coffee and he nods. Amanda points out the small table she managed to snag before the rush and Bob proceeds to go sit down, and hangs his pea-coat over the back of his chair. Amanda follows behind with their beverages.

They chitter-chatter for 5 minutes while getting settled; the chitter-chatter helped Amanda to remember her wonders.

AMANDA
After our last conversation I was left with some questions... wonders really, about some of the things we discussed. *(Amanda wrings her hands nervously, she is feeling anxious about asking about his family, especially when they were not answered last time... did Bob not answer intentionally? A million scenarios circulate through her head(including* stories of bitter divorce, a parent's death, and so on…) . We chatted about you growing up in a small prairie town, and your racist grandfather and uncle, but we did not discuss your parents or if you have siblings.

BOB
I have one sibling, a sister, who is 7 years younger than me.

AMANDA

Self-reflection *:He does not seem uncomfortable or awkward talking about his family. Perhaps I read too much into the fact that he did not mention them last time.* Did you grow up with both parents?

BOB

Yeah, both parents. There was this racist theme to the family but to their credit there was also a theme of openness and accepting everyone. Growing up in a small town, you knew everyone; it was like "nobody's a stranger kind of mentality".

AMANDA

You grew up in a small town outside of the city.

BOB

Yeah, it was a small town, maybe 7000 people. Not a lot of diversity. In my high school there were 2 Pakistani kids, 1 adopted aboriginal girl and 3 black kids...that's it. Everyone else was white.

AMANDA

Wow, no kidding about the lack of diversity.

Self-reflection *:this might help to explain Bob's self- professed lack of childhood exposure to Aboriginal culture and why he did not question the stereotypes of his youth. It is pretty amazing how Bob's later career experiences working in group homes (especially up north) not only challenged his childhood beliefs but also drastically changed his perspective.Iwonder how becoming a psychologist fit into the picture?* Did you always want to study psychology?

BOB

It's funny, after graduation I had no clue what I wanted to do and my parents wouldn't leave it alone. The power of a small town mentality guides you, you know how we assume the Aboriginal stereotypes, and we also assume that you just kinda work in a chemical plant after you finish high school. My mom walked up to me after graduation and asked what are you going to do now? I said I'm going to work at the plant, buy a car and try to buy a house. Little did I know that she actually enrolled me in college without my knowledge. I told her are you frigging kidding me? I ain't going! But the deal was I would go for one year and my parents would pay for it. So I went...but I had no internal motivation whatsoever. I dropped out by second year and my parents said I could not live at home unless I was enrolled in school or working so I got a job up in the mountains at a ski resort. That did not last long...I had an epiphany soon after I received my measly second paycheque when I realized that I'd never be able to afford a bike, car or house. I called my mom and said I wanted to go back to university. Next fall I went back to school and chose psychology as a major. I think the interesting thing is that I was always that guy who liked to shoot the shit with people and connect on a deeper level. So I stuck with study of psychology knowing it would give me more options than just graduating from high school.

AMANDA

It sounds like your mom was incredibly supportive of your education.

BOB

She was happy and proud. Mind you after 7 years she started telling me I had been in school too long, but she sees the benefits now.

AMANDA

Self-reflection *:it seems like such a huge mental shift to go from a small town with lack of diversity and stereotypical beliefs to working with at-risk aboriginal youth. What was it like to have his beliefs challenged? Did it impact his family relationships? I wonder what this transition was like for Bob?*

How did you reconcile the differences in your personal history (i.e., racist family members, stereotypical beliefs etc.) to get to where you are now working with Aboriginal clients?

BOB

I guess I reconciled differences through exposure. It was exposure that showed me my grandfather and uncle were completely wrong, unfounded, and ignorant. I reconciled it through experiencing Aboriginal people for who they truly are. My family members took some hits on my continuum of idealism: growing up I thought both guys were like God and I looked up to them. But gradually overtime, and it wasn't overnight, their thoughts seemed less true and they had less of an ideal place in my world. It made me sad and angry. I guess I reconciled that their beliefs were wrong, and began to confront them.[I started 'debating' my grandfather, in particular...and he actually changed some of his thinking] I can do it now without getting angry, instead I will to try to have a conversation with them. [The John Lennon approach].

AMANDA

Self-reflection*:it must have been incredibly difficult for Bob to confront the people in his life who he idealized as a child. Not only that, but to be able to do so without getting angry. I wonder if any other fundamental beliefs have been challenged or question through his work with Aboriginal people?*

Did this exposure to Aboriginal people and culture impact or change any of your other belief systems?

BOB

It's funny, I was raised Catholic, and became Atheist at one point in my life but not any more. The idea of a spirit world seems to me the most legit theory for me.

AMANDA

Self-reflection: *I am glad this topic has come up again throughout the course of our conversation. I was planning to inquire about his ghost experiences.*

Your religious or spiritual beliefs have been challenged or redefined by this work?

BOB

Definitely! I did not realize how much Christianity suppresses this kind of thinking. My mom almost hisses when I start talking about ghosts or the spirit world because there is nothing in the bible that explains them, there's just heaven and hell, no crisscrossing. The existence of ghosts completely challenges her religious beliefs. I've heard so manystories about paranormal experiences, as well as consulted with Elders about spirit medicine in different situations that there seems to be more evidence supporting the spirit world than there is for most others. [My hero is rapidly becoming Carl Rogers...who would end some of his most ground-shaking papers by more-or-less saying "from my experience, I don't know what else to conclude"...and then he'd wait for hell to rain down on him from psychiatrists across North America! You could almost hear him cringing when you read them!]

AMANDA

Have you always consulted Elders or cultural providers when working with clients involving spirit medicine?

BOB

Throughout my years working up North and in the education centre I have met numerous Elders and I keep in touch with them, in fact I'm friends with one on facebook! I had a principle [I'd better not say principal to protect confidentiality/could be identifying...is it possible to say that I had someone from 'higher-up administrations with a major school district come up to me....'?] come up to me about 6 years ago, who had a student that was seeing people everywhere. I started talking to the Aboriginal student and as he began to describe what he was seeing as spirits, in the exactly same way that Aboriginal people would have on reserves. [On the _____ reserve, where I worked under Chief _____],Elders or medicine people have the ability to see spirits... [and if it was thought you had this ability you were slated for higher levels of power within the system].From my psychological background and training I screened him for schizophrenia but he did not meet any other symptoms. [Then I thought that it'd be a good idea to consult with an Elder] Italked to an Elder about the kid seeing ghosts he did not even bat an eye, as he informed me that it was not uncommon in their culture...[especially for kids. I should have said that the NEXT thing was deciding to tell said district staff to play it safe and to consult with a psychiatrist. So connected the student with a very prominent psychiatrist....and guess what? The *psychiatrist* screened for schizophrenia...and *then said* that "some kids see ghosts...they seem to grow out of it circa their early teens." I was pleasantly stunned!] I had similar situations with 3 different kids that I have worked with over the years. They all described ghosts the same way: grey, or off color almost transparent. I've also had many people talk about shadows, how they feel and move. From what I have been told, and from my experience, Aboriginal kids tend to kick out of seeing ghosts when they're 12. It is also common in the culture to be visited by animal spirits. Over the past few years I've had many kids talk about animal experiences and dreams. [It goes on ... CarlRogers!]

AMANDA

Self-Reflection: *Since we arrived the café has become absolutely packed. There are people hovering around waiting for tables to vacate. Bob and I are still sitting around a*

small table surrounded by people talking in loud voices on either side. Since Bob has started talking about ghosts and the paranormal his voice has become much quieter (almost whisper like) and his physical demeanor has changed into a more stooped position so we are huddled around the table. I hope the audio-recorder is picking up our hushed conversation. Bob is focused and the conversation has become more intense. It feels like he is about to share top-secret information with me. I wonder if this is the first time Bob has shared this information in a professional context? It is apparent that his spiritual 'awakening' has been influential on both personal and professional levels. I wonder whether he incorporates it into his daily practice?
Did your exploration into the spiritual world start when you began to work up North?

BOB

I could spend hours telling you why I believe in all this stuff now. My initial experience was kinda sub-first hand. I recently told a kid I was working with about my first exposure to the spirit world and how it was with a Dene woman whom I grew close with while working up north. I remember how we were smoking a cigarette...and then she started talking about how she woke up one morning and her grandmother was sitting on her bed, they talked for 5 minutes, then her grandmother looked at her and said I have to go now but everything is going to be okay. It chokes me up but apparently her grandmother died at that exact moment. What really struck me about that moment, though...is that she proceeded to look at me (and I can still remember her eyes) and then said that she wished that she had "*more* of that ability." That was the beginning of my contemplating that world...and also realizing that the Dene Tha' earmarked those with said ability for positions of power and respect (not unlike Red Cloud). Since then I've had one spirit visit me and I wish I would have more [I think that I maybe misspoke this...I've had one experience, and that was good enough! I couldn't walk by the location of the event for about 5 months...and it's in my bloody neighborhood! I found it to be very upsetting/unsettling, to say the least].I started believing in the paranormal world when I was working at the residential treatment centre (on the _____Reserve) [the same place were Chief _____call to say that "everything is taken care of."]. During my time there I had first hand experience dealing with ghosts and have made people cry before with my stories. [It's a long story. . . but that's where the reality of it truly confronted me...something was unsettling the kids and they eventually brought in a priest...and *then* some medicine/elders to resolve the issue...but my firsthand experience didn't happen until 2008/above. In short, everybody was seeing stuff that brought to mind a youth who committed suicide a short distance away) Altogether that's when I realized that I needed to learn about the Aboriginal cultures that I was working in...including their spiritual views.With the Dene people, apparently the stronger the connection you have with the spirit world, the better off you are, as you are slated for positions of power (oops...I've maybe been redundant here). Dene medicine has showed up in different ways for me, like clients seeing ghosts or spirits of passed on people, others receiving messages from nature or animals, and for some clients it involved dreams. It's part of the spirit world and their belief system that spirits interact with us.

AMANDA

Self-Reflection*: gaining an understanding of the spirit world seems incredibly important when working with Aboriginal clients, especially in the context of understanding mental illness. I find it interesting that seeing ghosts and spirits may be considered normal in some Aboriginal cultures, whereas in western culture the idea of seeing spirits or visions are classified as hallucinations and labeled as schizophrenia and stigmatized as a serious mental illness.*
Believing in the spirit world and working within this spirit realm, especially in a psychological context, seems so far from the western training that we have received in university. How do you make sense of it?

BOB

After X amount of stories, especially in the counselling world, and people saying the same kinds of things what else can you conclude? (Carl Rogers!)

AMANDA

It's interesting I've recently had a similar conversation with a counsellor who has been working with the Aboriginal community for over 20 years. She stated one of the most important things she has learned is to have an open mind, and to be accepting of others no matter what your beliefs, or your own practices are. She argues that a counsellor cannot work in Aboriginal communities without understanding ceremony, as well as cultural and spiritual ways of healing. She argued establishing connections in Aboriginal communities where one works is key, as is collaborating with Elders, spiritual providers and cultural workers. Wow...

BOB

You need to be open minded, and open to self-reflection to do this work. Once again, I embrace the idea that I do not know everything; I'm not the expert... I try to encourage my clients to fill me in on what they are going through, what it feels like, and how they see it. As I said working in this realm has encouraged me to learn more about Aboriginal spirituality and culture, as well as share my experiences.

Bob glances down at his watch and Amanda checks her phone. She realizes that they have been chatting for over an hour. Bob reminds her that he has to leave soon because he is working at his private practice and sees clients this afternoon. They both laugh when she mentions how they were once again sucked into the time vortex and how a short follow up chat turned into an hour and a half conversation. Amanda thanks him for taking the time to meet and chat with her. She gives him a big hug as he buttons up his coat. The café is still packed and bustling as Bob exits. As Amanda puts on her winter gear she looks out the window and sees that snow has begun to lightly fall...as she walks out of the café she wonders if spring will ever come?

Fade out.
Exit scene.

Self-Reflection**:** Sitting at my desk, gazing up at the photograph Bob gave me, (which

hangs above my computer) and I think back over my field notes and the transcripts of Bob and my conversations. I think how the photo has served as a source of inspiration for me. I catch myself staring into the faces of the 3 women all the time, as I imagine their lives, stories and struggles. I see faces full of pride, determination, strength and perseverance. The photo somehow grounds me. It brings me back to awareness when I am daydreaming or feel overwhelmed with the work ahead. It provides me with hope...it makes me determined to carry on. It makes me want to share my story and the stories of others. It makes me grateful for the amazing stories that Bob has shared with me about his life and experiences...it makes me thankful for the friendship that we have created.
I think about Bob's future as a counsellor, especially working in his private practice. How he will face the ongoing challenges of maintaining a cross-cultural practice? I wonder how long Bob will continue working at the education centre? If he leaves, I wonder if he will miss the support of his co-workers and how he will keep involved local Aboriginal communities? Will he attempt to create new ties within the community? I wonder if Bob will continue to explore the spirit world and if so, will he incorporate any teachings (or ceremony) into his practice? Will he continue to be actively involved in social justice issues surrounding Aboriginal rights?

As I think about my time spent with Bob, and as I reflect upon our conversations, I wonder if I too will regain the passion and love for counselling that Bob exudes and I feel I lost during my graduate studies. Right now at the end of my graduate degree I feel overwhelmed, exhausted and completely burned out. The fact that Bob felt the same way at the end of grad school, yet experienced a resurgence of inspiration, passion and excitement for his career once he got out in the field gives me hope for my professional future. Bob's stories also make me realize how important it is to keep an open mind (especially with regards to spirituality) when working with clients and always be receptive to learn from those around you.

End.

Chapter Three: Liz

Found Poetry

When I first met Liz I never dreamed she would be a participant in my research. My supervisor had recommended that I talk to her about making connections with local counsellors working in Aboriginal communities. My hope was that she might know someone who would be interested in participating in my study. I was given her email address near the end of the winter semester (with the warning she travels frequently for her current job so it might be difficult to connect with her). After a few back & forth emails, we eventually set a date & time to meet. We decided to have lunch on campus.

I remember feeling excited about our first meeting. Liz had worked with Aboriginal people for over 30 years (in town, as well as in many Northern communities), and was currently travelling across the country working with the TRC. Apparently she 'knew everyone' & would be 'an invaluable source of information'. *She was an advocate for social justice psychology & a frontline warrior in the field. She was everything I wanted to be as a counsellor…*

I knew she was very busy & I was incredibly grateful that she made time to meet with me. Thinking back, I was so nervous… (my lack of experience & lack of connections). Liz was a pillar in the community & was known by everyone. I had no ties, no connection, nor permanent roots in the city. I was just passing through, and needed an anchor in the community. *I also had very little hands on involvement or experience working with Aboriginal clients. The knowledge I had was theoretical, from texts &/or books (most of which I had sought out after being frustrated with what I had been taught in school). I did not want to be the "bleeding heart liberal" I had been accused of in a Native Self Government (political science) class I had taken 15 years earlier during my under graduate studies.*

When I saw Liz, I immediately recognized her from a TRC seminar that I attended at the university. I remember looking up as she entered the room (there was a buzz of excitement) & she was immediately surrounded (& hugged) by many people. It seemed like everyone knew her. I thought she might be one of the guest speakers.
It turns out, throughout the presentation she actually spent most of the time on the peripheral of the room, attending to people who were distressed and required support. I remember her approaching two of my crying classmates, giving them tissues, and checking in to see how they were doing during one particularly graphic story a man was sharing about his life. I have written elsewhere how influential this presentation was to me & how it essentially changed the course of my studies and my research. At the time, I did not realize that Liz would be such an integral part of my story.

After getting the preliminary greetings out of the way we instantly bonded through the search for gluten free food. Conversation came easy. Liz was talkative, engaging, & very easy going. She had a genuine laid-back vibe about her, and a fantastic sense of humor (not to mention a big infectious laugh that instantly seemed to put you at ease). As I shared my puzzles and wonderings about working with aboriginal clients, she shared

amazing stories from her past, as well as ones from her current career experiences. We chatted about the lack of information and support available, and how this might affect new counsellors going into the field (as well as seasoned veterans). I shared my curiosities and Liz shared her experiences. Time slipped into the lost vortex & before we knew it almost 2 hours had passed. Before she left, Liz provided me with names of people who might be interested in my study. We agreed to keep in touch & to meet in the near future for coffee.

Months passed before we were able to meet up again due to summer vacation, conflicting schedules & crazy work obligations. We finally managed to set up a coffee date at a campus java joint in the late fall. When I arrived Liz was already engaged in conversation with one of her previous students. We talked about how my research was coming along, and whether any of the people she had recommended had panned out. Our conversation came with ease & flow; it felt like catching up with an old friend. We had also befriended each other on Facebook so we were privy to each other's social media lives over the past couple of months.

From the moment I met Liz I wished she could be a participant in my work (I did not ask her for months because I assumed that she would be too busy with the TRC). She had given names of a few people who fit my criteria and might be interested in talking to me (in fact Bob had been recommended by her). After talking with Liz I realized the stories she told me were too important not too share, as they would greatly benefit future counsellor's work in the field. I was absolutely elated when she agreed to be a participant, not only were her experiences educational and applicable to helping other's but she was also a natural & gifted storyteller.

Liz, an orator by heart, shared her experiences through detailed imagery & metaphor. She was honest, open & upfront. She did not share a polished, shiny watered down Disney version of her life events…she was candid about the good & the bad. She shared the grit…real life…the fear, pain, exhaustion, sorrow, vulnerability; along with joy, love, laughter, fun and adventure.

As she shared her life stories of counselling Aboriginal clients over the past 30 years, I was able to travel alongside of her (Lugones, 1987) even though I was just starting out in the field. My lack of experience, nervousness, & insecurity was placed on hold, as I journeyed through her world.

The most challenging part of working with Liz was trying to find the time to meet. With the TRC in full effect she was constantly being called (at a moment's notice) to travel across Canada. I was a full time student & single parent in a town without family. It was difficult to find time where we both free. In fact we had to reschedule numerous times due to last minute work obligations and unforeseen circumstances. It was almost eleven months after our first email correspondence that we met for our first *conversation*.

When discussing where to meet, Liz had requested somewhere private where we could chat openly without being interrupted or overheard (unlike the coffee shop or campus dining area). She suggested that we meet at her house & I thought it was a great idea.

Our first official "participant meeting" (April 10, 2011), took place on a chilly Saturday morning in mid-April. The ground was still frozen and covered in a thick layer of snow as I drove to an unknown part of town. Liz's home was located in a gated community in beautiful tree nestled suburban area in the city. I had been given explicit instructions how to circumnavigate the moat & avoid the dragons. Liz had given me fair warning, as she described her house as a turreted castle. I arrived early, armed with gluten free cupcakes to appease any rogue dragons.

Upon entering her fortress, I was whisked away to the second floor. Our conversation took place in a big beautiful room with a large window. Under the window was a desk covered in books. A large white, fluffy sheepskin rug covered most of the floor. There was a sofa along the right wall, but I followed Liz across the sheepskin and we sat in two big, comfy armchairs that were facing each other. I sat gingerly trying not to crush a paper parasol that had been tucked in the corner of the chair. Between us were a tall coffee table & a lamp. Placed upon the table was a large Buddha statue adorned with prayer beads, and a large dream catcher. This was Liz's private sanctuary.

Liz began to talk & I lost track of time (our conversation lasted over 2.5 hours). It had felt like time stood still. I left my phone/clock in my jacket pocket hanging in the downstairs closet so I had no idea how much time had passed. I had arranged 2-hour childcare for my son & when I realized how late it was, I scrambled to retrieve my child. I barely escaped the dragons.

A couple of weeks later I returned to Liz's sanctuary for a follow up meeting, which turned into another 2-hour conversation. Our past coffee chats had been full of back & forth banter & discussion. While tucked away into Liz's private space, something changed, something shifted. Liz had spoken openly before, but this time it was different. Her passion, knowledge and love for what she does, had always shone through, but in her private space she opened up & became more vulnerable. It was almost like she took off her outer armor, her protective gear. Even though I had a set of general open-ended questions to ask I took on the role as more of an observer/listener/ witness, rather than interviewer.

The following narrative account is presented in the form of found poetry using words taken directly from our conversation transcripts.

I'm always asked,
"Who are your people?"
It makes me stop & think
Early settlers.
I grew up here…
Connections.
Family: Uncle.
Aunties not related by blood.
Gaps.

Liz shared stories of her Aboriginal family members & friends' incredible generosity & resilience. She spoke of self-reflection & how it wasn't until she started her Master's program (later in life) she began to realize the influence these people had in her life. Working with the TRC solidified these realizations. Once again Liz became aware of how her past experiences shaped her & how these connections impacted her life.

As Liz shared stories of her Aboriginal friends, families & clients, she spoke of 'the gap' in their lived experiences. This 'gap' is where she said 'she is working in now'.

I wonder if "working in the gap "can be found through life experience? Is it something that can be taught?

I went back to school,
& did my masters.
I worked with traumatized folk,
Child welfare work.
Mostly with children who were sexually abused,
Many were Aboriginal.
I did 5 years of fly-in to Aboriginal communities,
It really prepared me in a way no other experience could.
No multicultural training.
No Aboriginal models.
We lacked awareness.
We were not taught,
& had develop our own understanding.
Historical trauma did not exist.
At the time,
I wish I knew about residential schools.
It was:
Frontline work…
on the spot…
in the moment…
intense.

As we spent time together I learned Liz's counsellor training program did not include multicultural education. When she came into the field, Liz said they were not taught about trauma, & had to develop their own understanding. *As I listened to Liz taking about her education, I wonder how contemporary multicultural & trauma training would impact her practice?*

Liz spoke of the importance of past work experiences, & says this was what prepared her for frontline work (and the work she is doing now) rather than formal education. She said it was the hands on experience that taught her how to do stuff on the spot, and in the moment (unlike anything else).

Liz also spoke of how things were transitioning in Aboriginal communities (with repatriation & the beginning of sober communities) when she started in the field. At the time child welfare was turned over to the bands, and the counsellors worked directly with the bands. In many places social and medical services were located side by side. Children were brought into a tiny little room in the hospital for counselling. They did not have any play materials, and the only resources they had were what they could carry on the plane. Many smelly felts had been confiscated on her plane rides.

For Liz, it seemed like engaging in direct community action was a natural part of her counselling philosophy & practice. I wonder how this could this be taught in the classroom?

I'd come home when my kids were little,
& touch everything in my house.
This is where I am…
Learning to keep track of who you are,
Where you are…
I've become a part of many lives,
They have become part of mine,
But it's not my life.

Grounded.
Self -preservation.
Self -awareness.
Reflection.

How do you find your way?

Liz spoke of the importance of making a commitment to work in Aboriginal communities. She says it is a long-term commitment. You become part of the community, and it's a very invested way of working.

Liz shared a story about a client she worked with for many years. One day the woman had come to see her after she had been drinking heavily & had tried to commit suicide. She 'basically shot the back of her head off'. Liz helped her walk through the door to the waiting room in the hospital (where they did not treat suicides, or self mutilators very well). As Liz and her client sat in the waiting room (with her back of her head hanging off) a relative approached her client and asked for money. The girl stood up and started running out the door. Liz and a social worker ran after her, tackling her to the ground & just held her.

Liz says this is frontline work.

I wonder how do you find your way as a counsellor/therapist around some of those things?
How do you work through this?
This is not taught in school.

Liz spoke of the intensity of the work & lack of Aboriginal models of practice when she first entered the field. She felt she lacked multicultural awareness. *I wonder how and when she attained this awareness?*

Although she was never formally trained in dream work, Liz did a lot of training in Erickson based hypnosis.
When working with clients she would use whatever resources they brought, and viewed the unconscious as a resource (rather than a scary internal state).

So how do you find your way?

You use what the client brings,
Dreams, images, drawings,
Symbols.
Storytelling.
All resources of the unconscious
You work with those inner lives.

Liz shared that her clients would tell her 'incredible things' because they believed she had an understanding of spiritual culture (although she felt she did not have at the time). Liz spoke of always being open to working with whatever people brought with them, & feels this is what positively influenced relationships.

I wonder if working with inner lives is something that is gleaned from experience or can be taught through self-reflection & awareness?

Liz spoke of the importance of connection, as well as finding and working with community based resources. She shared that an important part of her work was helping connect her clients to the people & help they needed. *These duties differ from the traditional counsellor roles. I wonder how effective and helpful counselling roles can be examined and expanded to include community based helping and other direct social action(s).*

Always be open minded,
Understand the need for spiritual tradition & culture,
Learn from traditional healers,
Respect the Elders,
Traditional practice can be sustaining.
Healing…
Necessary for reconciliation.

Engage in ceremony,
Smudge,
Dance.
Partake in-group.
Engage in ceremony,
Support and embrace culture and spirituality.
Traditional and faith based practice is important,
No matter what your beliefs are.
This is not taught in school.

Liz spoke of the importance of acknowledging the impact of spirituality (whether it be Christian, or traditional) when working in Aboriginal communities (compared to other communities). She also spoke of the importance counsellors being able to engage in some kind of spiritual dimension, no matter what they believe in or regardless of their stance. Counsellors working with this population have to engage in ceremony. Liz spoke of being willing to understand that counsellors have less healing ability (or ability to transform things) while working within western methodologies than when working within a religious tradition of some sort.

Outside of multicultural counselling theory, social justice and indigenous psychologies we are taught that Euro-American psychology is effective & useful. I wonder how we can reframe this mindset to acknowledge the importance of traditional healers, healing methods, & other ways of helping.

Sometimes you are stupid,
You just don't get things.
My sense of humor saved me.
I've been asked,
Are you sure you're not Aboriginal?
You are funny.
I have a big laugh,
people can relate.
I'm not scary,
I'm not judgmental…
Sometimes is best to remain quiet,
Wait.
Something will happen,
& then you can respond.

Liz spoke of the importance of 'being persistent, asking questions, not acting like a know-it-all, & never making assumptions' as the best way to work together with clients.

Anger
Betrayal,
Hurt,
Mistrust,
Pain,
Trauma.

These are what Canadian cultural practices have brought to Aboriginal people.

GENOCIDE.

Being asked,
"Why can't white people leave us alone to heal?"

Calmly responding,
It's not just your healing,
It's all of ours…

The process is about everybody.

Liz shared an incident where she was approached from behind & punched in the kidney. The woman was incredibly distressed, angry & highly activated. She needed to talk to someone. It took place at a highly charged event, and Liz shared being physically attacked is not the norm for her. She spoke of never having encountered this kind of personal violence in the 20 plus years of doing individual psychotherapy or working with children on reserves.
In the current political climate I honestly would have thought that anger, mistrust, & confrontation would be the norm.

With regards to anger, hostility & violence, Liz spoke of being able to step back, realizing it has nothing to do with her personally (the "me of me"), while at the same time acknowledging that she needs to be present in some kind of way.
I wonder if this is something that gets easier with experience?

How do you step back?
How do you stay present?
How do you facilitate healing?

Liz spoke of the backlash against western healing traditions over the past couple of years in the attempt to regain traditional practice (reconnecting culturally & spiritually).
Liz shared she would never attempt to do the spiritual process of healing, “it’s not who she is & she would never attempt to fake it”. She acknowledges the importance of traditional practice & finds it sustaining. Liz also spoke of working with Elders on healing (in groups & ceremony) & being given permission to use their stories (their teachings) for healing purposes.

Liz shared a Buddhist saying,
“Of strong back, open heart.”
She spoke of trying to maintain this position all the time, in a flexible kind of way.

Acceptance.
Commitment.
Persistence.
Trust.
Intention.
Healing.
Once embedded in a community,
You become a helpful person,
Not a white person,
But a helpful person.

Become a helpful person.

Ask questions,
Never make assumptions,
Every community is different,
Culture, and customs are different.
How children are taught,
And how spiritual beliefs are passed down
Differ in each community.

Awareness.
Reflection.
Self-awareness.
Self -reflection.

We have to be aware of not knowing,
This is the best way to enter.
Witness.
Become aware of what you carry,
Be aware of your attitude.
Don't think you know everything.
Textbooks will not transfer over to other setting!
Just show up,
Be there.
Presence.

Empowerment
Knowledge
Life long learning.
Instinct.
Humor.
Awareness.
Be present.

BUT Beware of snakes,
Infestations…
There are millions of snakes.
Always be ready,
They are everywhere.

What helps in a pit of snakes?
Know yourself,
What brought you here?
Don't be afraid of other's fear,
Know how to breathe.

You cannot take the snake on yourself…
You don't have to protect everyone,
Or fight every battle,
Figure out who has the solution to the problem.

There are many ways to tame a snake.
Patience,
Connection,
Being able to sit back…
recognize this.

Liz spoke of how the work is intense, highly charged, & incredibly activating. It carries a lot of vicarious trauma without a lot of support. When asked about her support systems, Liz spoke of not really having anyone to debrief with at her current job. She did share that she had a group of Elders, one in particular she could talk to about anything.

As I listened to Liz's stories I realized how easy it would be for new counsellors to quickly burn out with lack of support. *I wonder how we can help support new counsellors in the field? It also made me wonder how seasoned Veterans do this job day in & day out? What support systems do they have in place? How do they deal with the vicarious trauma?*

Liz spoke of the importance of acknowledging your skill set. She says to seek out others to help when needed & always know what resources are available.

And be prepared,
You never know what the weather's
going to do…
hurricanes,
blizzards,
prairie thunderstorms,
tornados

an entire ocean turning red…

We have an ethical responsibility,
To look at our practices,
And to make sure they are human.
We need to work differently,
To make sure they are not 'Othering' practices.

I wonder how self -reflection is attained when multicultural training is not even mandatory at the master's level in most educational psychology programs (even though most practitioners deal with a diverse clientele)?

I wonder why this isn't an integral part of the curriculum? How do you stop "othering" if you don't even know what it is, or if you are doing it in the first place?

A model of connection,
A very different process,
Is needed.
Recognize where people are connected…
Down to their last thread.
Bridge the gap,
Use human based care,
Connection.
It's contrary to most Euro-American psychology.

Working from a multicultural, multi-systemic framework that takes into consideration both client & community needs.

Being active in addressing social injustices, inequalities, and oppression, taking action toward social change and attending to the needs of groups of people who experience oppression.

Advocating with or on behalf of clients, communities, and change programs, and empowering others to engage in self-advocacy, resist oppression, and make social change (Arthur & Kennedy, 2014).

I wonder how this can be incorporated into counselling program curricula?

About a year and a half after our last (face to face) conversation, Liz contacted me because she (& her husband) was going to be passing through my town en route to California. We both wanted to reconnect & decided to meet for lunch.

So much had changed since our last meeting. I had taken an informal leave from my thesis work after the birth of my premature daughter, and had just begun to start working on it again. Although I still remember my time in Edmonton, it was so great to see Liz in my town, in my space. I got to meet her husband, & they had a chance to meet my daughter. Our brief reconnection made me reflect back to our last meeting, her shared stories & life experiences. Seeing Liz helped bring me back to where I had left off. We caught up on life, work, travel & adventure. As I sat with her, I saw that Liz had moved on to new & exciting places in her life.

Now, as I sit with her narrative, I keep thinking about how Liz's stories have shaped her as a person and how they have impacted me as a counsellor. I am so incredible grateful to her for sharing her life experiences with me.

Chapter 4

Publication

A Narrative Inquiry into the Experiences of non-Aboriginal Counsellors working with Aboriginal Peoples.

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In 2015, The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) finished its six-year operation mandated to "reveal to Canadians the complex truth about the history and the ongoing legacy of the church-run residential schools and guide" and "inspire a process of truth and healing, leading toward reconciliation" (p. 27). The TRC's final report included numerous 'Calls to Action' to the federal, provincial, territorial and Aboriginal governments regarding child welfare, language and culture, health (including mental health), justice, professional development and training, education for reconciliation, and youth programs. All of the calls for action were significant and require a large national and local effort to shift education, practices, and most of all long standing relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. In this paper we inquire into the experiences of two non-Aboriginal counsellors who work with Aboriginal peoples to better understand multicultural practices and social justice in the Canadian counselling profession.

Background Information

As a result of colonialism and government policies aimed at assimilation, Aboriginal peoples in Canada have suffered from devastating effects of historical and cultural genocide, as well as intergenerational trauma. In Canada, Aboriginal peoples experience a disproportionately higher amount of mental health issues when compared to other groups (Allan & Smylie, 2015). In addition, many Aboriginal people view current mental health services as 'inaccessible and culturally insensitive' especially those that are provided through contemporary western based service delivery (Nuttgens & Campbell, 2010). France and colleagues (2002) found that Aboriginal clients were twice as likely not to return after their first counselling session. Barlow and colleagues (2008) posit this

attrition is a result of deep-seated historical and ongoing power differences and mistrust towards non-Aboriginal health care professionals and ongoing experiences of racism within the Canadian health care system (Allan & Smylie, 2015). Despite this recognition of barriers to access and delivery of mental health services with Aboriginal clients, there is a dearth of literature on cultural competencies and best practices for non-Aboriginal counsellors who work with Aboriginal clients. The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to better understand the experiences of non-Aboriginal counsellors working with Aboriginal clients.

> The issues that face Aboriginal people in Canada are quite unique from any other ethnic or racial group, personally, politically, and socially. All aspects of wellbeing are fused with these intricate aspects, which makes effective counselling a challenge. Essentially, counselling training as it stands now does not have a solid foundation that would make counsellors effective with the majority of clients that now not only are in need of effective counselling, but are demanding culturally competent counsellors both within and outside the Aboriginal community. All minorities face the prospect of dealing with a Eurocentric counselling paradigm that starts with a worldview and knowledge base that stands as a barrier to effective counselling services (Frances et al., 2004, p.1).

A historical and socio-political understanding of Aboriginal peoples in Canada is necessary for cultivating a shared worldview in counselling (McCormick, 2009; Blue et al., 2002; Kirmayer et al., 2009; Nuttgens & Campbell, 2010; Wihak & Price, 2006; France et al., 2004). Knowledge of the Indian Act[11], Indian Residential Schools (IRS)[12],

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[11] The Indian Act created in 1876 continues to mandate and institutionalize the lives of Aboriginal people in Canada by the federal government.

[12] Over the span of 100 years, over 100,000 Aboriginal children were forced from their homes and "subjected to an institutional regime that fiercely denigrated and suppressed their heritage" (Kirmayer, Tait & Simpson, 2009, p.9). Indian Residential schools were created in the 1870's by the federal government and run by churches in most Canadian provinces and territories. They were created to 'assimilate and educate' aboriginal children into Canadian society. More than 150,000 First Nation, Métis, and Inuit children were forcibly removed from their families and placed in residential schools. The children were forbidden to speak their languages, practice their cultural and spiritual traditions and were punished for doing so. They were subjected to physical, sexual and emotional abuse (Regan, 2010).

and the 60's scoop[13] is imperative for counsellors in understanding why Aboriginal peoples often feel alienated from Canadian (mental) health providers and institutions.

Nuttgens and Campbell (2010) offer a socio-political and historical rationale for attending to key cultural differences when working with Aboriginal peoples. Their approach is grounded in three domains of multicultural competence including self - awareness, knowledge of the other, and therapeutic practice. They provide a comprehensive overview of important multicultural concepts such as ethnocentrism, racism, white privilege, as well as a historical view of the 'remnant effects of colonialism born of assimilative government policies', including The Indian Act, Residential schools, and culture retention. Multicultural competence requires choosing interventions that are respectful of a cultural group's intact beliefs and values regarding health and healing (p.119).

When counselling Aboriginal people, France and colleagues (2004) argue that "the lack of understanding of the historical, political and social aspects of oppression and how it disrupts counselling practice has been one reason why counselling has not been as effective as it could be" (p. 2). Futhermore, McCormick (1996) articulates effective counselling with Aboriginal peoples cannot take place without knowledge and respect for an Aboriginal worldview and value system. According to Blue and colleagues (2002), even though a wide range of counselling models exist, counsellors must be mindful not to impose unhelpful or even harmful Euro-centric techniques on Aboriginal clients and their

[13] Beginning in the 60's (and lasting for almost three decades) large numbers of Aboriginal children were taken from their families and communities and placed in foster care or adopted into non-Aboriginal families. Aboriginal parents were viewed as "incapable of educating their children with proper European values" and in the 1960's the federal government handed over Aboriginal health, welfare and education to the provincial government. Social workers opted to place Aboriginal children in long-term foster care or adoption into non-Aboriginal families. Kirmayer and colleagues (2009) point out that in the 1970's one in four "status Indians" could expect to be separated by his or her parents.

communities and practices should "be based on deep respect, be beneficial to the community, and embrace spirituality" (p. 19). Non-Aboriginal counsellors need to be flexible and adaptive in their counselling techniques. They also need to be committed to understanding the historical and (unique) cultural characteristics of their potential clients, develop competencies for working with non-verbal communication (i.e., comfortable with silence), have tolerance for ambiguity, and cultivate a deep understanding of their own values and biases.

Incorporating a social justice perspective by attending to stories of oppression and subjugation (Blue & Darou, 2005) is also vital when working with Aboriginal peoples. Nuttgens and Campbell (2010) argue, "mental illness is often entwined with the effects of poverty and racism and attributable to historical and current social injustices levied against Canada's Aboriginal people" (p. 124). Counselling techniques need to include attention to changing social conditions and focus beyond traditional paradigms of mental health care. Culturally relevant therapy is needed to address issues of poverty, unemployment, racism, and injustice (Nuttgens & Campbell, 2010).

Multicultural Counselling

While there are vast amounts of writings on multicultural counselling history and theory, there are few studies inquiring into the multicultural competence of Canadian counsellors. France, Rodriguez, and Hett (2004) report that there is a growing awareness of the changing realities of ethnic groups in Canada and state that this has resulted in more holistic and non-Eurocentric counselling approaches. Arthur and Januszkowski's (2001) found that although Canada's population is becoming more diverse, only one third

of counsellors who have been in practice for more than ten years have taken (at least) one course in multicultural counselling.

Jun (2010), a multicultural counsellor, argues that when a counsellor is not aware of their own beliefs, values and biases, they are not aware of how they might be affecting their client. This unawareness can result in marginalization, discrimination, prejudice, stereotyping, engaging in racist, heterosexist, ablest and/or classist oppression, which can negatively impact the client's physical, emotional and psychological welfare (Jun, 2010).

Multicultural counselling requires multidimensional thinking, tolerance for ambiguity and assigning equal importance to others' cultural values, beliefs, and respect for the ways of being and traditions of others. Furthermore, Jun (2010) points out that multicultural counselling should not only examine race and culture, but needs to emphasize the intersection of race, class, gender, socio-economic class, sexual orientation, and physical ability and disability. A holistic perspective on multicultural competencies, requires practitioners to understand clients from their socio-cultural historical contexts while acknowledging multiple identities and truths. In this current study we are interested in the experiences of non-Aboriginal counsellors working with Aboriginal clients. We inquired into their experiences to gain insights into the cultural competencies, perspectives, and approaches to counselling practice they had accumulated over years of working closely within Aboriginal communities.

Methodology

Narrative inquiry is both a methodology and a phenomenon under study (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). It is a relational inquiry that provides a way for people to share and make meaning of their experiences. Narrative inquiry is an approach to the

study of human lives conceived as a way of honouring experiences and as a source of important knowledge and understanding (Clandinin, 2013, p.17). Experiences of participants are explored within the three dimensional narrative inquiry space of time, context and place (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000). Engaging in a narrative inquiry requires collaboration and the building of relationships. Clandinin and Caine (2013) illuminate that "amidst these relationships, participants tell and live through stories that speak of, and to, their experiences of living" (p.167). They posit that the relationship with participants requires being attentive to ethical tensions, obligations and responsibilities throughout the inquiry process. This attention to relational ethics is at the heart of narrative inquiry.

The process of narrative inquiry is composed of engaging with participants in the ongoing relational inquiry space, or field. This is done by listening to individuals tell their stories, and by creating field texts (including field notes, transcripts of conversations, journals and photographs composed or co-composed by researchers and participants) as well as writing both interim and final research texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Field texts are shaped into interim texts, which are shared and negotiated with participants before being composed into final research texts for public audiences.

Negotiation of relationships and exploring the research puzzle marks entering the field. Clandinin and Caine (2013) illuminate that negotiations are ongoing processes throughout the inquiry and explore purpose, transitions, intentions and texts. Research conversations are the basis of the collaborative process of exchanging information, ideas, and building understandings that lead to co-authored, in-depth, intimate, narrative

accounts that are context bound, told over time, and attend to place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Participants were recruited through community consultation. Criteria for participation in this study included a) non-Aboriginal counsellors must have worked with aboriginal clients for at least a six-month time period, and b) counsellors must have a graduate degree in psychology, and registered as a psychologist. Participants also needed to be willing to participate in at least three research conversations and review the co-composed narrative accounts. Conversations with participants occurred in places of their choosing and in addition to a signed informed consent form, ongoing dialogue and collaboration informed the study. Ethics approval was obtained from the University of Alberta Health Research Ethics Board. Research conversations were tape recorded and transcribed. In-depth research conversations using guiding questions, autobiographical writing, and photography were used to gather counsellor's cross-cultural narratives. The use of multiple sources of field texts provided more complex insights. Detailed field notes also formed part of the field texts and inquiry.

Analysis included listening to the recorded conversations multiple times, as well as reading and re-reading field texts. For each participant a narrative account was co-composed to reflect their experiences as cross-cultural counsellors. After the narrative accounts were co-composed and negotiated with participants, final research texts were created. The focus of the analysis was on identifying resonant threads across the narrative accounts. In this study we worked closely with two participants, Bob and Liz. Bob's narrative account was co-composed as a dramatization or screenplay format. Found poetry was the method used to bring Liz's voice to the forefront. "In this approach, the

researcher uses only the words of the participant to create a poetic rendition of a story or phenomenon" (Butler-Kisber, 2002, p. 4). Liz's stories were rich, textured and detailed. Found poetry was chosen to evocatively portray her lived experiences and to "evoke emotional responses" (Butler-Kisber, 2002, p. 4). To ensure confidentiality participants were given the opportunity to use an alias and have their identifying information changed.

The Lives of the Participants

In this paper we share parts of the narrative accounts negotiated with participants[14]. Throughout the study I engaged in intensive autobiographical inquiry in order to understand who I was, and who I was becoming, in relation to participants and the phenomena under study (Clandinin, 2013, p. 43). This process allowed me to shape my research puzzle. The following is an excerpt from my narrative beginnings entitled *Coming to My Research Puzzle.*

> i spent the next year submerged in my studies
>
> multicultural counselling
> therapeutic relationship
> trust, empathetic listening
> circumstances counted and recounted
>
> in the midst
> finding feminist and multicultural models
> to explore my white, female, heterosexual, fully able, middle class upbringing
>
> i questioned my role
> *how **would I/i not** perpetuate the white, male,*
> *post colonial, Euro-ethno-centric values*
>
> bumping up against assessment training
> against formalistic and reductionist patterns

[14] I in these accounts refers to Amanda Bowden, the first author, who engaged directly in conversation with participants.

mandatory coursework

i wanted to shift ethnocentric ways of doing
how were others working across difference?
how did non-aboriginal counsellors work with aboriginal clients?

i have struggled with tensions regarding my place in this work
how could i conduct my inquiry in a respectful and honorable way.

Bob

Bob is a psychologist who recently opened his own private practice. He also works 1.5 days a week as a counsellor at an urban education centre for at-risk youth where over 90% of his clients are Aboriginal. He is one of three school counsellors who work with youth who struggle with truancy, stress, Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). Bob was first introduced as a possible research participant by another participant. I did not realize at the time that we had actually met prior to his participation at a social function. Our first meeting took place at a downtown café and the conversation over coffee was relaxed, informal and felt like we were old friends. Both of our conversations took place at the same café and each lasted over two and half hours. During our conversations Bob recalled his "redneck" roots and how these views changed with his exposure to Aboriginal culture as an adult working within an Aboriginal community. I wondered where these pre-conceived notions originated and how Bob dealt with the tensions that shaped his past stories. I too was curious about how his past experiences and beliefs had been re-storied on his personal and professional landscapes.

Liz

When I first saw Liz, I immediately recognized her from a seminar I had attended at the university. Her presentation at the time had changed the course of my studies and my research. Liz had worked with Aboriginal people for over 30 years, and was currently travelling across Canada working with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission[15]. Conversations with Liz came easy; she was talkative, engaging, and very easy going. The most challenging part of working with Liz was trying to find time to meet. With the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in full effect she was constantly being called to travel across Canada. It was almost eleven months after our first email correspondence that we met for our first conversation. Liz had requested 'somewhere private' and suggested that we meet at her house. Our conversations took place in Liz's private study and each lasted almost three hours. Liz spoke of the importance of past work experiences, and how this had prepared her for frontline work rather than formal education. Liz spoke of how the work is intense, highly charged, and incredibly activating. The work for Liz also carries a lot of vicarious trauma without a lot of support. When asked about her support systems, Liz shared that she had a group of Elders, one in particular she could talk with.

Findings

Resonant threads were found by following particular plotlines that threaded or wove over time and place through each individual's narrative (Clandinin, 2013). They are found in the subplots of the stories that make up experiences. Three narrative threads resonated across Bob and Liz's accounts.

Resonant Thread: Stories to Live By

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[15] The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Canada

'*Stories to live by'* is a narrative term for identity. Connelly and Clandinin (2000) conceptualized stories to live to show the interconnectedness of knowledge, context and identity (Clandinin, 2013, p.78). This concept of identity speaks to the stories that live and tell of who people are, and are becoming. "Stories of identity highlights the multiplicity of our lives composed, lived out and told in different plotlines, over time, in different relationships and on different landscapes" (Clandinin, 2013, p.53). Early stories to live by were questioned and re-storied by Bob through exposure to Aboriginal culture while working and living in an Aboriginal community. His childhood assumptions and stereotypes were challenged by his lived experiences. He said, "*I was born and raised in a small town where I just adopted hook, line and sinker whatever stereotype was said about Aboriginal people… I had little to no early experience of Aboriginal people whatsoever right through grade 12. It is funny when I think of my childhood the first thing that comes to mind is exposure. … Whatever piece of misinformation was being spread was never questioned. My early impression of Aboriginal people was based on stereotypes and assumptions that they were drunks, not capable and I hate to say it dangerous".* Bob traced the development of his stereotypes to, *"a combination of peers and family. I have an uncle who's completely racist, and biased. My grandfather was the same way. They were completely misinformed and had little to no exposure to Aboriginal culture. I remember my peers having little respect for Aboriginal people and assuming there was a level of truth to the stereotypes surrounding Aboriginal culture. I just assumed there was a level of truth to it. Ironically and thankfully becoming connected and exposed to Aboriginal people and their culture is something, which I'm eternally grateful for. It's one of my favorite parts of the psychology part of my life".*

For Bob, his first 'real exposure' to Aboriginal people occurred when he moved from a small town to work on a Northern Reservation. He recalls, *"I did not know what to expect...I thought it could be rough and slightly dangerous and all I had were these stereotypes floating in my head with little exposure. BUT it was a fantastic experience for me. The breakdown of all my past misinformation started happening."* Bob articulated that his experience of living and working in a Northern Aboriginal community completely challenged and changed his perspective. Even today his exposure to Aboriginal people *"grows daily as he continues to work with kids at the education centre"* and over time *"for a small town white guy I realize that I had everything wrong"*.

Unlike Bob, Liz grew up being exposed to Aboriginal culture:

I'm always asked,
"Who are your people?"
It makes me stop & think
Connections. Family: Uncle.
Aunties not related by blood.
Gaps.

Liz shared stories of her childhood and stories linked to Aboriginal family members and friends. She spoke of self-reflection and how during her Master's program she began to realize the influence people had on her life. Liz shared stories of her early work doing "fly-ins" to remote Northern Aboriginal communities. More recently, working with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission solidified these realizations. Liz became aware of how her past experiences had shaped her and how these connections impacted her life and work with Aboriginal communities. When asked how she moved between the spaces of personal life and work, she responded:

I'd come home when my kids were little,

and touch everything in my house.
This is where I am…
Learning to keep track of who you are,
Where you are…
I've become a part of many lives,
They have become part of mine,
But it's not my life.

Within their stories to live by, the notions of life and work become intertwined for both Bob and Liz. Liz spoke of the importance of making a commitment to work in Aboriginal communities. She says it is a long-term commitment. *"You become part of the community, and it's a very invested way of working."* Liz said that she has worked with four generations from one family over the past 30 years. Liz shares:

Acceptance.
Commitment.
Persistence.
Trust.
Intention.
Healing.
Once embedded in a community,
You become a helpful person,
Not a white person,
But a helpful person.

Bob spoke of "*having a revelation*" after signing a contract to work in a community for one year. He stated that this commitment showed he wasn't there *"just to make a buck.*" He said *"once I committed to working there for one year it was mind-blowing … they literally took me into the centre of everything and protected me. It was wonderful. My co-workers and I started hanging out and that is when the real cultural exposure started."* As I listened to Liz, I wondered how do you find your way as a counsellor/therapist around some of those things? How do you work through this? This is not taught in school.

Liz responded:

Ask questions,
Never make assumptions,
Every community is different,
Culture, and customs are different.
How children are taught,
And how spiritual beliefs are passed down
Differ in each community.

We have to be aware of not knowing,
This is the best way to enter.
Witness.
Become aware of what you carry,
Be aware of your attitude.
Don't think you know everything.
Textbooks will not transfer over to other setting!
Just show up,
Be there.
Be Present.

Resonant Thread: Humility

Liz spoke of always being open to working with whatever people brought with them, and feels this is what positively influenced relationships. Liz spoke of the importance of acknowledging the impact of spirituality when working in Aboriginal communities. Liz notes counsellors working with this population have to engage in ceremony. She spoke of being willing to understand that counsellors have less healing ability (or ability to transform things) while working within western methodologies than when working within a spiritual tradition or structure. Liz shared:

Always be open minded,
Understand the need for spiritual tradition & culture,
Learn from traditional healers,
Respect the Elders,
Traditional practice can be sustaining.
Healing…
Necessary for reconciliation.

Bob notes, "*I was raised Catholic, and became an Atheist at one point in my life but not any more. The idea of a spirit world seems to me the most legit theory for me.*" He said that his spiritual beliefs have been challenged and redefined by his work with Aboriginal peoples. Bob said, *"I've heard so many stories about paranormal experiences, as well as consulted with Elders about spirit medicine in different situations that there seems to be more evidence supporting the spirit world than there is for most others."* Bob shares, "*You need to be open minded, and open to self-reflection to do this work… Working in this realm has encouraged me to learn more about Aboriginal spirituality and culture, as well as share my experiences.*"

Liz also spoke of the importance of "*being persistent, asking questions, not acting like a know-it-all, and never making assumptions"* as the best way to work together with Aboriginal clients. Liz notes:

Sometimes you are stupid,
You just don't get things.
My sense of humor saved me.
I've been asked,
Are you sure you're not Aboriginal?
You are funny.
I have a big laugh,
people can relate.
I'm not scary,
I'm not judgmental…
Sometimes it is best to remain quiet,
Wait.
Something will happen,
and then you can respond.

Bob shares, *"one of the greatest friggin' teachings that anyone has ever passed down to me (and there is a handful of them) is 'I don't know' … no ego, getting comfortable with not knowing the answers and being able to tell the kids, the staff,*

whomever, that you don't know but you are open to figuring it out, and being educated. I'm not the expert, every kid's unique and I just ask questions and try to figure out what is going on and what the factors are". Furthermore, Bob notes*, "I tend to reflect a lot, it helps me keep open-minded, honest, and open. Always be ready to be corrected, know you are not the expert, and always have humility… Oh and keeping a sense of humour about things is also really important!"*

When asked whether Bob thought his university education in counselling psychology adequately prepared him to work cross-culturally with Aboriginal clients, he replied, *"It's funny...when I think about this I don't think I was prepared. I kinda just brushed through grad school just trying to get everything done. All I needed was one cross-cultural counselling class in order to graduate, which is pretty sad considering that immigrants are the fastest growing population in the city. They're going to be a significant portion of any counsellor's caseload potentially…First Nations and Métis are the fastest growing populations in this city...and already the largest populations of their kind in Western Canada. Odds are pretty high that cross-cultural training will be useful for the practitioner! At least having some understanding of different cultures, even if you do not work with them directly, like for referrals, would be incredibly helpful!"*

Liz said self-awareness and reflection was what grounded her during difficult work. *How do you step back yet remain present?* When asked these questions Liz responded with a Buddhist saying: "Of strong back, open heart." She said she tries to maintain this position all the time, in a flexible kind of way.

Resonant Thread: Being called to the work

Neither participant entered the field planning to work specifically with Aboriginal peoples and described being pulled or called to the work through a variety of experiences. Bob had taken up employment in a Northern community to gain experience in the field and ended up making a year-long commitment to living and working within the community. His work at the urban education centre began with a (denied) research request and ended with a job working with urban street youth. He shared: *"I embrace the idea that I don't know everything, I'm not the expert. I try to encourage my clients to fill me in on what they are going through, what's it like, and how they see it… I tend to reflect a lot, it helps me keep open-minded, honest, and open. Always be ready to be corrected, know you are not the expert, and always have humility"*.

Liz went back to school to do a master degree "*later in life*". She had initially been trained as a journalist and while working as a court reporter she was privy to the inequitable treatment Aboriginal people experienced in the justice system. This inequity fueled her desire to change her career. Unlike Bob, Liz's program did not include cross-cultural training at all. She shared:

I went back to school,
and did my masters.
I worked with traumatized folk,
Child welfare work.
Mostly with children who were sexually abused,
Many were Aboriginal.
I did 5 years of fly-in to Aboriginal communities,
It really prepared me in a way no other experience could.
No multicultural training.
No Aboriginal models.
We lacked awareness.
We were not taught,
and had develop our own understanding.
Historical trauma did not exist.
At the time,
I wish I knew about residential schools.

It was:
Frontline work…
on the spot…
in the moment…
intense.

Liz's counsellor education program did not include Aboriginal models or cross-cultural education. When she came into the field, Liz said they were not taught about trauma, and had to develop their own understanding. Liz notes:

Anger
Betrayal,
Hurt,
Mistrust,
Pain,
Trauma.

These are what Canadian cultural practices have brought to Aboriginal people.
GENOCIDE.

Although she was never formally trained in dream work, Liz did a lot of training in Erickson based hypnosis. When working with clients she would use whatever resources they brought, and viewed the unconscious as a resource, rather than just an internal state. Liz shared that her clients would tell her "*incredible things"* because they believed she had an understanding of spiritual culture. This speaks to the challenges of not having training or guidance in practice. Liz was drawing on her own training, and luckily it resonated with some of her clients. Her clients also believed she had an understanding of their culture when she did not at that time. Liz had the ability to manage this misunderstanding without taking advantage of her clients, but this may not always be the case with non-Aboriginal counsellors.

Liz spoke of the importance of past work experiences, and says this was what prepared her for frontline work and the work she is doing now, rather than formal education. She said it was the hands-on experience that taught her how to work therapeutically with clients on the spot, and in the moment. When asked about anger or backlash from being non-Aboriginal Liz responds:

Being asked:
"Why can't white people leave us alone to heal?"

Calmly responding,
It's not just your healing,
It's all of ours…

The process is about everybody.

Discussion

The narrative threads that resonated across Bob and Liz's accounts are: (a) stories to live by, (b) humility, and (c) being called to the work. Stories to live by, as conceptualized by Connelly and Clandinin (2000) is a narrative term to help us understand the interconnectedness of knowledge, context and identity. It allows us to speak of the stories that each of us lives out and tells of who we are and who we are becoming. Stories to live by highlight the multiplicity of our lives; lives composed, lived out and told around multiple plotlines, overtime, in different relationships and on different landscapes (Clandinin, 2013, p. 53). Bob and Liz's experiences are embedded within live histories. Through engagement and involvement in an Aboriginal community, Bob's stories to live by morphed, shifted and changed over time. His identification as a "*premier redneck*" was challenged and redefined as a co-worker and ally. This shift occurred when he was taken outside of his comfort zone, placed in a challenging situation and forced to re-examine his preconceived notions and stereotypes. Bob's identity was

redefined through his "*reflection on issues of race, ethnicity, oppression, power, and privilege in his life.*"

Counsellors are expected to engage in self-reflective practice in order to cultivate self-awareness. This self-awareness entails "being cognizant of one's attitudes, beliefs, and values regarding race, ethnicity, and culture, along with one's awareness of the sociopolitical relevance of cultural group membership in terms of issues of cultural privilege, discrimination, and oppression" (Constantine et al., 2007, p.24) and is integral in providing culturally relevant service to diverse populations. Bob's reflective practice continued throughout his doctoral studies and while working in an urban youth education center. Although he took a single mandatory multicultural counselling course, Bob's self-reflection, awareness and examination of position of power and privilege occurred outside the classroom.

Although Liz did not have multicultural training as part of her counselling program, her reflective practice and self-awareness seemed to be cultivated in her youth and (re)examined in her early career experiences. Exposure to inequities and racism as a court reporter challenged her and fueled her desire to work with marginalized and disenfranchised populations. Working with remote Aboriginal communities, and working with traumatized children encouraged and perpetuated constant self-reflection and awareness of her identity as both a counsellor and a mother, as well as a Caucasian woman working with Aboriginal peoples. Liz also spoke of the impact that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission had in reexamining her relationship with Aboriginal family members, as well as redefining her identity as "*becoming a helpful person*" in the Aboriginal community. It is important to point out that self-awareness and reflection on

practice were critical in Liz's development as she did encounter ethical situations where she could have taken advantage of clients who thought she had cultural knowledge when she did not.

As a counsellor working with people from diverse populations, engaging in self-reflective practice is imperative. When a counsellor is not aware of their own beliefs, values and biases, they are not aware of how they might be affecting their practice. This unawareness can result in marginalization, discrimination, prejudice, stereotyping, engaging in racist, heterosexist, ablest and/or classist oppression, which can negatively impact others physical, emotional and psychological welfare (Jun, 2010). Self-awareness, a critical component of multicultural competency, requires examination of stories to live by; it involves critical reflection of race, ethnicity oppression and power as well as maintaining an ongoing awareness of how positions of power and privilege impact others. Through education and experience, awareness and critical reflection of identities, stories to live by as counsellors, are shaped, challenged and redefined over time. This in turn shapes counsellors identity by examining how they practice, how they collaborate with others, whether they question and challenge inequities or oppression, and how they cultivate and maintain reflective practice.

> Multicultural competence, when grounded in social justice, necessitates a commitment to praxis, "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it". Multicultural competence is most relevant to members of oppressed communities to the extent that it is grounded in a social justice agenda seeking to eradicate oppression. The work one engages in for social justice would occur not only when "being psychologists"; rather, such work would be required in the communities where one lives and works. This process of critical self-examination, when combined with an examination of social conditions and policies, ultimately leads to a personal and professional commitment to social change (Vera & Speight, 2003, p 270).

For Bob it was important to get *"comfortable with not knowing the answers and being able to tell the kids, the staff, whomever, that you don't know but you are open to figuring it out, and being educated."* Bob spoke of humility and embracing the idea that "*I don't know everything, I'm not the expert. I try to encourage my clients to fill me in on what they are going through, what's it like, and how they see it…Always be ready to be corrected, know you are not the expert, and always have humility.*" He shared the importance of learning about his clients and being able to ask others for help if needed. He argues collaboration with community members, healers, elders and other professionals is integral in providing culturally competent and effective services to diverse clients.

Working within a multicultural framework requires a commitment to cultural competence and a broad systemic conceptualization of clients (Kennedy & Arthur, 2014, p 194). Kennedy and Arthur (2014) point out:

> It has been suggested that counselling psychologists should work from a culturally responsive or multicultural framework that is grounded in a multisystemic perspective of client problems, including not only individual concerns but also the needs of groups or communities. More specifically, professionals would need to be active in addressing social injustices, inequalities, and oppression, taking action toward social change and attending to the needs of groups of people who experience oppression. This would also include advocating with or on behalf of clients, communities, and change programs, and empowering others to engage in self-advocacy, resist oppression, and make social change. (p.194).

Liz also spoke at length importance of "*being persistent, asking questions, not acting like a know-it-all, an never making assumptions"* as the best way to work together with clients. She acknowledged the importance of respecting Elders, and learning from traditional healers. Liz acknowledged that collaboration with other was important and this

sometimes necessitated expansion of professional activities beyond individual counselling such as utilizing indigenous healing methods, assessing community services and creating community level interventions.

In order to provide effective and culturally relevant services both Bob and Liz understood that at times they were required to step outside their roles to engage in advocacy, outreach, prevention programs, psycho-educational and other forms of community based intervention. Serving diverse populations includes collaborating with others and incorporating an infusion of multicultural competencies with social justice that encourage counsellors "to act as teacher, advocate, organizational consultant, social activist, and other roles designed to impact the systems of oppression that precipitate client distress and ill health" (Collins & Arthur, 2007, p 41).

Arthur and Collins (in press) argue that social justice is a fundamental value for supporting personal growth and human potential and state that counsellors need to be prepared with knowledge about social inequities and the potential impacts on people's health and well-being. They argue knowledge can be used as a powerful tool for action and that professionals need to be intentional about using their knowledge to promote social justice (p. 172).

Incorporating a social justice perspective by attending to stories of oppression and subjugation (Blue & Darou, 2005) was critical to Bob and Liz. Nuttgens and Campbell (2010) argue "mental illness is often entwined with the effects of poverty and racism and attributable to historical and current social injustices levied against Canada's Aboriginal people" (p. 124). Counselling practices need to include changing social conditions and focus beyond traditional paradigms of mental health care. Culturally relevant therapy is

needed to address issues of poverty, unemployment, racism, and injustice (Nuttgens & Campbell, 2010).

It is timely and relevant to examine issues of multicultural practice and social justice in the Canadian counselling profession. In 2015, The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada finished its six year operation mandated to "reveal to Canadians the complex truth about the history and the ongoing legacy of the church-run residential schools and guide" and "inspire a process of truth and healing, leading toward reconciliation" (p. 27). The Commission was required to hold seven national events; to gather documents and statements about residential schools and their legacy; to fund truth and reconciliation events at the community level; to recommend commemoration initiatives to the federal government for funding; to set up a research centre that will permanently house the Commission's records and documents, and to issue a report with recommendations (Honouring the truth, reconciling for the future: Summary of the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, p. 27).

According to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final report, the Commission received over 6,750 statements from survivors of residential schools, members of their families, and other individuals who wished to share their knowledge of the residential school system and its legacy. It also included numerous 'Calls to Action' to the federal, provincial, territorial and Aboriginal governments regarding child welfare, language and culture, health (including mental health), justice, professional development and training, education for reconciliation, and youth programs (pp. 183-210). Specific Calls to Action that may impact counsellor training, practice and research includes: A call for:

- sustainable funding for existing and new Aboriginal healing centres to address the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual harms caused by residential schools;
- people who can effect change within the Canadian health-care system to recognize the value of Aboriginal healing practices and use them in the treatment of Aboriginal patients in collaboration with Aboriginal healers and Elders where requested by Aboriginal patients;
- For all levels of government to provide cultural competency training for all health-care professionals (p. 210-212).

The call for action states that non-Aboriginal practitioners (counsellors etc.) must develop a better understanding of the health issues facing Canada's Aboriginal peoples including the legacy of residential schools in order to be more effective. This understanding will require education for counsellors (and other health professionals and practitioners) to include courses dealing with Aboriginal health issues (including the history and legacy of residential schools), and Indigenous teachings and practices. The report states nursing and medical training programs need to include skills-based training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights, and anti-racism. Given that both Bob and Liz did receive limited exposure during their educational programs it is important to also apply these recommendations to counsellor training programs.

Study Limitations

No one truth or finally story is provided by narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Caine, 2013). Narrative inquiry allows for an in-depth, and intimate study of individuals' experience over time and in the context of place, temporality and sociality. It is not meant to generalize findings. Bob and Liz have unique experiences that are not necessarily representative of all non-Aboriginal counsellors working with Aboriginal clients. Bob's early experiences living and working up north challenged his pre-existing stereotypes and racist upbringing. These 'revelations' working with Aboriginal people he experienced not

only influenced his academic research, but also impacted his employment choices, as well as the structure of his private practice. Liz has spent the past thirty years working with Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Although she has recently retired, her connections run deep throughout many communities across the country.

Conclusion

It is timely and relevant to examine issues of multicultural practice and social justice action in the Canadian counselling profession. As a result of colonialism and government policies aimed at assimilation, Aboriginal peoples in Canada have suffered from devastating effects of historical and cultural genocide, as well as intergenerational trauma. In Canada Aboriginal peoples experience a disproportionately higher amount of mental health issues (Allan & Smylie, 2015). In addition, many Aboriginal people view current mental health services as inaccessible and culturally insensitive (Nuttgens & Campbell, 2010). In this paper we show that it is important to understand non-Aboriginal counselling experiences across time, place, and diverse social contexts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). These experiences are embedded within life histories of people that raise questions about counsellor education and support. In order to provide effective and culturally relevant services counsellors may be required to step outside their traditional roles to include advocacy, outreach, prevention programs, psycho-educational and other forms of community based intervention.

Liz recommends that new counsellors "think outside the textbook" and look beyond the academic lens. Her shared experiences of frontline work exemplified the importance of hands on experience in the field. When asked about her role as a counsellor, Liz shares:

Ask questions,
Never make assumptions,
Every community is different,
Culture, and customs are different.
How children are taught,
And how spiritual beliefs are passed down
Differ in each community.

We have to be aware of not knowing,
This is the best way to enter.
Witness.
Become aware of what you carry,
Be aware of your attitude.
Don't think you know everything.
Textbooks will not transfer over to other setting!
Just show up,
Be there.
Presence.

It is imperative for helping professionals to become educated on Aboriginal culture, cross-cultural practices, as well as multicultural counselling theory, indigenous psychologies and social justice action.

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Chapter 5 Conclusion

In this final chapter of my thesis, I will look both backwards across the work I have done and forward to look at future possibilities. As I do this I will focus once more on my research puzzle, which allowed me to attend to the experiences of cross-cultural counsellors, working with Aboriginal peoples. Clandinin (2013) articulates that as researchers designing and living out narrative inquiries we must attend to the questions of "so what?" and "who cares?" in order to justify our work. She posits that there are three ways to answer these questions: personally, practically and socially (p.36). In this chapter I will build on the narrative threads and highlight the personal, practical and social significance of my study.

Looking Backward

Revisiting my narrative beginnings

Before the study began it was important for me to explore my stories and experiences of childhood and how these experiences were shaped by notions of race, gender, ability, whiteness, privilege, oppression, as well as attend to how I understood myself in relation to the stories of my participants and their life experiences. I was attentive to how my stories shifted over time, as my place and circumstances changed and I became cognizant of the fact that my participants' lives also transformed and shifted throughout the inquiry. I also became aware of the tensions and silent stories intertwined within our lives. Throughout the study, I reflected upon my education, training, competency, philosophy and future goals in both my personal and professional life.

> in the midst
> finding feminist and multicultural models
> to explore my white, female, heterosexual, fully able, middle class upbringing

i questioned my role
*how **would I/i not** perpetuate the white, male,*
post colonial, Euro-ethno-centric values

bumping up against assessment training
against formalistic and reductionist patterns
mandatory coursework

i wanted to shift ethnocentric ways of doing
how were others working across difference?
how did non-aboriginal counsellors work with aboriginal clients?

i have struggled with tensions regarding my place in this work
how could i conduct my inquiry in a respectful and honorable way

Coming alongside Liz and Bob has opened up new ways of understanding. Their shared experiences as well as silent stories reminded me of the complexity of people's lives. It made me wonder about the stories and experiences we chose to share, and the ones we keep to ourselves. Bob challenged me to delve into my family history of racism, something that I was ashamed of and kept silent. Liz encouraged me to "think outside the textbook" and look beyond the academic lens. Her shared experiences of frontline work exemplified the importance of hands on experience in the field. When asked about her role as a counsellor, Liz shares:

Ask questions,
Never make assumptions,
Every community is different,
Culture, and customs are different.
How children are taught,
And how spiritual beliefs are passed down
Differ in each community.

We have to be aware of not knowing,
This is the best way to enter.
Witness.
Become aware of what you carry,
Be aware of your attitude.
Don't think you know everything.

Textbooks will not transfer over to other setting!
Just show up,
Be there.
Presence.

Looking Forward

Re-imagining counselling practices

Liz and Bob were immersed in their counselling practice and each time I interacted with them I recall their energy and passion. At the same time, I too sensed from their experiences that this was and continuous to be incredibly difficult work – I am reminded of Liz's choice to leave counselling for now. Several of the conversations I had with Liz and Bob detailed their struggles in finding possibilities of counselling practices that were culturally congruent with their clients. Over the past two decades Canadian counsellors have been increasingly called upon to work with diverse client populations whose needs may not be met through traditional counselling models. Vera and Speight (2003) argue that the counselling profession's use of "white, middle-class models of human development and behavior" (p. 255) fail to represent the needs of historically disenfranchised communities.

When counselling Aboriginal people, France and colleagues (2004) argue, "the lack of understanding of the historical, political and social aspects of oppression and how it disrupts counselling practice has been one reason why counselling has not been as effective as it could be" (p. 2). McCormick (1996) articulates effective counselling with Aboriginal peoples cannot take place without knowledge and respect for an Aboriginal worldview and value system and successful counselling differs from Euro-American approaches. As my mind returns to Bob and Liz I too know that they have pointed out that the Aboriginal population is not homogenous, that there is incredible diversity.

Knowing how to work with and respond to this diversity requires an ongoing wakefulness and attentiveness. I too was reminded as Liz in particular showed how her understanding developed over time and with increasing experience, that the experiences of clients differ and reflect intergenerational differences, gender differences, as well as cultural differences. This much nuanced attentiveness to clients in cross cultural contexts is hard to learn and continuously shifts.

Multicultural counselling requires multidimensional thinking, tolerance for ambiguity and involves assigning equal importance to others' cultural values, beliefs, and respect for the ways of being and traditions of others. Jun (2010), argues that when a counsellor is not aware of their own beliefs, values and biases, they are not aware of how they might be affecting their client. This unawareness can result in marginalization, discrimination, prejudice, stereotyping, engaging in racist, heterosexist, ablest and/or classist oppression, which can negatively impact the client's physical, emotional and psychological welfare. Bob was very humble and he recalled his own learning and increasing awareness with humor and insight. The degree of self-reflexivity of both Bob and Liz was particularly striking.

Brown et al., (2014) posit that social justice is a fundamental value for supporting personal growth and human potential and state that counsellors need to be prepared with knowledge about social inequities and the potential impacts on people's health and well-being. They argue knowledge can be used as a powerful tool for action and that professionals need to be intentional about using their knowledge to promote social justice (p172).

As I lived alongside Liz and Bob I wondered how their experiences, as well as those of future counsellors might be shaped differently in the future. Even though it was not something they were explicitly taught, in order to provide effective and culturally relevant services both Bob and Liz understood that at times they were required to step outside their counsellor roles to engage in advocacy, outreach, prevention programs, psycho-educational and other forms of community based intervention. Liz and Bob also incorporated social justice action(s) in their counselling practices by attending to their clients stories of oppression and subjugation.

Future counsellors need to have a strong understanding of changing social conditions and focus beyond traditional paradigms of mental health care. Culturally relevant therapy is needed to address issues of poverty, unemployment, racism, and injustice (Nuttgens & Campbell, 2010). I wonder how multicultural competencies and social justice actions can be incorporated into future counsellor's training curricula. Given what I have learned from my own experiences, which resonated with Bob and Liz, future research needs to focus on developing educational contexts that further develops teaching and learning in this area. For now there appear significant gaps and a lack of evidence informed teaching practices.

Re-imaging social relations in counselling practices

Social actions and policy justifications form significant contributions to the theoretical justification of narrative inquiry. These include exploring the ways in which others understand the lives of people, challenging the value placed on lived experiences and making the silences, disruptions and complexities visible in people's experiences (Clandinin & Caine, 2013). Although narrative inquirers do not generalize from the

experiences of their participants, they do add to policy development by pointing out complexities, contradictions, and inconsistencies often inherent in policies and their implementation (Clandinin & Caine, 2013).

It is timely and relevant to examine issues of multicultural practice and social justice in the Canadian counselling profession. In 2015, The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada finished its six-year operation mandated to "reveal to Canadians the complex truth about the history and the ongoing legacy of the church-run residential schools and guide" and "inspire a process of truth and healing, leading toward reconciliation" (p. 27). The TRC's final report included numerous 'Calls to Action' to the federal, provincial, territorial and Aboriginal governments regarding child welfare, language and culture, health (including mental health), justice, professional development and training, education for reconciliation, and youth programs. All of the calls for action were significant and require a large national and local effort to shift education, practices, and most of all long standing relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples.

The TRC's final report calls for non-Aboriginal practitioners (including counsellors) to develop a better understanding of the health issues facing Canada's Aboriginal peoples. These health and social issues are deeply linked to the legacy of residential schools, these connections must be understood in order to develop more effective interventions and practices. This understanding will require education for counsellors (and other health professionals and practitioners) to include courses dealing with Aboriginal health issues (including the history and legacy of residential schools), and Indigenous teachings and practices.

Bob and Liz received limited multicultural training, and no social justice or community development education during their training programs. Through hands-on, lived experiences, Bob and Liz, as well as I, became aware of how important both multicultural competency and social justice awareness is in providing counselling to non-Aboriginal clients. The lack of training in comprehensive multicultural and social justice practices specifically to Aboriginal communities in many Canadian counsellor education programs raises the question of how non-Aboriginal counsellors provide culturally accessible and culturally relevant services to Aboriginal clients and communities.

Liz and Bob's shared stories also bring forth the question of whether there are adequate support systems for counsellors engaged in frontline work within Aboriginal communities. How does one tread lightly in a community, becoming a helping person, while attaining the emotional, cultural, and educational support necessary to help others?

I know now that it is important to understand non-Aboriginal counselling experiences across time, place, and diverse social contexts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). These experiences are embedded within life histories of people that raise questions about counsellor education and support. In order to provide effective and culturally relevant services counsellors may be required to step outside their traditional roles to include advocacy, outreach, prevention programs, psycho-educational and other forms of community-based intervention. It is imperative for helping professionals to become educated on Aboriginal culture, cross-cultural practices, as well as multicultural counselling theory, indigenous psychologies and social justice action. Future research needs to include Aboriginal voices, by client's sharing their stories and experiences of counselling with non-Aboriginal counsellors.

Conclusions

While the results of this study are not generalizable to all non-Aboriginal counsellors working with Aboriginal clients, it is important to consider the questions that were raised and the understanding that the experience of working with Aboriginal clients is different for everyone. It is an ongoing experience and not just one single session, interaction or moment in time. These experiences are also shaped by social, political, cultural, historical, familial, linguistic and economic contexts, and are shaped by the environments in which they occur.

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