

Do No Further Harm: Becoming a White Ally in Child Welfare Work with Aboriginal
Children, Families, and Communities

by

Grace H. Atkinson
BSW, Lakehead University, 1983

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Supervisory Committee

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Supervisory Committee

Dr. Jeannine Carrière, (School of Social Work)
Supervisor

Dr. Donna Jeffery, (School of Social Work)
Departmental Member

Abstract

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Supervisor

Dr. Donna Jeffery, (School of Social Work)

Departmental Member

The purpose of this thesis is to support White social workers who wish to become allies in their child welfare work with Aboriginal children, families, and communities. It is based on the premise that it is crucial for Aboriginal children to remain connected with their families, communities, and cultures. To this end White social workers need to consider practicing in a different way. Using the stories of five White social workers on their journey to become allies, this thesis identifies a process which can support other would-be White allies on their journey. An autoethnographical method informed by Critical Race Theory and White Racial and Social Development Models was used to create a thematic analysis of the journals of participating social workers. Five main themes emerged that contribute to a process others can use to guide their own journeys to becoming White allies in their practice.

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Chapter 1- Introduction

“If you are here to help me you are wasting your time but if you come because your liberation is bound up in mine then let us begin.”

Lilla Watson (1985), Aboriginal Activist

Introduction –Setting the context

This thesis grows out of the experiences, the learning and the desire to make meaning out a social work career dedicated to working with Aboriginal children, families, and communities. I wanted to understand why, when research clearly shows the critical importance of Aboriginal children maintaining connections to their families and communities, this does not always happen.

The title of this thesis: *Do No Further Harm: Becoming a White Ally in Child Welfare Work with Aboriginal Children, Families, and Communities* makes explicit two specific issues which are not often explored in a significant way within the social work milieu: that is linking social work practice with harmful outcomes; and linking them with the dynamics of the social worker’s race – specifically White. Implicit within the first issue “Do No Further Harm”, is the assertion that social workers may potentially cause harm in their work with Aboriginal children, families, and communities. Because no social worker intends to ‘do harm’, it is therefore important to provide the context to explore this. Blackstock (2005) reminds us that, “The belief that we know good, are good, and can instil good in others, is so ingrained in the social work fabric that there is little meaningful conversation about our potential to do harm” (p. 1).

Clearly harm is being done. Within the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) in British Columbia a full eighty-five percent of Aboriginal children in the care of the Ministry are residing in non-Aboriginal homes.¹ There is abundant and current research which shows that connecting Aboriginal children to their families and their communities leads to healthy outcomes. On the other hand, this research also shows that connections are being lost and harm is being done (see Arsenault, 2006; Bagley with Scully and Young, 1993; Carrière, 2007a; Carrière, 2007b; Crey and Fournier, 1997; Locust, 1998; Sinclair, 2007a; Sinclair, 2007b; Sindelar, 2004; Nuttgens, 2004; Richard, 2007, Timpson, 1995; Ward, 1984). So, how do social workers in the field of child welfare, working with Aboriginal families, become actively involved in making these connections happen, and do no further harm?

¹ MCFD Aboriginal children in care October 2009 report - See Appendix H for more information

The question that also needs to be asked is “what stands in the way?” Working across cultural and racial difference is challenging (see Goodman, 2001; Strega and Sohki Aski Esquao [Carrière], 2009; Kendall, 2006) and this must be acknowledged as a ‘given’ in the social work with Aboriginal communities. There are consequences and complications that emerge from this cross racial dynamic that demand to be examined courageously and meticulously. It is significant to note that most social workers and social work educators are White² and that most of the children in the care of the government are Aboriginal.³

As these weighty issues begin to be interrogated, the opportunity emerges to look at social work practice within child welfare with Aboriginal people with a new lens. This thesis intends to provide a lens that encourages the ongoing critical self reflection necessary if we desire to be meaningful change agents as social workers. This means contemplating the work in the context of cross racial difference. Becoming an ally to Aboriginal people (in the context of social work practice) means to acknowledge that race is important and has significance in this work.

Therefore this thesis, and the study which supports it, is premised on the following “givens”.

1. That it is crucial that Aboriginal children remain connected to their families and their communities
2. That social workers have a role in ensuring that Aboriginal children maintain these critical connections
3. That the dynamics of race, systemically and individually, impact the practice of child welfare practitioners
4. That critical self reflection is key

² “The most recent extant survey reveals that workers are 94 percent White; 80 percent female; 97 percent with English as their primary language...and only 2 percent Indigenous” (Fallon et al. in Strega and Sohki Aski Esquao [Carrière] 2009:10).

A brief look at the faculty lists on 3 BC Schools of Social Work websites indicate that approximately 74% are White, 12% are Aboriginal and 14% are other people of colour.

³ “...it is estimated that across Canada 38% of children in care...are Indigenous despite representing only 5 percent of the child population in Canada” (Strega and Sohki Aski Esquao [Carrière], 2009:9).

In British Columbia, 54.4 percent of the children in care are Indigenous. (MCFD March 2010 report)

The Thesis

This thesis describes a process of critical self reflection which supports social workers to become White allies in cross-racial work with Aboriginal people. In other words, it explores how practitioners come to understand the dynamics involved in preventing White social workers from maintaining the connection to family and community that is vital to the wellbeing of Aboriginal children.

This exploration involved the collecting of stories from social workers who were identified as White allies to generate the data for the study. From these stories emerged common themes that invited analysis in order to understand the process that White social workers undertake to become allies.

The Research Questions

Key research questions that arise when developing the process of becoming a White ally are:

- What is a White ally?
- What are the barriers?
- What are the theoretical frameworks that provide a foundation to help better understand the process?
- How do White social workers become allies in their child welfare work?

These questions address the heart of the matter. In keeping with Creswell (2008), I am stating “multiple research questions so that I can fully explore” (p. 122) the topic of becoming White allies in child welfare with Aboriginal children, families, and communities. By exploring these issues, this thesis provides a process for becoming an ally which could support others who see themselves on this same journey.

Positioning Myself

I will begin by acknowledging that I am a White visitor in the territory of the Hul'qa'minum and Sencoten speaking peoples and the Coast Salish Nations of Esquimalt, Songhees, Tsawout and the other communities on the Saanich Peninsula. I am deeply grateful to the Coast Salish people for allowing me to live, work, study and play on their traditional territories. It is important that I situate myself in this research, as my identity and experiences influenced my decision to pursue this research. My story, including my own experiences and journals from various time periods throughout my career, will be a part of this work as it would be impossible to separate myself from this research. (adapted from Aro, 2008, p. 3)

I am a White woman of Scottish descent who has had the privilege of working with and in Aboriginal communities, with Aboriginal children and families, for the greater part of 25 years. The roots of this work go back to a childhood formed by White supremacist⁴, elitist, ideology as well as the clandestine opportunities to play with Aboriginal children both on and off reserve in Anishinabe traditional territory in Northwestern Ontario.

In my practice in both Ontario and British Columbia I have had the honour of encountering many Aboriginal teachers who helped me along the road to becoming a White ally in child welfare work with Aboriginal peoples. These teachers came in many ages, sizes and colours but their common thread was their ability to patiently teach me about my own racism and how I, as both a White person and an anti-racist, continue to benefit from racism and the ongoing oppression of Aboriginal people in Canada. I am grateful to each of these teachers for their time and trust. This trust is reflected in the name I have been gifted with: 'Wa KeeinSka

⁴ As defined by Brayboy (2005): White supremacy refers to the idea that the established, European or western way of doing things has both moral and intellectual superiority over those things non-western...viewed as natural and legitimate and it is precisely through this naturalization that White supremacy derives its hegemonic power (p. 432).

White supremacy... is the backbone of the Canadian project of colonization and nation-building... as the power base of those who are historically granted white-skin privilege, its ideas underpin all aspects of the dominant culture, and it's social, political and economic structures. It is ultimately the source of both the ongoing brutal exclusion and subjugation of non-white people and an array of everyday and structural privileges of whites. (Wilmot, 2005, p. 22)

Weyan' or 'White Thunder Woman' given by the ancestors Stone Man and Morningstar Woman in a Yuwipi ceremony in 2007.

In this time, I have also witnessed a practice that is harmful to Aboriginal children, families and communities – not by people intent on doing harm but by well-intentioned social workers who fail to understand how completely entrenched they are in Canadian racist ideology with respect to Aboriginal people. This failure blinds workers to the fact that it is not the intention that counts – it is the result that counts. Along the way, I have also encountered other White workers who, like me, have made a firm commitment to do “no further harm” in our practice.

Note: I want to caution those readers who identify as First Nations, Métis, Inuit, Aboriginal or Indigenous that this study encompasses the struggles and triumphs of five White people's journeys to becoming allies in their child welfare practice with Aboriginal peoples. It can be difficult for Aboriginal people to read/hear about White people's struggle to understand and overcome the ongoing racism and oppression perpetrated on Canada's Indigenous peoples. I acknowledge that there is no comparison between our struggles and the pain experienced by Aboriginal peoples as a result of this racism and oppression. Your continued patience with us as we work through the layers is greatly appreciated.

Definitions

Aboriginal

I am intentionally using the word "Aboriginal" because it is a customary term used in social work context. The term "Aboriginal" in this thesis is defined according to the definition provided under Section 35 (2) of *The Constitution Act 1982* and includes First Nations⁵, Métis and Inuit peoples. While Aboriginal is still a colonially imposed term, and supports the discourse of the monolithic other, I use it since potential White allies could be working with any or all three of these different groups of people and this term will be familiar to them.

⁵ Although Section 35 (2) actually uses the word Indian, this is also a colonized term for the original inhabitants of this land and I will use the term preferred by the people with whom I have worked. First Nations and First Peoples are used interchangeably.

Indigenous

I have used the word Indigenous in reference to ideology as this encompasses what I understand to be traditional or ancestral knowledge passed from one generation to the next despite colonization. Indigenous ways of knowing and doing persists despite its domination by White ideology. (see Ermine, 1995; Graveline, 1998) The term Indigenous also distinguishes Indigenous peoples from other peoples of the world through their shared “struggle against the dispossessing and demeaning fact of colonization by foreign peoples” (Alfred and Corntassel, 2005, p. 598).

Indigenous Knowledge comprises a complex system of reciprocity that must be understood by the learner in order to maintain equilibrium within the world. Personal actions impact upon environment, and so there is a tremendous responsibility carried by the individual, and the community, that must be considered carefully before carrying out a particular action.⁶

An understanding of the nature of Indigenous ideology becomes critically important when, as a child protection social worker, you solicit help from the community to ‘keep an eye on’ a family whose children have been determined to be at risk of harm. I have come to understand and appreciate that such a request places both a moral and cultural responsibility upon that Auntie, Uncle, Brother, Sister, Elder, Grandmother, and/or Grandfather that transcends and supercedes any legal responsibility the social worker may have.

White/Whiteness

Whiteness is defined by Carter, Honeyford, McKaskle, Guthrie, Mahoney, & Carter (2007) as “a hegemonic system that perpetuates certain dominant ideologies about who receives power and privilege. Whiteness maintains itself in cultures through power dynamics within language, religion, class, race relations, sexual orientation, etc.” (p. 152). (see also Endres and Gould, 2009; Frankenberg, 1996; Levine-Rasky, 2000; Yee and Dumbrell, 2003)

Whiteness is entrenched in a system that confers advantages on White peoples and disadvantages on Aboriginal and other racialized peoples. Jensen (2005) supports this notion

⁶ There was no author given for these words that were downloaded December 15, 2008 from http://www.culturescope.ca/ev_en.php?ID=9529_201&ID2=DO_TOPIC#epistemology

when he writes, “virtually all white people have to face the fact that racism lurks in our hearts and minds as a result of being raised in a white-supremacist society” (p. 26).

Whiteness is problematic because of its power to control all aspects of life, regardless of colour. Yee and Dumbrill (2003) help us to understand this concept when they write, "To examine Whiteness is to identify how race shapes the lives of both White people and people of colour" (p. 100).

Ellsworth (1997) challenges us to think of Whiteness "as a practice; a form of property; a performance...a form of consciousness, a form of ignorance; something that gives us pleasure; something those of us who "are" white must unlearn..." and not as an identity (p. 264).

I capitalize White in this thesis not to privilege or make it dominant but to show that White is a race and not invisible. Using "white" only serves to enable White to continue to be lost. This is especially true when “Whiteness ” is not defined as a “colour”, but rather as an implicit and universal norm against which “people of colour” are defined and evaluated” (Jeffery, 2009, p. 54).

I use the term “White” as opposed to non-Aboriginal because I wish to include both heritage and ideology. There are practitioners who do not have White heritage but do have White ideology (for example, other racialized people from countries that have been colonized by White Europeans). Carter (n.d.) writes “whiteness can be seen to provide material and symbolic privilege to whites, those passing as white, and sometimes honorary whites.” (In Thompson, 2001:1) However, I will not be addressing times when White ideology informs the practice of racialized people. The focus of this study is on those White social workers, entrenched in White ideology, making the journey to practicing in a way that makes space available for the centering of Indigenous ideology.

Doing Harm

The term "doing harm to Aboriginal children" is used in this thesis. While there are certainly Aboriginal children who have suffered physical and sexual harm while in care, I am specifically referring to the Spiritual and cultural harm that results from practice that does not respect and honour the family, extended family, community, and cultural connections that bring meaning to the lives of Aboriginal children. The effect of this harm can be seen when Aboriginal youth refuse to participate in cultural events or to learn about their specific cultural identities. This harm is reflected in the confusion of Aboriginal children when they are raised in White

homes to think of themselves as White while simultaneously experiencing the racialization and racism specific to Aboriginal peoples in Canada. The opposite to "doing harm" is being culturally safe.⁷ That is ensuring that "while in care Aboriginal children maintain their inherent right to develop a positive cultural [and racial] identity" (MCFD Cultural Safety Agreement, p. 3). Providing culturally safe care involves workers' "acknowledgement of and attendance to a child's needs and cultural frames of reference" (Fulcher, 2002, p. 690) and examining "their own cultural realities and the attitudes they bring to each new person they encounter in practice" (Ramsden and Spoonley, 1993:163 in Fulcher, 1998, p. 701).

Race/Racism

While 'race' was originally used to describe an essential biological trait, the concept of race has evolved such that it is understood as a social construction with political and social ramifications (Jeffery, 2007). Essed (2002) discusses race as an "ideological construction with structural expressions":

"Race" is called an *ideological construction*, and not just a social construction, because the idea of "race" has never existed outside of a framework of group interest. As a nineteenth-century pseudoscientific theory, as well as in contemporary "popular" thinking, the notion of "race" is inherently part of a "model" of asymmetrically organized "races" in which Whites rank higher than "non-Whites." Furthermore racism is a *structure* because racial and ethnic dominance exists in and is reproduced by the system through the formulation and application of rules, laws, and regulations and through access to and the allocation of resources. Finally racism is a *process* because structures and ideologies do not exist outside the everyday practices through which they are created and confirmed. (p. 185 - italics in original)

For the purposes of this thesis, St. Denis (2007) reminds us that " race matters because members of society have internalized racist ideas about what skin colour tells us about the value and worth of a person or a group of people " (p. 1071). (see also Delgado and Stefancic (2001); Endres and Gould, 2009; Goldberg, 1993; Omi and Winant, 2002)

Like race, racism is also a social construct and complex process that many, including social workers, find uncomfortable to discuss. There are numerous definitions of racism and I

⁷ Cultural safety is a term "originally coined by Maori nurses which means there is no assault on a person's identity." (Williams, R., 1999:552)

Cultural safety... "enables a safe service to be defined by those who receive the service" (Nursing Council of New Zealand, 2002:8)

find Jensen's (2005) particularly relevant in light of how White to Aboriginal racism is performed in Canada:

Racism is typically distinguished from mere prejudice in terms of power. Prejudice – negative or hostile attitudes toward members of a group based on some shared trait, perceived or real – becomes racism when one group has the power to systematically deprive the members of another group of rights and privileges that should come with citizenship and/or being a human being. (p. 16)

There are also many categories of racism including: individual; systemic, institutional, reverse, everyday, common sense, structural, unintentional, etc. I will discuss a few of these below as they pertain to this thesis.

Everyday/Common Sense Racism

Essed (2002) and Furniss (1999) write about these terms as they relate to how racism becomes part of the expected, unquestioned, and normal practice by the dominant group. In North America, the dominant group position is still held by White people and thus everyday and common sense racism is perpetrated by White people onto Aboriginal and other racialized peoples. Essed writes:

Everyday racism is the integration of racism into everyday situations through practices that activate underlying power relations. This process must be seen as a continuum through which the integration of racism into everyday practices becomes part of the expected, of the unquestionable, and of what is seen as normal by the dominant group (p. 188).

Reverse Racism

Reverse racism is a term generally used to describe attitudes, behaviours, and policies which appear racially discriminatory in a manner which is contrary to a historical pattern of racial discrimination. This is believed to occur when a historically non-dominant race is perceived to benefit at the expense of the historically dominant race. As Nicoll (2004) states, "...the rhetoric of reverse racism...attempts to make victims out of the beneficiaries of Indigenous dispossession..." (item 36).

Said slightly differently, reverse racism is believed to occur when Whiteness becomes a "threatened status [and] whites feel that we are losing the privileges to which we are entitled" (Thompson, 2001, p. 2). In Canada this claim generally occurs when anti-racism and equity

policies are perceived to be oppressing or excluding White people (Henry and Tator, 2006). However, Cazenave and Maddern (2000) remind us that:

Racism is not color blind. Racism in...most modern societies is a system of color supremacy. Color matters and the color that matters most is the color white. Consequently, in such societies racism cannot be understood without understanding whiteness. As we have noted, racism is systemic. Systemic racism is, in fact, white racism. Indeed, one way of defining white racism is the organization of white racial identity in the attainment of white racial privilege. Unfortunately the vastness of whiteness has rendered it largely invisible in much the same way that the pervasiveness of water may reduce its visibility to the fish that inhabit it. (p. 43)

For the purposes of this thesis, White people cannot be victims of racism by Aboriginal people. Aboriginal people do not have any power in Canada to oppress White people; to deny their rights; to remove their children; and to destroy their language and culture. As Boler (1999) writes “to teach that racism hurts us all does not adequately address power inequities” (p 130).

Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is based on an autoethnography of my experience of becoming an ally in conjunction with the stories of four other social workers on similar journeys.

In Chapter 2, I have provided a review of the literature as it pertains to becoming an ally; the theoretical frameworks that I posit help to understand the process of becoming an ally; and the barriers that can prevent or present challenges to becoming an ally. This review includes an overview of the literature and research pertaining to White and racial justice allies; a brief history of social work with Aboriginal peoples; and a discussion of racism, including unintentional and democratic racism. There is an extensive overview of Critical Race Theory and Racial and Social Identity Theory.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology and method used to conduct this research. An overview of autoethnographical narrative is provided with a description of the participants, the process by which they were recruited, and a synopsis of the data gathering and analysis process used.

Chapter 4 provides the journeys of the five participants, including myself, who contributed to the study and provided the lens that deepens our understanding of the culture of social workers who become allies.

Chapter five presents the findings from the analysis and interpretation of the data provided. Five overarching themes emerged including: Relationships, Personal Journey, Professional Journey, Racism/Discrimination/Reverse Racism, and White Ally Potential. While the analysis is in keeping with an autoethnographic approach, including the stories of four other social workers required that other qualitative and narrative processes be employed as a means of managing the volume of the data provided by the participants.

Chapter 6 provides a summary of the process involved in becoming an ally including how social workers become White allies, the theoretical frameworks that guide our understanding of this process, and the barriers that workers need to work through on their journeys to becoming allies.

Chapter 2: The Study

The Purpose of the Study

This study contributes to the literature generated by White social workers who are becoming allies with Aboriginal peoples in the field of child welfare. At its most fundamental, this means supporting Aboriginal children in maintaining those critical connections with their families, extended families, communities, and cultures in such a way that harm is reduced.

What is it that keeps social workers in a practice that severs those critical connections Aboriginal children in care need for successfully negotiating their racial and cultural identities as they grow up away from family, extended family, community, and culture? A review of the legislation, standards, and policy that govern child welfare work in British Columbia clearly shows provincial support for ending the practice of assimilating Aboriginal peoples through the removal of their children and supporting children to maintain connections with family, extended family, community, and culture.⁸ Despite this, the percentage of Aboriginal children in care continues to rise while the percentage of non-Aboriginal children in care declines⁹. Children are taken from their familial and cultural contexts and not provided with opportunities to participate, in a meaningful way, in their culture. Teams of predominantly non-Aboriginal social workers who work exclusively with Aboriginal peoples are being created with insufficient resources and often little or no consideration given to their ability/willingness to be allies. Finally, social workers continue to deny access for children to the people who provide them with a sense of belonging.

The topic of the harm done to Aboriginal children and families in Canada is a sensitive issue that many Canadian people are reluctant to talk about. It is especially difficult for social workers, who see themselves as well-intentioned and well-meaning people, to discuss the role that members of the social work profession have played in this harm perpetrated in the ‘best interests’ of Aboriginal children. Blackstock (2005) refers to this dynamic as “The Occasional Evil of Angels”, an article describing the harm that has been done by well-intentioned social

⁸ See Appendix H for an overview of the *Child, Family, Community Service Act* and the Child and Family Development Service Standards.

⁹ The Ministry’s quarterly reports show that the number of Aboriginal children in care in British Columbia has risen from 48% in 2005 to the current 54.4%. This represents 4,643 of the 8,528 total children in care in British Columbia as of March 2010.

workers. This is summed up in Graveline (1998) by one student, Mac, who, in courageously examining his own reluctance to examine or discuss this ‘dark’ side of the social work profession, wrote:

There is no line in the sand that, once crossed, means that you are culturally sensitive. You cannot be sure how you’ll act when you only deal with issues on an intellectual level. What about when it hits you in the face. What about when you have to take a stand. What is the point of proclaiming oneself racist but well intentioned? (p. 103)

Young (1990) also writes about the consequences of well-meaning people in her discussion of oppression:

Oppression is structural...the causes are embedded in unquestioned norms, habits and symbols, in the assumptions underlying institutional rules and the collective consequences of following those rules...Oppression refers to...the vast and deep injustices some groups suffer as a consequence of often unconscious assumptions and reactions of well-meaning people. For every oppressed group there is a group that is *privileged* (emphasis in original) in relation to that group (pp. 41-42).

As Young writes, “privilege depends on the continued oppression of others” (p. 185) and this concept is understood by those striving to be allies. Moving past the resistance to discussing and examining the ‘dark side’ of child welfare practice and by using the privilege to which Young refers we are provided with the potential for catalytic validity which is worth the price that I, and the participants, might have to pay¹⁰ for having participated in this research.

Setting the Context: Literature Review

Introduction

There is a plethora of literature that discusses the impact of colonization and imposition of White ideology on the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island¹¹, now known as North America. (see Adams, 1999; Churchill, 1998; Furniss, 1999; Lawrence, 2004; Loomba, 1998). Therefore, this study accepts the impact of colonization as a given.

¹⁰ Based on my experience with becoming a White ally, the price paid is the loss of personal and professional relationships and opportunities. Allying with Aboriginal people in Canada alienates one from White friends, colleagues and family members.

¹¹ For many Aboriginal peoples, North America is called Turtle Island “partly because the geographic outlines of the continent resemble the outlines of a great turtle swimming to the northeast. On a deeper level, however, the turtle is a central figure in a number of Aboriginal creation stories” (Hall, 2005, p. 100).

There is a growing body of research and literature regarding the harmful outcomes experienced by Aboriginal children who are raised away from their family, community, and cultural contexts in the homes of people who ascribe to a White ideology (see Arsenault, 2007; Carrière, 2007b; Sinclair, 2007b; Nuttgens, 2004; Sindelar, 2007; Timpson, 1995; Ward, 1984). This is also a given for this study.

This literature review is comprised of four sections using the research questions as a guide: What is a White ally? What are the barriers? What are the theoretical frameworks that provide a foundation to help better understand the process? How do White social workers become allies in their child welfare work?

What is a White ally?

White and Racial Justice Ally Literature

Bishop (2002) defines an ally as “a member of an oppressor group who works to end a form of oppression which gives her or him privilege. For example, a white person who works to end racism or a man who works to end sexism” (p. 152). Adams, Bell and Griffin (2007) have a similar definition, “An ally is a member of the advantaged social group who takes a stand against social injustice directed at targeted groups. An ally works to be an agent of social change rather than an agent of oppression” (Appendix 6G).

The literature on White allies that comes from the United States including Frankenberg, 1996; hooks, 2003; Jensen, 2005; Leonardo, 2004 and Tatum, 1994 does not refer specifically to social work practice. The literature from Canada (Bishop, 2002; Bishop, 2005; Clarke, 2003; Dumbrill and Maiter, 1996; Jeffery, 2005; Moran, 1992; Razack, 2002; Strega, 2007; Wilmot, 2005) does discuss the steps social workers and others can take to either become allies or be anti-oppressive in their practice. However, very few address the deeply embedded roots of White colonial ideology and how it is manifested in practice with Aboriginal peoples specifically. There is much about practice with other racialized people in the literature but it does not address the unique relationship of White Canadians with Aboriginal peoples.

Bishop (2002) writes about becoming an ally and outlines an eighteen step process that includes understanding that the roots of oppression run deep and that one person won't change the system, just what they do within it. Bishop's work has been useful in helping to contextualize the participants' experiences of avoiding or working through the roles that Bishop terms the

‘backlasher’ (those who deny the existence of racism while making racist statements...) and the ‘guilty’ (those who personalize the issue and become defensive and paralyzed) to becoming an ally (use any opportunity to learn more and then act on what they learn) during the process of unlearning racism (p. 109).

Tatum (1994) makes the argument that “the role of the ally is to speak up against systems of oppression and to challenge other whites to do the same” (p. 474). Goodman’s (2001) perspective is that allies “make intentional choices to support or work for the rights of those from disadvantaged groups of which they are not a part” (p.164).

White social workers do need to be able to find support from other White social workers who are becoming allies in their practice with Aboriginal peoples so they “no longer rely on people of color to define Whiteness for them or to validate for them their ‘nonracist’ status” (Helms:1992:87-88 in Thompson, 2003, p. 14). Tatum (1994) also says that, ““allies need allies”, others who will support their efforts to swim against the tide of cultural and institutional racism” (p. 472). Tatum discusses the search for White allies using Janet Helms’ (1993) White Racial Identity Development Model. Tatum describes her use of the model with respect to teaching White students about racism and makes the point that there are few well-known White anti-racist role models about whom her students can study. Both Helm’s model and Tatum’s interpretation of that model have been beneficial in providing a framework for understanding the journey that allies experience.

The literature regarding racial justice allies (see Adams, Bell and Griffin, 2007; Goodman, 2001; Kendall, 2006, Kivel, 2002) discuss the tensions and resistance associated with teaching White students, teachers, and counsellors about racism and cross-racial dynamics.

What is important for social workers to take from this racial justice literature is that:

Because the dominant ideology is embedded in our institutional practices and individual consciousness, for oppression to continue we just need to act as usual, to go along with the status quo. It does not require malice or bad intentions to perpetuate systems of domination. (Goodman, 2001, p. 16)

I believe understanding this is critically important for those workers who take exception to being called ‘racist’ when they believe they are treating people fairly. As Kivel (2002) writes, “racism is caused by the attitudes, behaviours, practices, and institutions of White people...we cannot

justify retaining the benefits of being White without taking responsibility for perpetuating racism” (p. 49). Christensen (1995) links this to practice when she writes:

Anti-racist [social work] practice suggests the [social worker] acknowledges a) growing up in a racist society, b) racism’s effects on herself and on client populations, c) that she may not be competent to deal with the effects without additional training. (p. 214)

Therefore the literature regarding White and racial justice allies makes it clear that becoming an ally requires a courageous examination of how White social workers are complicit in, and the ways they benefit from, racism. Changes to status quo cannot happen without such courageous conversations.

What are the barriers?

History of Social Work with Aboriginal peoples

Aboriginal peoples have had a long and arduous history with White, European settlers whose ‘well-intentioned’ interventions have resulted in some of the most horrific experiences for Aboriginal peoples in Canada. The historical atrocities committed since contact are well documented and I feel no need to repeat those here. The portion of history covered in this MSW thesis is the period that spans the last 40 plus years. This includes the “60’s scoop” (Johnson, 1983) and the ongoing damage being perpetrated upon Aboriginal peoples through the child welfare system. (Blackstock, 2005; Crey and Fournier, 1997; Crichlow, 2002; Kimelman, 1985; Richard, 2007)

A number of authors have written about social work history with Aboriginal peoples (Blackstock, 2005; Crey and Fournier, 1997; Crichlow, 2002; Timpson, 1995). It is a long indictment of a profession that places itself in a helping role. For example, Blackstock (2005) writes, “Even social work, which purports a social justice mandate, demonstrated very limited activism regarding residential schools....In fact, social workers were active participants in the placement of Aboriginal children in the residential schools as late as the 1960’s” (p. 10) ... and, “child welfare placements accounted for over 80% of the admissions in six residential schools in Saskatchewan” (Caldwell, 1967 in Blackstock, 2005, p. 25). Crichlow (2002) writes “The child welfare system, in its application to Aboriginal peoples has been an exercise in cultural genocide and racism...an extension of the *Indian Act*...in essence the new Western colonization disease” (p. 92). It was important to know whether or not having the opportunity to learn about and gain

an understanding of this historical context contributes to social workers becoming allies. The data shows it does and I will discuss this in more depth in the findings section.

Racism

I find this to be the best use of this term to describe the treatment of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Racism takes many forms. For the individual, it can take the form associated with acts of extreme White supremacy, of cross-burning, and white sheets. It can also take the form of unintentional racism which Ridley (2005) defines as:

Perhaps the most insidious form of racial victimization. Unintentional racists are unaware of the harmful consequences of their behaviour. They may be well-intentioned, and, on the surface, their behaviour may appear to be responsible. Because individuals, groups and institutions engaging in unintentional racism do not wish to do harm, it is often difficult to get them to see themselves as racist. They are likely to deny their racism...cloaked in their sincerity and desire to do good, unintentional racists often do some of the greatest harm. (p. 39)

Using Kim's (1999) *contempt matrix*, which places racism on a continuum from unexceptional to extreme, we could put unintentional racism at the unexceptional end of the continuum. This has left me willing to risk advancing the premise that most White social workers who are not in the process of becoming allies would fall into the unexceptional racism section of Kim's matrix. This does not imply that unintentional racism is not harmful.

This is supported by Furniss (1999) who states that,

The casualness with which many Euro-Canadians denounce Aboriginal people, and the ease with which they deny Aboriginal people their full dignity, humanity, social worth, and individuality, are two of the most disturbing indicators of how fully racist beliefs and practices have infiltrated the common-sense, lived reality of the non-Aboriginal population. (p. 117)

Another form of individual racism that I believe many social workers in British Columbia are prone to exhibit is known as 'aversive racism' (Kovel, 1970 in Henry and Tator, 2006, p. 21). According to the definition, aversive racists "consider themselves prejudice-free, but attempt to avoid contact with [Aboriginal peoples]" (Gaertner and Dovidio, 1986 in Henry et al, 2006, p. 21)

Tatum (1997) provides another way of viewing aversive racism that she describes as a subtle but pervasive form of racism – e.g. White opposition to affirmative action. Tatum writes

that aversive racists see themselves as non prejudicial and racially tolerant and generally do not behave in overtly racist ways. This type of racism is demonstrated in situations where ‘doing the right thing’ is not clear and the ‘Whites are better’ bias shows up.

Aversive racism may also explain why some social workers who desire to be allies find relationship building with Aboriginal people to be difficult, thus preventing some from negotiating the latter stages of the social and White racial identity models discussed below.

Democratic racism

The concept of democratic racism helps us understand how racism manifests itself at both the individual and institution levels. Henry and Tator (2006) write that democratic racism “is the justification of the inherent conflict between the egalitarian values of liberalism, justice and fairness, and the racist ideologies reflected in the collective mass belief system as well as the racist attitudes, perception and assumptions of individuals” (p.19). Knowing that racist attitudes are no longer socially acceptable, Canadians have “developed the ideology of democratic racism – a set of justificatory arguments and mechanisms that permit these contradictory ideologies to coexist. Democratic racism therefore, results from the retention of racist beliefs and behaviours in a “democratic” society” (p. 19).

In writing about democratic racism as racist discourse, Henry and Tator (2006) write of the frame of reference Canadians have that sustains racist beliefs. They write,

Democratic racism as a racist discourse begins in the families that nurture us, the communities that socialize us, the schools and universities that educate us, the media that communicate ideas and images to us, and the popular culture that entertains us. (p. 23)

Henry and Tator (2006) outline 12 discourses of democratic racism which are globally applicable in Canada. These are the Discourses of: denial; political correctness; colour-blindness; equal opportunity; blame the victim; White victimization; reverse racism; binary polarization; moral panic; multiculturalism; liberal values; and national identity. Henry and Tator add an additional two discourses that are specific to Aboriginal people. These are the Discourses of: paternalism and the monolithic other. A more comprehensive description of each discourse is provided in Appendix I. To briefly describe a few of them here, the discourse of denial is generally put forward to show that Canada is not like the United States with respect to racism. Few Canadians have an understanding of the systemic nature of racism and how it is played out in Canadian institutions. The discourse of colour-blindness is generally used to deny that race

could be a factor at play in a given situation. For example, a company that insists it takes a colour-blind position with respect to hiring but has few non-White staff or a social worker who claims to treat all children in care the same. Injustice is maintained since the acknowledgement of “systematic inequities in power and privilege” are avoided (Goodman, 2001, p. 55). The discourse of reverse racism is used to deny that it is only White people who have the power to be racist in Canada. A White person who experiences discrimination from an Aboriginal person or other person of colour will insist that the ‘other’ has been racist towards him/her. The discourse of multiculturalism is used to show that Canada tolerates difference and ‘allows’ immigrants to maintain their uniqueness. What is not tolerated, though, is anything that reminds us of that uniqueness like an accent or the smell of the food. This discourse also denies Aboriginal people their unique position as the First Peoples of this country and the fact that White is also an immigrant group that has been tolerated here.

With respect to the final two discourses, the discourse of paternalism stems from a long-held belief that Aboriginal peoples were primitive and uncivilized when White Europeans first ‘discovered’ them. The sophisticated systems of governance, political structure, legal system, commerce, trade, language, culture, education, justice, child welfare, and environmentalism were ignored, disrupted and replaced with ‘superior’ European systems. The discourse of the monolithic other serves to deny the uniqueness of Canada’s Indigenous peoples so that all are treated ‘equally’. For example, ‘Indian’ is the term used to define anyone who is eligible for status under the Indian Act. This does not provide for any of the differences or uniqueness of the cultural groups to which these ‘Indians’ belong – e.g. Nisga’a, Cree, Mi’qmaq. ‘Inuit’ is used to define anyone living in Canada’s arctic regions with no recognition of the uniqueness of the Innu or Inuvialuit who also occupy those areas. The term ‘Aboriginal’ lumps First Nations, Métis and Inuit together into one category as though their political, linguistic, economic, governance, etc issues were the same.

The concept of Democratic racism may be new to many and is very complex. However, understanding it is critical to this study because of it can interfere with social workers’ ability to choose to become allies.

What are the theoretical frameworks that provide a foundation to help better understand the process?

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) puts race at the center of critical analysis and describes the relationship between ostensibly race-neutral ideals and the structure of white supremacy and racism (Deyhle, Parker and Villenas, 1999 in Nuenke, 2004). A review of the literature on Critical Race Theory reveals a number of books and articles about the roots of CRT in law (see Aylward, 1999; Delgado and Stefancic, 2001; Solorzano, 1998; Williams, P., 1999) and how CRT is being used in education (see Brayboy, 2005; Ladson-Billings and Tate, 1995; Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado and Crenshaw, 1993). Although I have found limited literature on CRT and social work (Jeffery, 2005; Razack and Jeffery, 2002), I have found nothing written specifically about CRT and child welfare or CRT and child welfare with Aboriginal peoples. However, CRT does inform my methodology. As Brayboy (2005) explains:

While CRT centers race and racism, it also focuses on other areas of subordination. Solorzano (1998) writes, “Although race and racism are at the center of a critical race analysis, they are also viewed at their intersection with other forms of subordination such as gender and class discrimination (p. 122). CRT values experiential knowledge as a way to inform thinking and research. As a result, narrative accounts and testimonies are valued as key sources of data by CRT scholars. (p. 428)

This theory also provides information to help us better understand how racism is embedded in the behaviour of White individuals and the operations of White institutions. Aylward (1999) writes that “CRT attempts to expose the ordinariness of racism and to validate the experiences of [Aboriginal peoples]” (p. 35). Although Aylward is writing specifically about the experiences of people of colour, I have inserted Aboriginal peoples into the quote chosen to illustrate my belief that it is this very ingrained, unconscious, unintentional racism that exists in most White Canadians that lurks in the minds and hearts of well-meaning, well-intentioned White social workers. As Aylward states, “In Canada today, discrimination and racism exist in subtle and systemic forms and are concealed in systems, practices, policies and laws that may appear neutral on their face but have a serious detrimental effect on [Aboriginal] people...” (p. 12). This is supported by Adams (1999) who writes, “White people do not have an awareness of themselves as standard bearers for the racist culture of mainstream society. It is taken for granted and without any sensitivity” (p. 1).

From both instructing in and supervising the Cultural Awareness Training (CAT)¹² program through the Caring for First Nations Children Society, I have noticed that many White social workers are unable to resolve the dichotomy between the social work ethic of ‘do no harm’ and the fact that they are doing harm by virtue of refusing to examine their complicity with the racism that exists in the institution of child welfare with Aboriginal peoples. The level of resistance by participants and backlash towards the instructors, particularly the Aboriginal instructors, was testimony to this. As Ward (2003) writes, “Even though social workers continue to reproduce the same kinds of practice that racialize and oppress the clients, they do not see themselves as racist” (p. 39). Ward is writing about the dangers of demonizing the few social workers who exhibit overt racism in their practice as this tends to provide those, whose racism is not so obvious, a way to “determine their own actions as minimal in comparison” (p. 42) .

Perhaps Ross (2002) states this best in his writing about the unbearable Whiteness of being:

...right thinking Whites...we reject the tenets of racism...the problem for us...is that we are still racists at the unconscious level. Having been taught the precepts of racism for so long and from so many sources, we cannot slough off all that teaching. For us, it is something like a nasty habit or mannerism, something of which we are often unaware. When we catch ourselves acting in accordance with the racist teachings that lurk in our unconsciousness, we instantly amend our behaviour or judgment accordingly. When we fail to catch ourselves, we act out the racism. (p. 253)

It is this "Whiteness of being" that supports the stereotypes about Aboriginal peoples that are deeply ingrained in those who occupy a ‘White settler’ space. As Henry and Tator (2006) have outlined in the discourses of democratic racism, messages received from parents, teachers and media, that position White people as dominant and Aboriginal peoples as subordinate, are taught from birth. Although writing about social workers’ attitudes towards gay and lesbian clients, Brogatzki, Duggan, Foster, Levie and Trotter (2006) state this perfectly, “history influences people’s beliefs and understanding and forms part of their formal and informal education; a whole array of accepted ‘truths’ and collective ‘wisdom’ are ‘inherited’ from the past – much of which may later be ‘un-learnt’ as people get older” (p. 370).

¹² CAT or Cultural Awareness Training is short for Culture, Context and Agency Practice – a training program provided to Ministry of Children and Families staff by the Caring for First Nations Children Society from 2002-2008.

Brayboy (2005) writes about a variation of CRT that he terms TribalCrit in which he identifies colonization as the “primary tenet endemic in society while also acknowledging the role played by racism” (p. 430). It becomes increasingly difficult to interpret the actions of White child protection social workers as well-intentioned when the result of the work is clearly an extension of the colonial agenda, “rooted in imperialism and White supremacy” (Brayboy, p. 431) and intent on assimilating Aboriginal peoples into the Canadian fabric.

Of social work and critical race theory Razack (2002) writes:

...race is notably absent in social work theory. Critical race theory for the profession has not been discussed and race is subsumed within explications of multiculturalism, diversity, difference, anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive paradigms. Critical race theory for social work is therefore essential to understand race and oppression. (p. 25)

Nelson and McPherson (2003) further this discussion when they write about social work practice:

While race is a part of everyone’s identity, there is a total silence on a discussion of the White race. There are no chapters in any of the textbooks on either Western culture or White culture. White is not deemed to be a category. White is not recognized as a race, ethnicity, and/or culture. Through this omission, White is the invisible, unspoken, and implicit standard by which all the other categories are judged. (p. 87)

When linked with Ridley’s (2005) concept of unintentional racism, CRT helps us better understand what traps social workers in a practice that is contrary to social work ethics.

Chrisjohn, Young and Maraun (2006) state this concept in a different way when they write, “...the engine of genocide by cultural obliteration does not require demons in human shape to make it work; adherence of Euro-Canadians to a pervasive but unstated ideology is enough to assure their participation...” (p. 72).

Critical Race Theory has the potential to assist allies in changing the way colleagues think about Aboriginal peoples (Brayboy, 2005, p. 442). It can also link racism with practice by helping to explain the continual rise in the numbers of Aboriginal children in care.

Critical White Studies (CWS) have become an outgrowth or next step in critical race theory (see Akom, 2008; Delgado and Stephancic, 1997) and can also provide social workers with a framework for understanding the journey to becoming an ally. Whiteness theories provide a means for examining one’s Whiteness. Thompson (2001) divides the theories into 4 categories:

Material theories, which are more concerned with systemic racism, “ask how whites as a group come to enjoy privileged access to tangible goods” (p. 2); Discursive theories “analyze ways in which language, mass media, discourses, and symbols organize meaning so that whiteness is framed as both the preferred and the normal state of being” (p. 2); Institutional theories “focus on how regulations or codes privilege a certain discourse, culture, or value system” (p. 3) and on “the maintenance of a system of symbolic privilege through exclusionary practices” (p. 2); and Person/relational (or psychological or identity) theories “address the ways in which white privileging mechanisms find a home in our relationships, our sense of self, and our assumptions about growth, morality, and decency” (p. 3).

Critically interrogating one’s Whiteness becomes a piece of work that White allies must undertake as they come to understand their own racial identity development. The discussion on racial and social identity models to follow provides a means of beginning this critical interrogation. Having social workers focus on this too early, though, may serve to keep them from considering the impact of their Whiteness on the Aboriginal people they work with. I have found in my work that workers are more receptive to exploring their Whiteness only after they have been able to establish a sense of empathy (which emphasizes understanding) and compassion for Aboriginal peoples. Goodman (2001) supports this as a strategy when she writes, “Being empathic, or taking the perspective of another person and imagining how that person is affected by his or her plight, can be useful for promoting more positive attitudes and inspiring action” (p. 126). Understanding CRT means understanding race and oppression from multiple perspectives and critical for establishing this sense of empathy and compassion.

The purpose of theory is to understand reality. The reality is that there are few theoretical frameworks that join race and racism to White and Aboriginal experiences. The role of voice is central to critical race theory (CRT) and, when used in law and education, provides a “context for understanding feelings and experiences, interpreting myths and misconceptions, deconstructing beliefs and commonsense understanding regarding race...that renders the voices of the marginalized group members mute” (Williams, P., 1999; Bell, 1992 in Henry and Tator, 2006, p. 39). Critical race theory thus provides an important space in which to deconstruct race. Because CRT has traditionally been a space for those who are marginalized by race, it can also be a theory that provides context for allies to further understand the dynamics of race. Applying CRT in this way is not to co-opt the experience of people who are oppressed, but rather to

provide a tool for White allies to help better understand their place in the middle ground between Aboriginal and White people. By viewing CRT this way - as a first step of understanding - allies are then able to make better meaning out of other frameworks or theories such as Critical White Studies (CWS), that situate Whiteness at its core of learning. By expanding and broadening CRT to make room for this additional analysis, it creates opportunities for understanding potential roles of allies.

Tatum (1992) provides a means for understanding that we cannot be blamed for learning what we were taught as children but that "as adults, we have a responsibility to try to identify and interrupt the cycle of oppression. When we recognize that we have been misinformed, we have a responsibility to seek out more accurate information and to adjust our behaviour accordingly" (p. 4). Critical Race Theory and Critical White Studies are both theories that can help us learn that White is a race and that Whiteness is central to racist ideology.

Racial and Social Identity Development Models

As discussed, once the requisite empathy and compassion has been established, understanding racial identity development becomes an important next step in understanding Whiteness and its impact on Aboriginal peoples. This occurs when White people start to look at their identity in and of itself and not in comparison to other racialized peoples. (Hardiman, 1982, p. 194)

Social identity development "gives us insight into how people make meaning of their social identities and social reality" (Goodman, 2001, p. 53). It is a psychosocial process of change in the ways that people think about their own social-group membership, other social groups, and social oppression. (Goodman, 2001)

Racial identity development models emerged following the Civil Rights movement in the United States starting with the work of Cross in 1971 and "originally developed primarily for African Americans to understand the black experience in the United States" (Chávez, Guido-DiBrito, and Mallory, 1999, p. 39). White racial identity development models started to emerge in the 1980's beginning with the work of Hardiman (1982). Hardiman found that "studies in social development focus[ed] on socially 'deviant' or 'minority' groups (i.e. racially oppressed people, religious minorities or cults, homosexuals) not on dominant groups or groups that constitute the norm in any given society" (1982, p. 3). Hardiman goes on to say that, "this lack of attention on

the dominant group produces a situation where there is a fairly well-developed understanding of the victims of racism and how it disables them but very little understanding of the perpetrators and beneficiaries of racism” (p. 3).

Hardiman (1982) proposed a White Identity Development Model that describes a “process of racial identity development in White Americans as they become conscious of White racism and their Whiteness” (p. 7). This model suggests that “Whites are socialized into a racial identity that is based on racism...” which one can resist or reject (p. 207). Helms (1993) developed a White Racial Identity Development Model that “presupposes the existence of white superiority and individual, cultural, and institutional racism” and discusses what “would describe an intersection between racial perceptions of others (racism) and racial perception of self (racial development)” (in Chavez and Guido-DiBrito, 1999, p. 39). White racial identity development models help us to “understand the process of racial awareness for White people” (Goodman, 2001, p. 54)

In her discussion of Helms (1990, 1992, and 1995) White Racial Identity Development Model and Hardiman & Jackson’s (1997) Social Identity Development Model, Goodman (2001) writes:

Both models suggest that people from privileged groups begin with acceptance (conscious or unconscious) of the dominant culture’s ideology that justifies the dominance of their own group. They tend to be ignorant about institutionalized oppression and privilege. Some individuals then move to questioning and resisting this worldview and structure of social relations. They begin to explore and act against oppressive attitudes and practices. Some people develop the need to create a new sense of dominant identity that affirms their own as well as other’s cultural groups. Finally, this new sense of self and social reality is internalized. (p. 54)

One of the risks implicit in White racial identity models is the keeping of White in the centre. Thompson (2003) argues that “the entire white identity model is organized around individuals getting to feel good about being white in nonracist ways...that keep whiteness at the center of anti-racism” (p. 15). Thompson further argues that attaining the highest level of Helms’ model makes one an ally of racialized peoples when the danger is that “when we start congratulating ourselves on how far along we are, it is easy to stop thinking of ourselves as on a journey and start thinking of ourselves as having arrived” (p. 20). This is a caution to which I paid close attention in this study and have come to understand that these stages are fluid and a journey over a lifetime. There is no discrete beginning and ending to any of these stages. Allies

will struggle at each stage and can/will fall back if not diligent in their critical self reflection and critical interrogation of the discourses of racism. Coming to understand that stereotypes “protect against contradictions...and work as an endlessly repeated means of keeping diversity at bay...” (Hook, 2005, p. 28) is necessary for social workers to advance in their racial identity development.

As a caution, it is important that these models not be used to marginalize or oppress those workers not journeying to becoming allies or those allies who may be struggling in the early stages of these models. People learn and change at their own pace. We are all presented with crucibles¹³ or opportunities that trigger in us a desire to act or do things differently. As Thompson and Carter (1997) write:

Racial identity development entails a continual and deliberate practice of self examination and experiencing.... In developing racial identity, peoples must undertake careful reflection on the extent to which racial indoctrination has influenced and continues to influence their lives and the manner in which they relate to others who are racially similar or racially dissimilar to themselves. These experiences are ongoing and lifelong. (p. 17, in Solomon and Levine-Rasky, 2003:91)

Understanding one’s racial identity is a personal exercise that requires rigorous self-reflection and interrogation. Individual workers are cautioned about the tendency to locate themselves at ‘favourable’ positions in these models to avoid “being perceived as ignorant, intolerant or even racist” (Solomon and Levine-Rasky, 2003, p. 102). These models provide a place for White social workers to start to understand why they “come to think and act in prescribed ways toward [Aboriginal peoples]” (Solomon and Levine-Rasky, 2003, p. 107).

Appendix J provides an overview of several identity development models that have been adapted for discussion specifically about Aboriginal peoples. This overview is provided to illustrate how these models can be relevant to becoming White allies with Aboriginal peoples.

How do White social works become allies in their child welfare work?

To date, there is only one study I have been able to find that relates specifically to the study I have undertaken. This was conducted by Schultz (2003) titled, “The Making of Allies: How White People Become Anti-Racist.” Although her study focused on White social workers

¹³ Crucibles are “transformative experience[s] through which an individual comes to a new or an altered sense of identity” (Bennis and Thomas, 2002:40 in Kendall, 2006, p. 3)

in a counselling setting with women of Colour, there are many parallels that will be useful for the proposed study.

I found nothing in the literatures that speaks to White social workers becoming allies in the practice of child welfare with Aboriginal people.

Summary

What I have come to understand through the literature review is that the losses for White people are too great to avoid getting involved in work to change the current status quo. Coming to understand that racism is not an Aboriginal problem is liberating in many ways. To continue to believe, in the face of such a growing body of literature, that social workers are not racist is tantamount to professional negligence. As Jeffery (2009) writes, “social work’s management of differences has...been complicit with and essential to colonial and racist practices” (p. 48). This is a very complex issue to understand and as Ignatiev (1997) writes, “...racial oppression is not the work of “racists”. It is maintained by the principal institutions of society...administered by people who would be offended if accused of complicity with racial oppression” (p. 2-3). Child welfare is one of these principal institutions where racial oppression is maintained.

What every author I reviewed agrees on is that becoming an ally requires a great deal of critical self-reflection. We need to come to a clear understanding of who we are in this work. As Max (2005) writes, “as we work to become allies, we begin to turn our gazes from the ‘Other’ (Razack, 1998) onto ourselves. As we reflect critically on our own positions of privilege, we become better able to work collaboratively and respectfully” (p. 79).

This review has examined what a White ally is and the barriers that may prevent or delay a social worker from becoming an ally. Understanding the theoretical frameworks embedded in critical race theory and White racial and social identity development provide an opportunity to focus both on the individual and the larger systemic issues that support racism in the institution of child welfare. Although the racial identity models are discussed primarily in the literature about educating teachers or counsellors to prepare them for cross-racial encounters, these models can help guide social workers as they journey towards being allies because they “elaborate a transition from oppressor to anti-oppressor or racist to anti-racist” (Goodman, 2001, p. 57).

To date I have not located any sources in the literature that address a process for becoming a White ally in child welfare practice with Aboriginal peoples. In keeping with

Tatum's (1994) point that 'allies need allies', there is clearly a gap in the literature that would limit what those social workers who want to shift practice find when they go looking for ally role-models. This study begins to fill that gap.

Significance of the Study

This study offers a process that encourages and supports White social workers wishing to change their practice and become allies in child welfare with Aboriginal people. Being responsible for the safety and well-being of children is a difficult job performed in difficult environments. There is no disputing this fact. This does not, however, absolve social workers from their professional and ethical responsibilities of ensuring that children and families receive the best possible interventions that preserve the dignity of the individuals involved.

From a social justice perspective, social workers have a responsibility to work with Aboriginal peoples in their quest for self-determination. "Making space...to support Aboriginal self-determination...calls for an uncommon degree of humility and a high degree of receptivity to different ways of thinking" (Lafrance and Bastien, 2007, p. 111). This is not possible while the practice continues to be the removal of the children, and thus the communities' inability to take responsibility for "the existence and continuance of the group" (Brayboy, 2005, p. 435).

One barrier that interferes with social workers fulfilling their professional responsibilities with respect to Aboriginal peoples is, I believe, what Henry, Tator, Mattis and Rees (2006) refer to as democratic racism and the myths used to support the belief that racism cannot exist in a democratic society (p. 22). These myths would have people believe that there are 'essential' traits that can be attributed especially to Aboriginal peoples. Aboriginal peoples are not, however, inherently prone to poverty, violence and addiction. Rather, these are the tragic consequences of centuries of colonial programs intended to disrupt the lives and cultures of the Indigenous peoples of this country. (see Chrisjohn, Young & Maraun, 2006; Lawrence, 2004; Neu and Therrien, 2003; Scott, 1914 in Neu and Therrien, 2003)

The belief in the 1960's was that Aboriginal peoples were incapable of taking care of their own children resulting in the well-known and documented, '60's scoop'. What are the "regimes of truth and regimes of practice" (Chambon, 1999, p. 57) in 2010? I would suggest the belief hasn't changed much since 1960. With few social workers attempting to look honestly at the historical impacts and Canadian societal constructions of Aboriginal peoples as inferior, and

Whites as superior, children are still removed because of a belief that Aboriginal peoples are incapable of taking care of their own.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

Introduction

I entered into this research with an assumption that there are others, like myself, who want to tell their story about the experience of becoming a White ally. I wanted to capture the accounts of four social workers and myself on our journeys to becoming White allies.¹⁴ I chose autoethnography as the method for conducting this qualitative research. Ontologically I wanted to know what each participant understood to be the roots of their becoming White allies and also whether there were similarities in our stories. In other words, how each of us comes to be allies with Aboriginal peoples. Speaking for myself, I recognized that I am an insider as both a social worker and a White ally. I have gained knowledge as a practitioner in the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) in British Columbia and through training MCFD staff through the Cultural Awareness Training (CAT) program. Therefore, epistemologically speaking, it is these experiences that shaped my becoming an ally.

Methodology

Narrative Methods

Narrative methods “encompass a range of approaches including autobiography, autoethnography, biography, personal narrative, life history, oral history, memoir, and literary journalism” (Alvermann, 2000, p. 1). Creswell (2007) identifies narrative research as a “mode of inquiry in qualitative research with a specific focus on the stories told by individuals...with a [focus] on studying one or two individuals, gathering data through collection of their stories...” (p. 54). Similarly, Shank (2006) writes that sampling approaches in the qualitative method are small and so enable the researcher to focus on gathering larger amounts of information to increase the depth and richness of the understanding being sought. Therefore I kept the sample size small and recruited five social workers, including myself, either currently or formerly practitioners in the British Columbia Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD).

¹⁴ I was not aware of or provided the language of White ally with respect to myself until approximately 4 years ago when Aboriginal colleagues started to use that language. I considered myself an advocate who assisted Aboriginal people to get access to much needed services or for children to be placed with or continue access to family, extended family, community and culture. I have also come to recognize White 'allyship' as using the privilege I enjoy as a result of colonization to join with those who have been colonized to speak out against the daily experience of racism at multiple levels of society. There is simply no disputing the fact that Canadians, particularly White Canadians, enjoy a great deal of privilege at the expense of Aboriginal people. This privilege comes with responsibility.

Riessman and Quinney (2005) state that “narrative research analyzes the extended account, rather than fragmenting it into thematic categories as practiced in the grounded theory approach” (p. 395). This appealed to me, particularly when combined with Brogatzi, et al. (2006) when they quote Plummer (2001) who wrote that narrative research “has developed to bring together the researcher and the researched, and to include an examination of the relationship between them in the analysis and conclusions” (p. 372). However, what proved to be challenging was discovering that an analysis of the narratives still required me to “create descriptions of themes that [held] across the [participants’] stories” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p.12 in Creswell, 2007, p. 54). As described in the data gathering and analysis section below, the sheer volume of the data provided by the participant narratives made it necessary to complete a thematic analysis. Although the data analysis followed the process generally used in autoethnography (see Chang, 2008), I also employed other tools for analyzing narrative data due to the sheer volume of the information provided by the participants. A thematic analysis is one such useful tool. This may have inadvertently resulted in fragmenting the analysis of the extended account, but did make it easier to draw out the common features of the participant stories. This made it possible to describe the process of becoming a White ally.

“Narrative methods can convey a culture, an experience, a sense of place, or belonging to a group or life experience” (Hinckley, 2010, p. 2). Using narrative method enabled participants to write about their experience of becoming an ally in child welfare with Aboriginal people. Autoethnography provided me with a way to explore the phenomenon of becoming an ally using the participant stories and “by linking [them] to the relevant literature” (Hinckley, 2010, p. 3).

Creswell (2007) describes the role of narrative research as having marginalized voices heard and so the research produces an “advocacy/participatory result” (p. 21). Marginalized voices are those of people not generally heard because they occupy a place on the margins of society, e.g. sex-trade workers, racialized people, etc. Because ‘marginalized’ traditionally refers to groups who are oppressed, using the term to apply to White social work allies may be unsettling. However, within the workplace and familial environments, participants in my research do experience a unique form of racist-like backlash. (see Bishop, 2005; Goodman, 2001; Kendall, 2006; Kivel, 2002; Tatum, 1997) While it is not the same kind of harmful racism experienced by Aboriginal peoples, it nevertheless can be characterized by condescension, and a patronizing “holier than thou” tone that we recognize as familiar and one our White colleagues

often direct towards Aboriginal peoples and professionals. Brandyberry (1999) captures this when she writes:

Those of us committed to being allies must be willing to persevere in this struggle. [Aboriginal peoples] do not have the option of ignoring racism and its effects; therefore, we must not ignore it either. We must choose to persevere in the face of rejection, criticism, and suspicion from members of majority and minority groups. Not everyone wants Whites to be involved in the struggle, and I understand this lack of trust. But racism is the problem of the racists, not those who are oppressed by it. As part of the problem group, I must be involved in eliminating the problem itself. (p. 9)

I am calling this a ‘special’ discrimination directed at allies from other White people. The term I have heard used is ‘race traitor’ which is written about extensively by Ignatiev (1996) and defined in Wikipedia Free Encyclopedia (2009) as:

A pejorative reference to a person who is perceived as supporting attitudes or positions thought to be against the interests or well-being of their own race. The term may indicate racist attitudes on the part of those who use it.

Adams (2008) writes about the cultural influences that shape the stories that get told. He reminds us that in addition to the privilege we have in constructing a story “we should also acknowledge cultural factors that make a story possible such as its originality and oppressive systems that, because of their oppressiveness, give us a story to tell” (p. 181). I recognize that if racism towards Aboriginal peoples did not exist in Canada, this study would not have been necessary.

Autoethnography

Autoethnography is a form of autobiography. Autoethnography is defined by Ellis (2004) as “...research, writing, story and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social and political” (p xix). Ellis explains that this method goes beyond ethnography, which has traditionally placed the researcher as an objective observer, to placing the researcher as a participant with a subjective role in the relational process.

Duncan (2004) supports this when she writes:

The essential difference between ethnography and autoethnography is that in an autoethnography, the researcher is not trying to become an insider in the research setting. He or she, in fact, is the insider. The context is his or her own. (p. 3)

Reed-Danahay, (1997) in describing autoethnography writes, “Autoethnography combines autobiography, the story of one's own life, with ethnography, the study of a particular social group” (p. 6). As with other narrative research, the ‘traditional’ social group under study is generally considered ‘marginalized’ by the larger society. Again, I am not suggesting that by using autoethnography as a method that I or other social workers are marginalized in the same sense as one would equate with racialized people or differently-abled people. However considering child welfare social workers as a social group, I am willing to state again that striving to become an ally, particularly with Aboriginal peoples, places workers in a different and marginalized position within the work environment. As Tatum (1997) writes, “one of the consequences of racism in our society is that those who oppose racism are often marginalized, and as a result, their stories are not easily accessed” (p. 109).

As a qualitative research method, autoethnography is also criticized. Sparkes (2002) provides this caution, “. . .writers of autoethnographies and narratives of self. . .need to be aware that their writing *can* become self-indulgent rather than self-knowing, self-respectful, self-sacrificing, or self-luminous” (p. 214). This study is not an exercise in self-indulgence. Instead it is self-reflective and self-knowing. “Understanding self is not narcissism; it is a precondition and concomitant condition to the understanding of others” (Pinar, 1988:150 in Alvermann, 2000, p. 4). With respect to becoming an ally, I do not believe that my path is ‘the’ path or that mine has been the best road to take. This is because becoming an ally has been both a painful and rewarding process. Rather I have experiences and insights to share that I hope others will be able to read and to which others can relate. Tenni, Smyth and Boucher (2003) remind us that autobiographical enquiry. . .is inherently messy (p. 3). They write:

We must write about what we really prefer not to write about. It is not about presenting ourselves in a good light – in charge, competent, controlled, organized and so on, or how we might like to be seen. Rather, it is about writing rich, full accounts that include the messy stuff – the self-doubts, the mistakes, the embarrassments, the inconsistencies, the projections and that which may be distasteful. (p. 3)

As a form of autobiography, autoethnography provides the opportunity for me to be both a participant and an observer as I analyze and combine the participants’ narratives with my own into a process others may find useful. Connolly (2007) supports utilizing autoethnography when conducting narrative research to ensure “the researcher provides an account of his or her own voice, stance, assumptions, and analytic lens so the reader is abundantly clear on whose story is

whose” (p. 453). While this seems to have resulted in my own story being more in-depth and comprehensive than those of the participants, in autoethnography the researcher’s story is intrinsic to the larger story and provides “much potential for articulation of self-awareness and reflexivity...with the risk of making oneself more central to the discourse and pushing “other” voices out to the margins” (Edwards & Ribbens, 1998 in Trahar, 2009, p. 1). I clearly had the benefit of understanding the intent of the questions posed in the journaling guide and so provided more comprehensive responses to those questions. As I reflect on this, perhaps conducting interviews rather than asking participants to journal their answers to the questions would have provided me more opportunity to clarify the intent of the questions. I did check in with participants during their journaling process to ensure they had clarity on their task. Heron (1999) in writing about the tension inherent in being a participant in her own study writes,

I must acknowledge that, since this is my research project, I was not, and could not be, a participant like any other...I consciously chose to try not to make myself ‘look good’, but rather to let go and reminisce as freely as I could under the circumstances. The effort not to rescue or protect my own narrative comprises a gesture towards fairness in relation to other participants who did not have the inside knowledge to present themselves in quite as favourable a light as they might have liked. (p. 49)

In the end, the participant stories have contributed equally to the outcome of this study which was to identify a process that others may find useful in their journey to becoming an ally.

Chang (2008) describes autoethnography as “a research method that utilizes the researchers’ autobiographical data to analyze and interpret their cultural assumptions” (p. 9). She also describes autoethnography as a “useful and powerful tool for researchers and practitioners who deal with human relations in multi-cultural settings such as educators, social workers and medical professionals” (p. 51). Table 3-1 outlines the benefits and potential pitfalls that Chang identifies (pp. 52-54).

Table 3-1- Benefits and Potential Pitfalls of Autoethnography	
Benefits	Potential Pitfalls
Offers a research method friendly to researchers and readers	Excessive focus on self in isolation from others
Enhances cultural understanding of self and others	Over emphasis on narration rather than analysis and cultural interpretation
Has a potential to transform self and others to motivate them to work toward cross-cultural coalition building	Exclusive reliance on personal memory and recalling as a data source
	Negligence of ethical standards regarding others in self-

	narratives
	Inappropriate application of the label 'autoethnography'

With respect to the benefits of autoethnography, I believe this method does offer research that is accessible to researchers and readers. It also provides the reader with the opportunity “for self-reflection evoked by reading of others [as] a means of self-discovery” (Chang, 2008, p. 34). The findings from this study have the potential for transforming others as it continues to transform my own work. As one who self identifies and is identified as a White ally, I must recognize that transformative potential in my journey.

With respect to the potential pitfalls, I believe I have recognized and been diligent in avoiding these. I included the stories of four others in this study to prevent excessive focus on myself in isolation from others. I believe I have balanced narration with analysis and cultural interpretation. I made use of journals which Chang (2008) identifies as “valuable to self-narratives because the content often reveals less self-censored behaviour and thought” (p. 36). This was intended to balance my reliance on personal memory and experience. I have been diligent in ensuring adherence to ethical standards with respect to those whose identity cannot be protected by virtue of my being identified in my self-narrative. (For example, I have not referred to my father by his name but anyone who knows me, will know who he is). Finally, I believe I have adhered to autoethnography by “writing about the personal and its relationship to the culture” (Goode, 2006, p. 259) of White allies and child welfare social workers in an attempt to “undermine hegemonic representations (the “master narrative”) [regarding Aboriginal people] and encourage progressive social change” (Goode, 2006, p. 261).

Chang (2008) outlines four writing styles one can choose when writing an autoethnography. These are Descriptive-Realistic Writing; Confessional Emotive Writing; Analytical-Interpretive Writing and Imaginative-Creative Writing. Descriptive-Realistic writing provides opportunity to “depict people, places, experiences and events as “accurately” as possible with minimal character judgement and evaluation; represents a story with as much detail as possible” (p. 143). With Confessional-Emotive writing, the autoethnographer is “free to expose confusion, problems, dilemmas in life; personal agonies hidden from public view; and opens the door to readers’ participation but can be branded as “self-indulgent”” (p. 145). In Analytical-Interpretive writing, “the essential features are highlighted and the relationships

among data explained; [there is opportunity to] look at the broader context to make sense of the relationship between your case and the context; and can connect a specific case to broader societal issues [e.g. racism]" (p. 146-7). Finally, Imaginative-Creative writing includes "poetry, fiction and drama" (p. 147). Researchers can use a mix of these styles but, as will be discussed in Chapter 5: Findings, this autoethnography uses an Analytical-Interpretive writing style.

Summary

The five participants, including me, focused on self as we recalled and wrote about our journeys to becoming White allies in child welfare with Aboriginal people. This was an opportunity to be both reflective and reflexive with respect to the process that resulted in our coming to be known and regarded as White allies. Autoethnography enabled me to "bring forward the shifting aspects of self and create[d] ways to write about experiences in a broader social context" (Hamilton, Smith, and Worthington, 2008, p.22).

Rationale for the method chosen

There are social workers practicing differently despite identified barriers. Autoethnography, with the inclusion of others' stories, can bring forward what some are doing differently for analysis and interpretation. With 25 years of field research completed I believe there is something in my lived experience that can assist social workers who really want to shift their practice and ensure that Aboriginal children remain connected with family, extended family, community, and culture. By combining the narratives from my own journey with those of other social workers whose practice is recognized by the Aboriginal community as culturally appropriate and safe, I expected to be able to gather the kind of information I needed to describe the process involved in becoming an ally.

Participants

Participant Criteria

The participants for this study were social workers, either currently or formerly employed by the Ministry of Children and Family Development, who were recognized in the Aboriginal community as White allies.

Participant Recruitment

I received approval to proceed with this study from the Human Research Ethics Board on May 12, 2009. (Protocol number: 09-167).

Determining what the “Aboriginal community” was and who in the community was best positioned to identify the social workers who may be considered White allies was a difficult and ethical challenge. To approach any of the local First Nations, Aboriginal, or Métis communities would have been possible but I recognized a risk in a potential lack of consensus regarding who is considered a White ally.

I was reminded, (personal communication with C. Aro, October 15, 2008) that ‘community’ is defined in many ways and comes in many forms. MacDonald (2009) writes, “Communities...must be understood in relation to what stands outside the boundaries...where one equips oneself with the knowledge needed to be social, where one acquires “culture”” (p. 386). I have come to understand that for many Aboriginal peoples ‘community’ is the entity that grounds individuals and families to place and culture. Mussel, Cardiff and White (2004) define community as:

...a value shared by Aboriginal peoples. The spirit that holds a relatively healthy group of families together is embedded in community. For First Nation peoples, this strength is connected with living on the land that has been “home” for many, many generations. (p. 5)

The *Partnership Table* is a community of executive directors of the First Nations and Aboriginal Child and Family Service Agencies in British Columbia who share and discuss valuable and effective practices for Aboriginal child welfare. This community works with MCFD social workers on a daily basis in ensuring the safety and well-being of Aboriginal children in British Columbia. This provides them with the knowledge and experience to determine what they consider the criteria to identify an ally and which social workers meet those criteria. I approached this community and asked for three things: first, what are the qualities of a White ally; second, who, in their work and experience, demonstrate the qualities associated with becoming a White ally; and third, that representatives from this ‘community’ approach the identified allies directly to refer them to my study. I provided letters of introduction with contact information to assist with this process. (Appendix A and B)

As with many things in life, this process did not go as I had anticipated. The information was sent out in a mass email via the Caring for First Nations Children Society – the organization

responsible for coordinating the policy and training for the delegated agencies and the quarterly meetings of the Partnership Table. I received a few friendly responses and was asked to clarify whether it was Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal social workers I was recruiting. One agency responded with a list of eight people the agency considered to be White allies (email dated May 27, 2009). I responded to the contact person asking that he please provide the documents to the people on this list so that they could then choose to contact me if they were interested. If this request was followed-up on, I was not copied on the correspondence. I concluded that none of the people on the list were interested in participating in this study.

Only one agency took any action (to the best of my knowledge) and in that case, the Executive Director forwarded my email and information to all of the White staff with a message that said “if there are any staff who meet the criteria of Grace’s research and want to contribute to furthering knowledge in this field, please contact her directly” (email dated May 27, 2009). I received emails of interest from six social workers.

I was immediately concerned about my next steps because a) I knew that some of the people who responded would not be considered allies, and b) as a key distinction, the participants in this study had to be people whom the Aboriginal community had identified as an ally, not people who were self-identifying as an ally. I decided that I would approach an Aboriginal friend and colleague for whom I have a great deal of respect and who works in that agency. I asked if he/she would be comfortable and willing to go through the list of interested people and decide whether or not they would be considered an ally in the work they do. This person was willing to do this and indicated that four of the six people would be considered allies. As it turned out, of the two people not identified as allies, one decided she did not have the time to commit to this process and the other never did respond indicating whether or not he/she was willing to proceed. Therefore I did not have to deal with how to let either know that my secondary check did not result in their being identified as allies.

Within two days of receiving an email of interest, I contacted participants by phone to explain the process I would be following and then followed up by email with the journal questions, consent form, and self-care plan documents. Once a participant responded that he/she would like to participate, I discussed the process I had wanted to follow for finding social workers that an Aboriginal community would consider an ally to be. I let them know that I would be conferring with a mutual (unnamed) Aboriginal colleague (I respected this person’s privacy

since there could be backlash from those he/she did not recommend for this study) to ensure he/she was considered an ally in the agency. During the second call, I had a list of criteria I also discussed with participants to determine for myself whether or not they fit within the parameters of this study and were able to commit to the project. (Appendix F) Participants were provided with stamped envelopes to return their signed consent to me. (Appendix C). In addition, the University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Board requested a process that would ensure the participants had counselling and support available as they worked on the questions I had provided. All four participants indicated they did not feel any need of such a plan and signed that they were declining having one. (Appendix E)

Data Gathering and Analysis

Participants were provided with a journal template that I created for them to record their answers to the set questions (Appendix D). For three months - July through September 2009 - participants answered the questions at their own pace. I chose not to do a question and answer interview because I wanted participants to have time to reflect on their journeys. The guide was intended to assist participants in documenting that journey and telling their story. During the three months, I connected regularly with each participant both by email and phone to provide support and encouragement and to determine if there were any issues or barriers arising that could affect their ability to complete their journals in the allotted time frame. Initially, none of the participants experienced any barriers but did indicate they were surprised to discover what they had to share. One participant wanted to discuss some of her challenges of influencing other people to be allies which resulted in my sharing information from the literature with her. One participant was not able to begin working through the journal until the end of August. I learned after the journals were submitted that two of the participants experienced a significant loss during the three-month period which did impact on the time they had available for working through the journaling guide.

During this three-month period, I used the same journal guide to write about my journey to becoming a White ally. I had the benefit of my own journals recorded during my practice with 13 Ojibwa communities in northwestern Ontario between 1987 and 1992 and my practice with Nisga'a and Carrier communities in northern British Columbia between 1995 and 2000; my

practice in MCFD; and subsequent work in an Aboriginal non-profit society. This enabled an autoethnography to unfold.

In analyzing the data from a narrative, Creswell (2007) recommends that the process begin by managing the data through creating and organizing files; reading through the text, making notes in the margin, and forming initial codes, or, narrative codes (p. 156). This sounded like a good approach as I started to work with each participant's journal. I read through each one without making any notes or starting any coding. I then went through each one again and started to make comments in the margin. I did this three times with each journal, including my own. I did no further analysis after this, choosing to "re-story" each person's information into a narrative. As I wove the information into a story, I discovered additional information that I made note of in the original journal. In this process there were additional clarifying questions that emerged and I spoke with each participant by phone to discuss the additional questions. Each participant was provided with the re-story to review and approve. This enabled a member check on the information and each person gave their approval (by email) on what I had written.

I want to pause here to reflect on the moments in the analysis of the data where I struggled with 'judging' whether or not the participant really met my idea of what an ally is. I needed to work through and come to an understanding that allies are human and fallible and there is no 'perfect' ally. I came to see the participants for the unique people they are, filled with the gifts and imperfections of humanness. I came to recognize that this was not about the participants. Rather it was about judging me very harshly for not being the 'perfect' ally. This issue arose for me in a variety of ways: feeling like a fraud for continuing to have stereotypes (rather than celebrating that I know they are false and do not act on them); benefitting financially from being employed in 'Aboriginal space' and for the sole reason that racism continues to exist for Aboriginal peoples in Canada; and for not yet attaining or maintaining the final stages in any of the White/racial/social identity development models (discussed earlier). I found that allowing the participants their humanness made space for my own. I reflect on this so there is understanding that being able to re-story the participant journals was a journey in itself - to ensure that I did not embed myself in their stories in any way; and to ensure that I did not use their trust and words to cause them any harm. I also came to a solid understanding of how racism against Aboriginal peoples impacts White social workers who want to work differently.

I then returned to the data and started to combine participant material into broad themes. I did this until there was no information for which I did not account. At this point it was unclear to me how to proceed with the analysis of the data. Chang (2008) outlines ten strategies¹⁵ for analysing and interpreting autoethnographic data. (Although I did not discover this resource until after I had completed the analysis of the data from all five journals, I recognize that each of these strategies was utilized to various degrees – using everyone’s narratives, not just my own).

Including the stories of five social workers resulted in a large volume of information requiring analysis and I needed to rely on other qualitative tools for analyzing the data. I found such a tool in the form of a thematic analysis which helped me to begin making sense of the emerging themes. The process of utilizing thematic charts resulted in my being able to narrow the themes into five broad headings with three to five subthemes identified for each. I used a thematic chart (Appendix G) to present a visual for each broad theme, sub theme and participant information. It was not until this point that I felt ready to begin writing about the findings from this study.

Ethical and Political Considerations

Using my own practice and life experiences as field research was unintentional. Anyone who aided in my becoming a White ally, whom I would like to recognize in this thesis, could not have known they would be contributing to research one day. As Ellis (2007) states, “relational ethics...requires [us] to act from our hearts and minds, acknowledge our interpersonal bonds to others, and take responsibility for actions and their consequences” (p. 3). With no opportunity to go back and garner consent from these individuals to use their names and information, I have done my best to honour those who have aided me in my journey to becoming an ally.

Participants were asked to protect the identities of the people they wrote about to the best of their abilities. In those situations where a participant revealed someone else’s identity, I took care to ensure he/she was not named in any documents that form part of this thesis. All

¹⁵ Chang’s (2008) 10 strategies for analyzing and interpreting autoethnographic data: search for recurring topics, themes and patterns; look for cultural themes; identify exceptional occurrences; analyze inclusion and omission; connect the present with the past; analyse relationships between self and others; compare yourself with other people’s cases; contextualize broadly; compare with social science constructs and ideas; and frame with theories.

documents are kept locked in a cabinet in my home office and will be disposed of appropriately after the requisite length of time.

Borochowitz (2005), in a discussion about reflexivity in research, gets to the root of one of the risks in qualitative research when she quotes Gilbert and Schmid (cited in Franklin, 1996:4) who define reflexivity as “comprising critical introspection and analysis of the self as researcher” (p. 354). I am aware that I have taken a huge risk by writing honestly about my own struggle with ingrained racism. I asked the participants to take this same risk in their writing. While I would have liked to be able to identify the participants, the very real risk of backlash and lateral violence from White colleagues required me to assure and ensure complete privacy and confidentiality. Although one of the participants was willing to be named, I decided that everyone’s identity would be held in confidence. Each person chose their own pseudonym that they are known by in this study.

I recognize that this approach has the potential for disturbing the status quo of child welfare practice with Aboriginal children and families. On the other hand, this study has been conducted so as not to result in any harm to the participants and/or any further harm to Aboriginal children and families from the potential backlash.

Merits and Limitations of the Design

Merits

A merit of this study is that it is an *interpretive inquiry* – an attempt to make sense of the experience of becoming a White ally and staying mindful of Creswell (2007) when he says “...researchers make an interpretation of what they see, hear, and understand. The researchers’ interpretations cannot be separated from their own background, history, context, and prior understandings” (p. 39). I state my bias up front. I do not understand and have little patience for social work practitioners who refuse to recognize the harm they are doing and do not make the changes necessary to ensure better outcomes for Aboriginal children, families, and communities that come in contact with mainstream child welfare mandates. Remaining mindful of this bias will reduce the risk that I and the work become discredited as the work of an anti-racist zealot. I felt more confident about having such a bias after reading Chang (2008) who states that autoethnography “as a research method utilizes the researcher’s autobiographical data to analyze and interpret their cultural assumptions” (p. 9). One of these cultural assumptions I carry is that

social workers are not required to adequately explore their own racism or how it impacts their work with Aboriginal peoples.

A number of authors (Bochner, 1997; Bochner and Ellis, 2002; Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2007; Riessman and Quinney, 2005) write about narrative research as a methodology. The general theme of these writings is that narrative is a departure from the tradition embedded in positivist, quantitative research that keeps the researcher as an outside, objective actor. Narrative allows the researcher to start at the “site of one’s own experiences” (Bochner, 1997, p. 424) and rely on our own experiences in addition to the experiences of others. Bochner quotes Richardson (1990), “storytelling is both a *method* of knowing – a social practice – and a way of telling about our lives” (p. 435). Bochner further states, “few of us study subjects such as child abuse, addiction, racism, or abortion coincidentally” (p. 433). I agree and would like to know what brought me and others to the place of being willing to be White allies. What is the key to a worker taking that path? Why me and not countless others I have worked with over the last 25 years? Why the four others I have worked with in this study and not the dozens of workers they interact with on a daily basis or went to the same schools with? Is being an ally a staged process of development? These are questions for another time and place.

The merit of conducting this type of study is that it provides an opportunity to offer an in-depth examination and analysis of a small number of narratives. Hopefully this will result in a contribution to the current gap in the literature of White social workers writing personal narratives about the mistakes they have made and their success in ensuring these would not be repeated. I hope that this research will be available to future social workers when they are ready to take the steps necessary to becoming White allies in their practice with Aboriginal children and families. As Tatum (1994) writes:

...written materials about white people who have been engaged in examining their own white identity and who have made a commitment to antiracist activity in their own lives...is not easily located. One of the consequences of racism in our society is that those who oppose it are often marginalized. (p. 473)

Regarding credibility, Klinker and Todd (2007) make an excellent point when they write:

Our lived experiences are our own, and they have credibility from that personal standpoint...the data allows [the reader] to reflect on their own knowledge, intuition, personal experiences and apply those reflections to what we described in our study, equating to the criteria needed to provide transferability. (p. 167)

The validity has come from the participants themselves and whether or not they consider their stories useful in contributing to a process for practicing differently with Aboriginal peoples. The participants were provided with a copy of the findings from this research to review. As Polkinghorne (2007) writes, “validity is not inherent in a claim but in a characteristic given to a claim by the ones to whom the claim is addressed” (p. 474). For this study validity will also be determined by social workers who read and find claims about the process of becoming an ally, believable.

Limitations

This study is not for generalization to the larger population since narrative data is not intended to generalize but to provide for “clarification, understanding, and explanation” (Taylor-Powell and Renner, 2003, p. 9). My aim was to see if the stories of social workers who are succeeding in becoming White allies (despite the challenges and pitfalls along the way) reveal a process that can be referred to by others. This road is not an easy one and it takes courage and strength to continually move forward. I chose a small sample because I recognized that having participants’ journal for three months would provide lengthy narratives that were onerous to analyze and re-story.

One limitation could be that four of the study participants are currently employed in the same delegated Aboriginal child and family service agency. I have no way of knowing whether their experiences in that agency have helped them to advance in their racial identity development; whether there are opportunities for learning the discourses of racism; or if it is their experience as former MCFD social workers that made the difference to their becoming allies.

Mayer (2006), affirms the validity of stories and story-telling when he writes,

That shared narratives, public stories, are the fundamental human device for enabling communities to act collectively. Stories have great power in the mind, both cognitive and affective. It is through autobiographical narrative that we establish our identity and make meaningful our experience. As creatures constituted by narrative, we can be moved by stories: persuaded, provoked, and enlisted in causes. And because stories can be shared, can be held at once in mind and society, they can serve to construct common interests in collective goods, align individual identities with collective pursuits, and script collective acts of meaning. (p.1)

Ultimately, Clandinin and Connolly (2000) tell us, “narrative inquiry is stories lived and told” (p. 20). Hopefully the process that I and the other participants engaged in has allowed for

the “personal, historical and cultural contexts” (Creswell, 2007, p. 57) that each of us is situated in to assist others in recognizing themselves and influence changes necessary to stop the practice of disconnecting Aboriginal children from their critical connections to family, extended family, community, and culture.

Chapter 4: The Stories

Introduction

The participant stories provide the data necessary for examining the process of becoming a White ally with Aboriginal people. Each participant used the questions as a journaling guide (see Appendix D) to write about their journey to becoming an ally. The questions are provided in Table 4-1 for quick reference.

Table 4-2-The Questions
<p>Do you know you are considered a White ally? How do you know? Who told you that?</p> <p>Where and with whom were you raised? What is your cultural background? What was your contact with Aboriginal people when you were growing up?</p> <p>What did you learn from your parents, school, church, government and media about Aboriginal people in Canada?</p> <p>Tell me about your journey to becoming an ally. Where did that journey begin? Was there one defining moment that stands out for you? Who are the people who walked with you on this journey? Who were your teachers and guides? Are these people still in your life?</p> <p>Did you start out in your career as an ally?</p> <p>Has your commitment to being an ally been tested? How were you held accountable?</p> <p>Tell me about the “a ha” moments you have experienced on your journey.</p> <p>Tell me about the biggest “battle” you ever had in your role as an ally.</p> <p>What kind of journey have you had? Difficult? How so?</p> <p>Do you think anyone can be an ally?</p> <p>What role, if any, does racism play in assisting or hampering a White professional with the process/experience of becoming a White ally? Describe any ‘unlearning’ you may have done with respect to what you were taught or came to believe about Aboriginal people that you now know to be false.</p> <p>What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of becoming a White ally?</p> <p>If you had it to do over, would you still become a White ally? Is there anything you would do differently?</p> <p>What has been most rewarding about your becoming a White ally?</p> <p>Is there anything about being a White ally that you continue to struggle with?</p>

The participants were given a template to use in responding to the questions so they were answered in order. This made it easier to create a basic format for presenting a storied account of the participants’ journeys based on their responses to these questions in their journals.

The Participants

Three women and two men participated in the study. Four of the five have a degree in social work and the fifth person has more than thirty years of working with children and families without a degree. All five people have worked for the Ministry of Children and Family

Development and all participants have worked or are working in child welfare with Aboriginal people. With between ten and thirty plus years working in the field, we have nearly one hundred years of experience among us.

It will become clear to the reader that my own storied account is much longer than that of any of the other participants. This was not deliberate or intentional on my part. Each of us used the same journaling guide and had from July-September 2009 to think about and respond to the questions posed. An examination of the limited literature on combining these methodologies did not help to provide an explanation (see O'Byrne, 2007) and I can only speculate about why my story is longer. I am the one who chose which questions would be asked and so I had a good understanding of the kind of data I was hoping to gather from the research. As the student, a significant amount of time was spent writing about my journey. I also had the advantage of being able to add to my story as I created a storied account from my journal. While committed to completing the task, I know anecdotally from the participants that 'life' presented challenges to their ability to provide a longer account of their journeys. For example, two of the participants experienced a loss during the time they were completing the journal; and one was unable to begin writing until August and then lost a great deal of his/her data when his/her computer failed to save his/her work. It was summer and people were busy doing other things with family and friends. I understood that it would be challenging to find people willing to spend the time responding to the questions in a journal format and I am grateful for the material they did provide to aid this study.

The Participants' Journeys

It was clear from reading the participant's journals that each is committed to doing their best to practice differently with Aboriginal peoples. Here are their journeys to becoming White allies.

Anna's Journey

Anna is a middle-aged White woman. She describes her cultural heritage as Irish, English and Welsh. She was raised in West Vancouver on the Traditional territory of the Squamish people. Her father immigrated with his family as an infant and her mother's grandparents were immigrants to Canada. Anna was raised 'Canadian', knowing little about her ancestors.

Anna indicates that her father, whom she describes as an “open-minded, curious critical thinker”, taught values of “the importance of being honest” and “we are all created equal and deserve equal treatment.” In addition to her father she describes being influenced by a grade four teacher, Mrs. S. and Sunday School teacher, Mr. S. Mrs. S. “emphasized the importance of understanding the history of Canada and the cultures of the First People of Canada” and instilled in Anna an interest in social studies which “transferred into an interest in Social Work” once she got to University.

Anna describes Mr. S. as a “great Sunday School teacher” who did not make them study the bible but “rather taught us to be a ‘good’ person who was compassionate and caring.” Mr. S. brought in newspaper stories to provoke discussion. Anna remembers a story about an Afro-American person beaten by a White person. The lesson learned was about prejudice and Anna recalls being “so shocked that the beating took place because of skin colour.” Mr. S. also talked of the prejudice White people in Canada demonstrate towards First Nations people.

Anna wrote of her father raising his children to know that White people did not originate in Canada and gave her an understanding of the "terrible things" that were done to Aboriginal peoples. The message Anna heard was that White people had relegated Aboriginal peoples to reservations, taken their land and created a dependency on the government. Anna always felt sad seeing the poverty on the Squamish First Nation. She clearly heard her father say that White people were responsible for making the situation better.

Anna does not remember knowing any Aboriginal peoples as a child but her stepmother represented many Aboriginal artists in the marketing of their Art when Anna was a teenager. These painters and carvers stayed in their home; Anna went to Art Gallery and Museum openings and she describes feeling fortunate to have met Bill Reid, Robert Davidson and other very talented and successful artists.

Anna also accompanied her step-mother to visit artists incarcerated in Mountain Prison. Anna describes this as a “real opportunity” and speaks of one of the Artists who became a close family friend. R was a soft-spoken, sensitive man who was in prison for murder and had been sober for many years. Anna indicates how “painfully obvious” the over representation of Aboriginal men in prison was.

Anna remembers this being the first exposure she had to the myth that Aboriginal peoples do not metabolize alcohol the same way as ‘white people’ and was why so many Aboriginal

peoples had such difficult lives. Anna indicates that, intuitively, this did not make sense to her as there were alcoholics in her own family. She knew that suffering and disruption in one's well-being was a major factor to someone becoming an alcoholic. Anna also knew that this myth did not correspond with the injustices she had learned from her father.

Anna also remembers the most pervasive and overt display of racism being the 'drunken Indian' stereotype which she heard many times said about Aboriginal peoples. Although she knew this was not true, she did not always feel confident to respond to racist remarks.

Anna felt confused about these mixed messages until she attended university as an adult. In a class taught by Dr. Michael Yellowbird, she first learned about colonization and really started to grasp the "monumental destructive ramifications of colonization on Aboriginal peoples." Anna found this "very overwhelming" and was "embarrassed to be White."

Anna sees the "personal as political" - a stance that emerges from feminism - and believes that people not only have a responsibility to change and heal at a personal level but also at an institutional level.

Anna did not know she is considered an ally until I let her know that my own 'check' had confirmed she is. Anna feels her choice to work with Aboriginal families came from her own ethical duty/responsibility and an attraction to working with Aboriginal peoples. Having experienced, as a privileged, White person, the kind of demeaning treatment single mothers receive in the 'system', Anna felt an affinity towards Aboriginal peoples.

As a new child protection worker, Anna was quickly aware of the 'us/them' dichotomy that existed between social worker and client. She watched children being pathologized through a very mainstream, Western medical model of practice. Anna decided early on that she wanted to work with Aboriginal peoples who brought a healing approach to the practice as opposed to the mainstream pathologizing approach.¹⁶

Anna is not comfortable being seen as a White ally as she considers it a "great honour to support Aboriginal families and to have met so many wonderful and courageous people." Anna feels that "she has benefitted more from working with the clients than they have from her" and doesn't feel she "would have lasted in her career without being so touched by the goodness and

¹⁶ To view or characterize as medically or psychologically abnormal. Pathologizing. (2010). In *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*. Retrieved March 13, 2010, from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pathologizing>

courage she has experienced in working with Aboriginal families.” Anna acknowledges the possibility that her professional experiences have enabled her to grow to becoming a White ally. Anna indicates that she is “aware of the opportunities and privilege she has in her life” and speaks with admiration of the Aboriginal peoples who have the strength to continue despite the deep pain and sadness they experience. Anna understands there is a spiritual basis to the work with Aboriginal peoples.

Anna has worked in child welfare for approximately sixteen years and began her career working in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver. She was surrounded by "burned-out" colleagues and high turnover of staff but recognized this as “an experience of a lifetime” and settled in to working with predominantly First Nations families. Anna identifies learning the importance of respect and the relationships she built with Aboriginal peoples to be the factor that made the work worthwhile. Anna found herself in conflict with some colleagues and community partners because she did not ascribe to what she described as a mainstream world view that labelled and thus dehumanized people. Anna feels she had many ‘teachers’ willing to persevere to help her learn that humility is an important key in the work.

After seven years working on the downtown east side of Vancouver (DTES), Anna then worked in a remote Coastal First Nation community. She was the only child protection worker in the delegated Aboriginal agency and Anna describes this as the “most fun I have ever had in a work situation... I met the most wonderful people and never laughed so hard.”

While working on a redesign of the Aboriginal non-residential services, Anna quickly realized that her White colleagues did not believe Aboriginal agencies would deliver the programs in the same way as the region did. She felt the services did not fit with the needs of the Aboriginal community. As a team leader with MCFD, Anna understood that without a close working relationship with the Aboriginal agency staff, there was “little chance of doing any meaningful work.”

Anna’s position on an Aboriginal Planning Committee was her first experience working exclusively for an Aboriginal agency and being the only White employee. Anna indicates that she initially felt uncomfortable and very conscious of being White. In discussion with her colleagues about this, Anna learned that they wanted to ensure that she had an understanding of the impacts of colonization and she would not take offense by comments they made in reference to White people and these impacts. The fact that Anna was on secondment from MCFD also

placed her apart from her colleagues initially. There was gossip that her affiliation would not enable her to represent Aboriginal interests and while Anna felt hurt about this, she knew that her actions would speak for themselves.

It was while on this secondment that Anna came to understand the temporary nature of the work White people do in Aboriginal space. That is, that her career would not advance as it might have done had she stayed in the Ministry. In the Ministry her career would have advanced along a continuum of higher responsibilities and opportunities. By seeing her role as one of capacity building, Anna struggled with her ego and came to an understanding that feeling appreciated would have to come in a different form than promotion.

Anna is currently on secondment with a delegated Aboriginal agency in a team leader position. She was asked to take this position and knows it is temporary if she remains a Ministry employee. Anna does not feel she can work for the Ministry once the secondment is finished and is prepared to give up her Ministry benefits to remain with the agency as a direct employee. One of Anna's ongoing challenges is battling the mainstream belief that Aboriginal agencies can do the same work with fewer resources.¹⁷ The reality is that Aboriginal child protection work requires more resources available to smaller caseloads to be effective.

With respect to racism, Anna believes there are stereotypes (e.g. all Aboriginal children have FASD) that prevent/interfere with workers getting to know the person. Anna worked with a twelve year old boy recently whose child in care file had a long list of 'deficits' including a notation that he has a learning disability and cannot read. Anna discovered this was not the case after the boy read an entire book about animals and told her interesting things he knows about those animals. What Anna has since discovered is that social workers and teachers have all assumed he can't read and no one took the time to confirm this.

One concern Anna has is that there are workers who, for the sake of keeping families together, are not intervening at the expense of children. They are not removing children but are also avoiding doing something to ensure the child's needs are met while out of care. She isn't sure this is racism but it is leaving children at risk.

One other issue that Anna finds concerning is the tendency of parents to excuse their child's bad behaviour because they have FASD. She believes this is partially the parent looking

¹⁷ This is echoed by Wa Cheew Wapaguunew Iskew [Carolyn Peacock] (2009) who writes, "On three occasions, I was instructed by the board of directors and chiefs to issue lay-off notices to the staff and prepare to shut down the Agency because an agreement with INAC for an adequate funding base could not be reached" (p. 276).

for an excuse to not have to deal with the behaviour and she is disappointed in the other professionals who support this. Anna isn't sure but thinks this may stem from the other professionals not wanting to appear racist.

One dynamic Anna is beginning to notice in her time with Aboriginal organizations is the reaction from other White colleagues to White people who choose to work in Aboriginal spaces. Anna finds this curious as she feels it is a privilege to be working in Aboriginal spaces. Anna also finds it interesting that White colleagues in other White agencies attempt to 'teach' her and her team about the process of colonization [when her employees are living it daily].

Anna has twice experienced being called a "White oppressive social worker". Both resulted from situations where removals were required and while it was hard to hear, Anna simply acknowledged the Aboriginal person's words. Anna feels encouraged when she sees an Aboriginal client having the courage to confront a social worker.

Anna has no regrets about her decision to become a White ally and what keeps Anna moving along the path of becoming an ally is her commitment to ensure more resources are made available to do the work properly. She has had two deaths of youth she worked with impact her in a deep and meaningful way. Anna speaks lovingly of these two youth and feels their deaths were senseless and preventable.

Anna's struggle continues to be her fear of offending and causing further harm. She is sure she "unknowingly makes racist comments and assumptions that may offend people she really cares about." Anna fears she may not confront important issues for fear of making offensive remarks.

Jane's Journey

Jane is a forty-something White woman who identifies her cultural heritage as White and of Scottish decent. She believes her paternal grandmother was French Canadian and Métis however anyone who might have known something more has since died. She was raised in North Vancouver on the traditional territory of the Squamish people by her mother who is first generation Canadian and her father who is third generation Canadian.

Jane's father was a successful restaurateur which provided the family with a stable, middle-class life-style. Jane indicates that she participated in many activities (e.g. sports, music) and wanted for nothing.

Jane does not remember knowing any Aboriginal children as she was growing up. Her contact with Aboriginal peoples and culture was limited to a few Pow Wows her father took them to on the Squamish Reserve. Jane's father appreciated West Coast Aboriginal art and bought carvings from local artists. Jane acknowledges that, like her parents, she was "pretty much ignorant to the history and culture." She says her parents only learned of Residential Schools from her after she learned about them in University.

Jane believes she learned virtually nothing about Aboriginal peoples from school, church, government and media. Upon further reflection, Jane is sure there was nothing said in an obvious way to her about Aboriginal peoples. She did not watch TV but does remember seeing Western movies later in her life that certainly portray many of the stereotypes.

Jane credits her father with teaching her to be open and accepting. For her father, "if you were kind and treated others how you wanted to be treated yourself you were okay in his books – green, purple, wealthy, poor or other."

Jane remembers that,

As a kid it bugged me that others were less privileged than me. My youngest memories of my consciousness about this stuff were probably at about 8 or 10. Dad used to take us all over Vancouver on little "wild goose chases" (as he called them). One day we'd be driving around a really wealthy neighbourhood and the next walking around the lower east side, or on 4th Ave. with all the hippies. So I saw the differences and would ask a lot of questions. Dad never answered with judgment, he'd just ask us more philosophical questions and get us to think about the way the world works.

Since her teen years Jane has had many friends and family members who are of mixed racial backgrounds or have family members who are. She feels this has given her a good awareness of racism and the effects of racism on people's lives. Jane has been willing to confront and challenge racism as needed.

Jane "assumes she is considered a White ally as a result of the way in which she has been accepted, respected, encouraged and included." Jane has heard from colleagues and supervisors that she does her work "in a Good Way." Jane believes she is someone who cares and has "very little tolerance for things unfair, morally wrong and unjust."

Jane is not comfortable with being called an ally because a traditional Aboriginal co-worker has told her it suggests arrogance. Jane looked ally up in the dictionary and found it means "to combine, unite, connected with" and she does not feel this describes her. Jane writes,

I don't necessarily feel "connected". *Connected*, to me, has connotations of being *immersed*. While I do partake in ceremony when I am invited to do so and I often smudge and use (and gather) my own medicines, I don't practice culture, spirituality and ceremony in a traditional way. I actually consider myself to be a Christian, which some would argue isn't exactly conducive to the concepts of "combine, unite [or] connect with" Aboriginal spirituality. Although there are similarities and things that parallel each other as well as specific ceremonies that can be combined, my medicines are used in Christ's name for my one God and this is at the forefront of my prayer, not Grandfathers, Grandmothers and the Four Directions as is in Ab. prayer. So, while I respect and acknowledge Aboriginal spirituality and "borrow" some tools I am not immersed and therefore not fully connected. And, though I certainly spend time at friends' who live in Aboriginal communities, I don't live *on the Rez*. My digs/roots are still pretty much middle-class, waspy and mainstream white. So, I guess you could say that I haven't actually "united" either. In fact, "united" would imply "becoming one with". Instead, I tend to celebrate the differences; I own who I am and accept others' as they are.

Jane says that Aboriginal friends, family and coworkers have, at various times, referred to her as "a friend to the Aboriginal children and families we live and work with." Jane herself feels more like a helper.

Jane shared that she and her friends and colleagues often discuss why social workers working with Aboriginal peoples "do what they do." They discuss who does it well and who doesn't and why. They wonder about the barriers and shortcomings. Jane says they have concluded that "getting *it* seems to make all the difference." *It* is "the history – residential school, the foster care system as it relates to Aboriginal children, colonization, loss of language and culture, racism, education systems that understand only a Eurocentric way of teaching and learning, marginalization and poverty as a result of these issues."

Jane feels these issues are still being perpetuated in the child welfare system and not just at the institutional level but at the individual level as well. Jane thinks perhaps she is considered an ally because her mentors taught her to be a "change agent" and to "speak up when I see injustice." Jane also feels that she does not claim to know more than she does and that "being honest about her ignorance shows her humility is important and respected in Aboriginal circles."

Jane believes she started out her career as an ally. She did the BSW program at Nicola Valley Institute of Technology (NVIT) in Merritt which was an Aboriginal-specific program. She did two practicum placements that introduced her to the Nlaka'pamux/Okanagan/Secwepemc cultures and she knew before graduating that she would be working with Aboriginal peoples in her career. The NVIT program provided Jane with an

opportunity to be “immersed in Aboriginal history from an Aboriginal perspective” and the significant relationships she developed with classmates and teachers continue to this day. Jane has Elders in the Interior whom she can call on for mentorship.

Jane acknowledges that she asks a lot of questions and learns from the people in her life. Jane knows she is White and “doesn’t try to be anything else.” Jane is married to a man who is a bi-racial mix of African American and Choctaw who identifies as black and knows his Choctaw culture. This provides Jane with opportunity to enjoy relationships with a diverse group of people.

In her work, Jane accepts that there are clients who do not want to work with her because she is White. She sees this as “part of the job description for someone non-Aboriginal” and does not take it personally. Jane is not aware of any underlying issues interfering with collegial relationships.

Jane’s commitment to being an ally is “tested daily because of the institutional umbrella I work under.” Jane finds the neo-colonial nature of the relationship between the agency she works with and MCFD frustrating and “gets her wrists slapped for speaking out or bending the rules.” Jane feels that it is not right that the agency has to answer to “workers and supervisors educated/trained in pretty waspy settings.”

Jane believes that an ally does what they can to fight the system from inside the Aboriginal agency. Jane is prepared to resign from her position rather than make compromises to what she knows to be right regarding service for and by Aboriginal peoples.

At a personal level, Jane has “gained ammunition in the way of knowledge” which she uses to “educate people who are ignorant.” Jane reports she is finding more diplomatic and articulate ways to convey the information as she ages. Jane feels she has been very fortunate on her journey to becoming an ally and any frustrations are tempered by “how difficult the battle has been for Aboriginal peoples and how patient they have been.”

Jane does not think people can be taught to be allies. She reports that there are many opportunities for White staff in the Aboriginal agency to learn “how their choices, assumptions and lack of knowledge affect the families we work with, but people just don’t seem to get it.” Jane believes that if being an ally can be learned it “has to come from family values and sort of predisposed to upbringing.” That being an ally is about an innate attitude that starts early on.

With respect to racism, Jane thinks racism has to be taken in context dependent on how one lets it affect him/her. Jane does her job whether people are racist or not and only pays attention when it is affecting her clients, family or friends which she acknowledges to be their daily experience.

Regarding other workers, Jane has observed that there are workers at the agency who have maintained that “going to rescue/save” imperative that social workers seem to have. She recognizes that the practice is not always about the child or the child’s best interest – more about the worker’s need for everyone to see the world the same way they do.

Jane acknowledges there are staff members who hold onto assumptions about Aboriginal peoples that are not true. Jane does not think most people have the time in their day to critically self-reflect on their practice.

Jane does not feel she had any learning to “unlearn” with respect to Aboriginal peoples. She does not remember learning anything in school and when she started learning about the accurate history of Aboriginal peoples, came to discover how little she knew.

The context that influences Jane’s experience of being an ally is the issue of some having privilege, access, respect, family, health and money and others not having these things. Jane describes herself as a true socialist who thinks life should be fair.

If she had it to do again, Jane would still choose to be an ally. Jane believes that she and the people she works with “do good work and the intent comes from the right place” and while she knows she cannot change the world, knows she can “work as a change agent.”

Jane finds it rewarding in her work “to see Aboriginal families and children have some control over what happens in their lives.”

James’ Journey

James is a thirty-something White man whose cultural heritage originates in the British Isles (Scotland) and Austria. He was raised in Prince George on the traditional territory of the Carrier people by second generation Canadians. James was raised in the Catholic faith and although he was surrounded by a large family and extended family, there was little about their cultural background preserved from the Old Country. James’ grandfather taught them some German phrases and occasionally they ate traditional German food but James believes his family left the old world behind to start a new life.

James describes his parents as “open-minded people who held some liberal values” and indicates he “never heard either of them say anything negative about any culture, race or minority.” James’ father was quite vocal in the home about the absentee Indo-Canadian landlords who took advantage of the Aboriginal families who were renting homes in the neighbourhood. James’ indicates that his extended family was not so unbiased and describes his uncles engaging in “brainless chatter” typical of the local mills.

James recalls having significant contact with Aboriginal peoples when he was growing up. He indicates that the neighbourhood in which he grew up was “rich in ethnicity” with a mix of Aboriginal, Indo-Canadian and new Asian immigrants. James thought it was normal to have a diverse group of friends until he left his elementary school and discovered differently.

James describes the families in his neighbourhood as “poor or working class” and remembers everyone playing together. James had “several best friends” who were Aboriginal and they remain close today. The “togetherness” of the neighbourhood did not transition into high school and James remembers there being clear racial lines drawn. He remembers hearing racial slurs in the schoolyard.

James does not remember anything in particular about Aboriginal peoples in the school curriculum. He says his school had “houses” for intramural sports and activities that had Aboriginal names (e.g. Chilcotin, Salish).

James was aware that outside of his school, church and immediate neighbourhood, there was a “noticeable absence of Native people particularly in extra-curricular activities like music or drama.” James states that Aboriginal peoples sat at the back of the church and were the majority of the population served at church “holiday meals.” James did not know of any Aboriginal peoples in soccer, cadets or junior forest wardens.

James indicates his knowledge of his being considered an ally comes from his being included in this study. While he believes he is considered a White ally, he only takes it seriously when called this by Aboriginal peoples.

James believes his journey towards becoming a White ally began when he was invited to work at an Aboriginal family service agency. He felt this came from his knowing and working well with the families, community and Aboriginal service providers. He had considered himself more of a “sympathizer” than an ally up until that point in time. James was hesitant to take up the

offer because “the last thing that the Aboriginal community wanted or needed was another young White male social worker telling them why and how to fix their families.”

James had an understanding of the historical context of Aboriginal peoples and did not want to be a “collaborator” in further oppressing Aboriginal peoples who had been “oppressed at great cost to their community.” James struggled with the issue of taking a position that a qualified Aboriginal social worker could have taken.

In his current position, James says the issue of White allies does not surface very often. James thinks this could be because people assume all of the employees are Aboriginal and so there are some who may not know he is White. James indicates he will point out his race where appropriate for not disclosing this is like “keeping a dirty little secret.” Upon reflection, James indicates that this dynamic stems from a specific incident and has no problem identifying as White at work. James does wonder why race has to matter.

Outside of work, James says his friends and family do see him as an ally to Aboriginal peoples and expect him to be the ‘expert’ on Aboriginal issues like treaty rights, settlements and tax laws.

James does not think he started out his career as an ally but remembers a “vague dissatisfaction with the world in general and just wanted to do his part in improving the social condition.” James started his education in psychology but switched to the BSW program to “get some grounding in reality.” James’ first practicum was in an anti-poverty advocacy office where he was working with Native people who were living on the street. James describes this as a “really eye-opening experience” where he recognized that people are victims of structural discrimination, inequality and marginalization. He quickly realized that he was seeing the street level effects of failed social policy.

James did his second practicum with the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) and knew he would not be working there long in his career. He stated that he “did not like the hierarchy, the bureaucracy and its short-sightedness in dealing with larger social issues and problems.”

As James learned more about the history of Aboriginal peoples from peers at school and from the families and children he was working with, the more strongly he felt that he had to do his part where and when he could. James found he could do this from within an Aboriginal agency in a way that was not possible in MCFD.

James has worked in child welfare for approximately ten years with two years in MCFD and eight in Aboriginal agencies. James' first experience with removing Aboriginal children from reserve left him knowing that although "the law said he could, policy said he should, and his boss said he must...he felt it was wrong and wanted no part of it." James describes this experience as "knowing this was the tip of the spear in terms of oppression and assimilation and that as a simple cog in the machine I was powerless to do anything other than continue the process."

James feels he had many "teachers" who made the oppression real to him. Hearing tearful first hand stories or stories from those directly impacted by residential school left James knowing he had to "take it on." Watching his Aboriginal colleagues helped James to learn how to be an effective helper as well as providing "insight into his own values." James said these colleagues taught him that good practice came down to "listening well and not judging; trying to be helpful; empower people; and be a strong advocate for fairness." James considers himself to be fortunate to have experienced events and met people that "most non-Native people never get a chance to do."

James feels his commitment to being an ally has been tested when he encounters "conflict working with Aboriginal clients who hold deep resentment and anger towards White people." James finds it a struggle to provide effective support and has to remind himself that "their reaction is justified historically and not unexpected but not a judgment of him as a person or even his abilities." James is willing to acknowledge the challenge to the helping relationship and arrange for transfer to an Aboriginal worker.

James indicates that in the workplace he experiences "vibes from co-workers who aren't as accommodating to non-Native people as others." He acknowledges that this is not overt, more often third-hand comments, non-verbal dynamics, etc. James tries not to personalize this because he recognizes that this stems from something that he himself agrees with - which is that Aboriginal services should be provided by Aboriginal peoples to Aboriginal peoples. James acknowledges that he does struggle when his ego leads him to feel useless and under-appreciated and he wonders if he would be happier in a non-Aboriginal workplace.

James remembers a pivotal moment in his career when he was working with a family in Vanderhoof. He had helped a mother move a bed downstairs and she told him that he was the first social worker "to actually help her with something *she* needed help with." What struck him

was that “the goal of actually helping somebody on their terms is often lost in the bureaucratic needs of the ‘system’”; or “our need to get our stuff done.”

On another occasion, James was working with a woman whom he had grown up with in Prince George. She had asked how he had gotten where he was while she had not as they came from the same neighbourhood. James felt humbled to have had the good fortune of getting an education that provided him employment. He also recognized that there are some who would attribute the difference to some “personal character trait or ability.”

James talks of the opportunities he has had to attend and participate in traditional Aboriginal gatherings and ceremonies and speaks of attending a potlatch in Burns Lake as being a “seminal moment.” He felt “extremely humbled to be a minority and largely ignorant in an unfamiliar culture.” He felt that the 26 hours of sitting and listening to Carrier people and witnessing a community at work really “put him in his place.” He recalls thinking at the time that “as a White man in North America that was probably as close as I would come to really feeling like a minority; and it wasn’t comfortable, although the hosts were quite accepting and welcoming.”

These experiences came full circle for James when he realized that his own Catholic ceremonies were similar in nature to the Aboriginal ceremonies he attended in that there “were symbols, singing, metaphors, recognition of a Creator and communion with the Divine.” Being able to draw so many parallels helped James to understand that both serve to connect one to “something bigger than oneself, through the shared enactment of ritual.” The irony of the Church’s role in assimilating Aboriginal peoples is not lost on James.

James does not feel he has had professional “battles” as a White ally but certainly experiences ongoing challenges in his personal life. He has been troubled recently by his mother “developing a sense of jealous entitlement around Aboriginal issues...including being vocal about opposing land claims settlements, tax exemptions and free schooling.” James felt this was the “usual anti-native bullshit he would hear by narrow-minded White bigots on the street” but not from his own mother. James felt he had to question the values he had been raised with since he credits his mother with “instilling a sense of fair play, justice and responsibility in me.” James has decided his mother’s attitude stems from “a buried sense of White guilt and jealousy” over financial compensation and what he calls a “scientific process of older people becoming more racist as they age.”

James has had similar experiences with White friends who do not understand what or why he does what he does. He finds that it is hard on his relationships having the media reporting about fishing, treaty payments, residential school payments as this triggers contentious discussions between he and his friends. James does not present himself as an expert or authority but does not pass up opportunities to increase people's awareness and knowledge when he can.

James feels that his journey to becoming an ally has been "interesting and fortunate" in that he has learned a lot about himself and others as he has "been witness to many hopeful and positive moments in people's lives and ceremonies that were spiritually uplifting." James describes there being expected challenges and times when he has been tested emotionally and physically and when his values and morals were tested. While he has "witnessed great times with people and families as they overcame their challenges and grew strong...this was balanced out with being witness to terrible tragedies and injustices."

James does not believe that just anyone can become an ally and thinks it requires "a person with the right values, attitude and personality." He bases this on his experience of there being many fellow students and colleagues, who learned the same history of Aboriginal peoples, see the same need and have the same skills but they are not working as allies. He considers effective allies to:

1. practice with patience, humbleness, and a willingness to listen and learn;
2. recognize the importance of culture and relationships between people and foster these with their clients;
3. be comfortable in the grey area outside their comfort zone and able to practice in this area without being the expert;
4. recognize their own culture and background and the effect this has on their work;
5. acknowledge and accept there is a boundary;
6. be "of the culture but not in the culture" to share, foster, and reflect Aboriginal values but not to the point where we confuse our own identity and roles;
7. learn about the culture – to be open to being taught, to listen, and to participate when expected; and
8. not presume to be experts in a culture or Aboriginal community – always the student

James feels very strongly that racism plays a strong role in assisting White allies because, "although it can be negative, it is a strong reminder of the place that culture has in our practice." He states, "we cannot deny that racial relations has played a significant role in Aboriginal communities and continues to play out in different ways today." James believes he experiences racism as a White person from Aboriginal peoples who see his Whiteness as a factor that limits

how far he can walk with an Aboriginal person. James sees this racism as his cue that “the dialogue between people of different cultures is broken” and it is important to name the behaviour as racist if “we hope to address it and move past it.”

James does not comment specifically on how the racism White people have towards Aboriginal peoples may come into play in preventing people from becoming allies. He does comment on how his own narrow view of Aboriginal peoples has changed and grown over the years. He feels his view was narrow because of the limited context in which he interacted with people. He has since met “Aboriginal political and spiritual leaders, athletes, artists – Native people that have excelled in school, as professionals, and as parents.” James feels he has a different understanding of Aboriginal peoples than most White people. He says he knows others see Aboriginal peoples as essentially flawed and inferior but he sees Aboriginal peoples and communities as “survivors of Western cultures” attempts to extinguish them.

Upon further reflection, James does wonder if perhaps having a family of origin who are racist and discriminatory prevents some workers from seeing Aboriginal peoples differently. “Perhaps it is a White, elitist attitude...toward anyone who is different. The history of colonization has made White ‘right’ and once the brain is hardwired to believe certain things it can be hard to change that.” James can see that some people he went to University with saw Aboriginal peoples as needing help – sort of “client-like” whether they were actual clients or not.

James discusses confusion about a continued White way of doing things when Aboriginal peoples clearly have a better way of doing things. From family to preserving the environment, it is clear to James that White people have lost something that has endured for Aboriginal peoples despite colonization.

James believes that it was “having been raised with values of equality, fairness and non-discrimination coupled with having a wide variety of friends from different cultures ‘humanizing’ everyone for him” that influenced his becoming an ally. He also feels that as he ages, he is “becoming more disenchanted with the White western, linear thinking, Judeo-Christian, pro-capitalist, military-industrial hegemony.” He is finding that “Indigenous cultures have much more to offer in terms of spirituality, relationships, resource use and health.” James credits having Aboriginal friends as the greatest impact to his becoming an ally – seeing the daily lived experience of the colonial impacts and hearing the Elders’ stories has left a mark on James.

In addition, James feels that the education he received from UNBC regarding the history of Aboriginal peoples and Canadian social policy was critical to his becoming an ally.

If invited to do so, James would become an ally if he had to do it all over again. Being asked to come along on the journey is important for James.

What James finds most rewarding about becoming an ally is being given “a new perspective when looking at my own family history, culture and traditions.” Also being able to “witness and partake in ceremonies has been a large reward” for James and he feels “lucky to witness healing taking place, to reconnect with something larger and older than myself.” James feels there are few White men who have had the chance to experience what he has in the Aboriginal community.

James’ struggle continues to be “fending off some co-worker’s racism’ towards him as he knows he will ‘always be White and there will always be some Aboriginal peoples that don’t see anything redeeming in White people.” This issue impacts James’ decision-making regarding taking on more responsibility as he wonders how “effective he would be supervising Aboriginal staff working with Aboriginal families in an Aboriginal setting.” James wonders whose needs he would be meeting.

Bob’s Journey

Bob is a fifty-something White man whose cultural heritage originates in Britain. He was raised in Vancouver on the Traditional territory of the Coast Salish people by first generation Canadians.

Bob indicates that he was raised by parents with left-wing politics who discussed worker’s rights, labour issues and the NDP. They did not have respect for the parties in power and taught Bob to think critically about the people running the country. Bob feels this may have helped him to accept the accurate history of Aboriginal peoples when he learned it many years later. Bob feels fortunate that his parents believed in treating everyone fairly.

Bob recalls having little contact with Aboriginal peoples as a child. He “heard and knew very little” except what he saw in the Western movies on TV and in the theatres. Bob states that he “never bought” that they portrayed the Indians as the bad guys. “You put a bunch of cowboys with guns up against Indians with bows and arrows and we are supposed to feel bad for the cowboys.”

Bob attended high school with a few Aboriginal students but did not socialize with them outside of school. He does not recall this being about their being Aboriginal as his own “best friend” was of East Indian descent and there were other minority kids in his circle of friends. Bob does not remember learning anything about Aboriginal peoples and wonders “where I was during those years.”

Bob had not thought of himself as a White ally and is honoured to be accepted as such. Bob describes himself “as simply an individual who wants to promote the changes that I feel are long overdue” and has “always supported fair rights for any group that was being marginalized.”

Bob’s becoming an ally results from his experiencing the high number of Aboriginal children in care. He has been a social worker for more than thirty years and found, over the years, that “it was painfully apparent to me that the people who created the situation that placed so many Aboriginal children at risk could not do the social work. To expect the Aboriginal community to accept help from this group is, in my opinion, ridiculous.” It has been Bob’s experience that “most non-Aboriginal social workers do not work well with Natives.” This influenced Bob fifteen years ago to become involved in projects that “promoted Aboriginal peoples working and caring for their children in care.”

Bob believes his journey towards becoming a White ally with Aboriginal peoples began, after “years of total ignorance regarding the treatment of Aboriginal peoples in our country,” with an experience that was quite shocking for him. Bob recalls that after six months of being a child protection worker he was required to remove children at risk. He received an intake call about an Aboriginal woman and her baby which, upon investigation, resulted in the baby being removed. What Bob found disturbing is that the mother did not demonstrate the emotions he would expect from someone whose child was being taken from her. He expected anger or sadness or guilt but what he saw was someone without any “fight, energy or interest in what happened next.” After debriefing the situation with a colleague, he was able to identify this response as ‘resolve’ and his colleague said, “she does not believe we intend to return her child.” Bob recalls his only response being “why would she think that?”

Bob indicates that he was incensed that this mother did not believe she had an equal chance of having her child returned to her and he was disturbed by the realization that she was right. This incident was the start of Bob’s education about the history of Aboriginal peoples in Canada.

Bob feels the injustice embedded in the relationship Canada has with Aboriginal peoples is something that “should not happen to anyone or group.” Bob was not raised with Aboriginal peoples but his friends were of other races. On the other hand, Bob raised his children in south Vancouver where they attended school with eighty five percent of the children having English as a second language. Bob states, “we do not see colour when choosing whom we spend time with. We look at their character and values.”

Bob states that any testing of his commitment to being an ally comes from his “willingness to tolerate the limited abuse that comes with the role and the ignorant comments made by non-Aboriginal friends and relatives.” When Bob agreed to take the secondment to the Aboriginal agency, “a number of non-Aboriginal co-workers questioned my decision.” What he has experienced is non-Aboriginal friends making comments like “it sounds like you are turning Indian.” Bob states, “one individual wanted to know why I would want to work with people who hated us. Another assumed I would not find the environment friendly.” This has not been Bob’s experience at the Aboriginal agency.

Bob has found that working in an Aboriginal agency, with Aboriginal people, has resulted in his looking at his values, way of thinking and how he does things. He did not realize that his “culture had conditioned me to process ideas and problems in a very restricted way.” Bob’s father taught him and his brother to engage in “healthy debate” so they would learn to defend their points of view and build a strong case for them. This ‘skill’ resulted in Bob questioning an Elder in a Talking Circle. Fortunately for Bob, Aboriginal peoples are patient teachers and he is grateful that they understood “I was just stupid and not meaning to be rude.” Bob’s test as an ally has been to learn to “sit back, listen, learn and put aside my teachings in hopes to understand how the community functions.”

Bob understands that there is an expectation that he will respect the culture and do his best to operate according to protocol. Bob accepts this as an unspoken understanding upon which his acceptance and inclusion are dependent. This has resulted in Bob discovering many things about Aboriginal culture, like respect for the elderly, family and environment, that he loves and finds lacking in his own culture. For example, Bob feels White people could lose the values of “ownership of ideas, greed and willingness to walk over each other to get to the top.”

Bob reports being tired of comments like “when will they get over the past” but will do his best to educate a receptive audience. Bob recognizes that mostly people are ignorant, as he

was, and that “the average person knows very little about what happened to the Aboriginal community and how it has affected them.” Bob knows that for him, “the more I learned about the history of Aboriginal peoples in Canada and their culture, the more I appreciated their determination and resiliency.”

Bob accepts that “if a non-Aboriginal person wants to be an ally, they must expect and be prepared for some hostility.” Bob has found it challenging to deal with the resentment that can come with the role of being an ally but understands that not all Aboriginal peoples want White people involved in developing their child protection services. Bob understands that his role in the agency is to “offer what knowledge and experience they think may be of use in the development of their programs.” Bob concludes, “I would never assume to know what would work for them.”

Bob understands that any hostility directed at him is related to an Aboriginal person’s past experiences and he “cannot deny them those feelings or expect them to go away before the person is ready.” Bob does not personalize the response as others in the agency have been “kind, generous and very open to my presence.”

Bob feels that his journey to becoming an ally has been a very positive experience for him despite the challenges. He realizes that he will never be a full member of the team because “it is unrealistic to think that an outsider could drop in and say, “hey guys, I get it”. It’s impossible to “get it” unless you were there.” Bob recognizes that “sharing tragedy and loss binds a group in a special way” and so he “will always be an outsider.” Bob feels isolated at times but understands why.

Bob does not believe that just anyone can become an ally. He believes an ally needs to:

1. Have a good understanding of the issues
2. Have a thick skin
3. Be able to engage with Aboriginal peoples in a different way
4. Have a certain amount of tolerance and patience

Bob does not believe that everyone is willing to put themselves in that place and do what is needed to be an ally with Aboriginal peoples. There is the issue of putting up with non-Aboriginal peoples who are quite critical of the Aboriginal community and only see them in a limited way as “wanting” something. “You are the odd one out and have information and knowledge that others don’t so it is an up-hill battle trying to educate others who just don’t ‘get it’.”

Bob also says few people are willing to put themselves in a place of being with Aboriginal peoples who are angry and tired of how the non-Aboriginal community treats them. To be accused of just wanting to alleviate his White guilt by working with Aboriginal peoples has been hard for Bob. He feels a strong social justice imperative is a driving force behind what he does and is does not personalize what is said.

Bob thinks everyone is racist to a point because society promotes it. The value his parents taught about treating everyone fairly is something Bob believes conflicts with racism. Bob has enjoyed positive experiences with other ethnic groups and the fact that he “did not have any knowledge of Aboriginal peoples or of how they were mistreated” may have made it easier for him to accept the accurate version of history when he learned it.

Bob feels strongly that he was a White professional required to remove children from situations that his community created and that these acts were “driven by racism.” Separating a child from his family was the beginning of Bob’s unrest.

Bob’s “unlearning” has been centered on the issue of relatives being reluctant to come forward to foster a child. He used to think “you said you wanted your kids back in your community, so step up.” He now knows that the situation is far too complex and has come to understand “how intimidating the process was or that most applicants assumed that we would find them unsuitable. Asking them to work with us was unrealistic and would have put them in a loyalty conflict with their families.”

Bob recognizes that he is a person who “likes a start, middle and end to things” and that this is not the case for Aboriginal peoples necessarily. Bob recalls a meeting where there was a “start, middle and side” and everyone went home even though the meeting was not over. What Bob has learned is “to keep my mouth shut. White guys talk too much.”

If he had to do it over, Bob would choose to be an ally again because being an ally has “changed the way I look at things.” Bob finds it rewarding that his “outlook is different and my goals for my personal life have changed somewhat. I want fewer things and appreciate my relationships more...I appreciate the journey and focus less on the goal.”

Bob understands that the struggle he has with respect to the hostility directed towards him comes with the role and won’t go away. Bob does not find this overwhelming and represents a very small part of his journey. Bob feels that there are “a few negative confrontations that I have not been able to bring to a better place. Full inclusiveness simply can’t happen and that makes

sense.” The bigger struggle comes from “the ignorant White friends and community members.” Bob finds this frustrating but knows they need educating.

Bob concludes by saying “having a lot of Native kids in care... doesn’t just ‘happen’.” Bob became a social worker because he wanted to help children, regardless of race. He thought he “had enough experience ...to assist the agency in the development of their foster program and...feel I have contributed in this area.” Bob feels strongly that he has “received far more than I have given.”

Grace’s Journey

Where does one start in telling one’s own story? Telling someone else’s story was so much easier once I put aside my inclination to attach judgment to what they have taken the courage to share. What about my own courage to share my story? What will people say of my own journey to becoming a White ally in child welfare work with Aboriginal peoples? The four people who volunteered to participate in my study put their trust in me to honour and respect what they shared. Who do I trust to honour and respect what I have to share?

Let me start the story and see where it leads us. Usually a story starts at the beginning but my journey has no beginning or end, it is truly cyclical and so I start with something that happened for me in the summer of 2009. I had the honour of working with an Elder on a project to develop a cultural competency program for non-Aboriginal health care workers. As I was developing a relationship with this Elder, we were talking about her willingness to share her story of being in both an Indian Hospital¹⁸ and a Residential School. What this Elder said to me continues to resonate because it is a really great example of the differences between White people and Aboriginal people.

The Elder said, “Grace, I am not telling a story, I am sharing my painful experiences and knowledge of the experimentation and torture done to me and my family members in the Indian Hospital.” The Elder went on to explain that the term ‘story’ implies some mythology and “there is nothing mythical about what I have to share.” I understood right away. Aboriginal peoples are steeped in, and dying from, the mythology that surrounds them in Canada.

¹⁸ Few people know that there were 17 Indian Hospitals operating in Canada between the 1930’s and 1960’s. Originally intended to contain the spread of tuberculosis to the White populations, medical experimentation was carried out; children from at least one Residential School were sent there for punishment that ranged from putting them in full body casts to having electric shock attached to their breasts and genitals (see Kelm, 1999; Lux 2007)

So the Elder, who comes from a culture that honours oral tradition, does not have the privilege of telling her story for fear it is relegated to the past with the rest of the ‘noble Indians’ who exist in Hollywood and history books. I have the privilege of telling my story of becoming a White ally without it being dismissed as ‘mythical’. Let me exercise that privilege so the goal of this research can be realized. The goal that other White social workers will read something that inspires them to be willing to exercise their privilege and act up against the system of oppression that continues to privilege us as White people at the expense of and oppression of Aboriginal peoples.

I was born Grace Heather Atkinson on November 9, 1958. But by virtue of whose turn it was to name this fifth baby, I would have been Heather Grace Atkinson and perhaps my path would have gone in a completely different direction and we wouldn’t be having this conversation. That, however, is the subject of a completely different type of research.

I was born to parents of Scottish/British ancestry who were first generation children born to immigrants who settled in Saskatchewan on Cree traditional territory and Southern and South Western Ontario on Mohawk traditional territory. The significance of that detail has been lost on at least five generations of this family. My parents were Protestant and attended church every Sunday. They were active in the church serving on committees and executive. My parents also held strongly to the values that I have come to understand as White supremacist and elitist in nature. These are the values entrenched in the Discourses of Domination discussed earlier. For now, let it suffice that my parents were not the “Ku Klux Klan” (KKK) type of racists that most White people measure themselves against. Instead, they were the type of racists who were categorically unaware of how the power their values, entrenched in a racist culture, have come to oppress and marginalize Aboriginal peoples in Canada.

I was raised in a small town in Northwestern Ontario in a home that my father designed and built high up on a street that many in town referred to as ‘snob hill’. We had an unimpeded view of Lake Superior and the downtown core. Our view of the local reserve was impeded by a big hill that obscured our view of the residents on the other side of the river. This was Anishinabe (Ojibwe) traditional territory and I would come to know more about the people from that reserve than I know about my own ancestors and culture.

Let me begin with my family's culture. My maternal grandmother arrived in Canada and settled on the shores of Lake Ontario when she was fourteen. She still had her Scottish accent

when she died at the age of ninety-six. My grandmother had some Gaelic expressions that she used but did not teach us any Gaelic words or traditions. My family did not eat any traditional Scottish foods like haggis but my mother did make oat cakes and shortbread. My family did not practice or celebrate any aspects of our Scottish culture but my mother has kept the knowledge of our Scottish ancestors alive. I did not know my maternal grandfather who also arrived in Canada from Scotland as a young adult and settled in Southern Ontario.

My paternal grandmother was always vague about her cultural origins. What I remember her saying is that they were Scottish/British and that she arrived in Canada as a child young enough to fit in a basket that hung from the horse as they crossed through the Kicking Horse Pass on their way to Saskatchewan from British Columbia at the turn of the 20th Century. It is not clear to me how my grandmother ended up in Southern Ontario but there was a family farm at what is now Markham, Ontario and there is a stained glass window honouring and commemorating the family in the Browns Corners United Church. I did not know my paternal grandfather and have no knowledge of how he came to be in Southern Ontario.

My parents had one sibling each and we lived thousands of miles from any of our relatives. When I was in training in the early 1990's with colleagues who were Aboriginal we were given an activity to map the neighbourhood in which we had grown up. As the only White person in the small group, it was quite shocking to my Aboriginal colleagues to learn that I was not related to anyone on the street I grew up on or the community in which I was raised. They were openly and vocally sympathetic about this lack.

I do not remember seeing any Aboriginal person in my parent's home until I brought the First Nations boy I was dating home for dinner in tenth grade. I was shipped off to private school a short-time later (not a coincidence). I did have a number of friends who were Aboriginal when I was growing up. As I think about it now they were children of Aboriginal women who would have lost their status marrying White men and lived off-reserve. I suppose I was 'allowed' to play with these girls because their White fathers were 'hard working men' and these girls had light skin. Whatever the reason, I gained a great deal from the gift of their friendship. One of these girls still calls me friend and I am the godmother to her eldest child. We have been friends since we were eight years old and have plans to retire together on a porch one day.

As a child with friends who were Aboriginal, I remember their Aboriginal grandmothers being around their houses. I did not understand what I was seeing at the time but have come to

understand how each lived on different ends of the same colonial spectrum. One was an alcoholic coping with ‘being Aboriginal’ in a White racist community and the other was trying hard to be White. I can see now that both lived tragic lives because they were not free to live authentic lives. This is perhaps the most insidious result of racism in any form.

My friends and I – both Aboriginal and White – used to ride our bikes out to the reserve and play. My parents did not know I was doing this. I knew instinctively that this was not allowed and I would have been punished (lectured, grounded and spanked) for going there. ‘The reserve’ was off bounds and I just never spoke of it at home.

There were off-reserve Aboriginal children attending the public school where I went to school. I realize now that the on-reserve children would have been bussed to the Catholic school in town so I did not see them at school. Some of the girls were tough and I would say I was bullied by them but I do not recall associating bully with Aboriginal. There were an equal number of White girls who bullied and I saw them as people to avoid. I do not honestly know if the Aboriginal girls bullied because J and I were friends. I do know there were White girls who did not like it and she and I fought many battles as children to protect each other. My friend moved about ninety minutes away before the start of grade seven so our school battles ended. For some reason our parents were willing to accommodate us continuing our friendship and so one or the other of us was driven to the other’s house at regular intervals. This is how we were able to maintain our friendship beyond elementary school I suppose.

Grade seven was the year the students from a reserve about one hour from town were bussed to the Public school. I honestly do not remember whether or not I engaged in teasing them because I remember how enthralled they were with the running water in the school. I did not know until later that they did not have running water or indoor plumbing in their homes. (Ironically, this was the same year, 1969, that the first men walked on the moon)

The High School I attended for grades nine through ten was about forty minutes from town. There were many buses that carried students to the school but my two friends and I rode the bus that originated on the reserve 1 hour away. Our White friends thought there was something wrong with us but that was definitely the fun bus to be on – we could smoke, we laughed till we cried and the bus driver never said we couldn’t or shouldn’t be riding with the ‘Indians’. Again, I am very sure my parents had no knowledge about this.

What I learned about Aboriginal peoples in my home and at school is that Aboriginal peoples are: drunk, lazy, stupid, worthless, taboo, exotic, good for nothing unless they were productive and worked hard and then worthy of my father's respect (although there was always surprise in his voice to learn the person was Aboriginal); that you could not trust Indians; that you were not to associate with Indians – and certainly never date or marry an Indian!

What I learned was racism. I learned that Aboriginal peoples are only worthy of contempt from White people. My brothers and father held Aboriginal peoples in contempt. The resentment about 'taxes and other free stuff' at the expense of 'white men' and their hard earned money. So many racial slurs it is hard to remember them all – the contempt oozed from these men.

In March 1993 I wrote, *“came home for supper to spend time with [my brothers] – as usual there were derogatory remarks about Native people and Black people – I stayed quiet – after some time I asked why they couldn't just accept people without judging them and where White people get off believing they are the superior race – Dad blew it – his answer was “because White people are smarter” – that was it! I couldn't accept it – I made a crack about how pathetic it is and how ill I feel hearing my father and brothers uttering White supremacist shit at my father's table. The battle was on – well, I asked Dad where in the Bible it says that White men are created more equally than black, red or yellow and why God created all colours if He meant one to be Supreme. I asked where it says in the Bible that anyone can or is supposed to judge themselves superior to or inferior to – we are all humans, created equally. It went round and round ...I made a comment about why they didn't just be grateful to have been born white and male instead of judging good, bad, right, wrong. [My sister] called in the middle of this – said it was too bad [her husband] wasn't home to add his racist two cents! [My brother] made a crack like “at least [my sister] married a red neck” – I responded, “what chance did she have, look at her models!” It went on and on... It is the White Supremacist shit I can't accept – I felt sick, physically sick when dad said “whites are smarter” – he really believes he is better than and supreme...I have a long road to struggle along.”*

As I think about the messages I received in school about Aboriginal people, it seems to me that the grade one teacher only seemed to strap the Aboriginal students – including my friend who was strapped for not keeping her capital E's in the lines.

I had one teacher in grade ten who introduced us to the Treaties as part of the curriculum. I remember being very interested in this topic – he made a point of talking about how unfair the

treaties were – my memory tells me the Robinson Superior Treaty was signed with ‘x’s’. How could those Chiefs possibly have known and trusted what they were really signing?

I completed high school at the private school where my parents had sent me – there were students from all over the world at that school – Mexico, Jamaica, Trinidad, South Africa, Yugoslavia, Bermuda, Hong Kong, Bahamas. It was a multi-denominational school so church services accommodated all but Muslim faiths – Catholic; Anglican, Protestant and Jewish were services that I remember being rotated on Sundays. I do not remember racial divisions in this school – I got along and hung out with everyone. There was one Aboriginal student who attended on scholarship one year that I went there. As I think about her now, I can only imagine how utterly awful that year must have been for her. She was all alone, away from family, community and culture – I remember that she had to sit at a table very strategically so that she was not on serving duty when she had her period. I would love the opportunity to speak with her today.

So how does this little White kid from the ‘right’ part of town come to be considered a White ally? How do I know I am a White ally? Well, for sure White people are tired of listening to me talk about the accurate history of Aboriginal peoples in Canada; and racism – they see me as a ‘race traitor’ (Ignatiev, 1996). In the last five years I have had Aboriginal peoples use the term ‘ally’ when referring to me. In one of the jobs I had in British Columbia, I supervised staff members who were Aboriginal. They travelled to various places in the Province to deliver training and when they returned to the office, one of them would say “Grace, it doesn’t matter where we go in this province, everyone knows and respects you – I hear your name everywhere.” After presenting at a training session in the lower mainland, they returned to let me know that another Aboriginal presenter had said, “If you want to know more about building relationships in Aboriginal communities, Grace is the best person I know.” It is true that the jobs I have had in British Columbia have enabled me to have contact with a number of Aboriginal peoples and communities.

I never considered myself to be an ally. I did see myself as an advocate (defined as one who takes action in support of another). An ally brings up a different level of responsibility in my mind and I really did not understand that I had a responsibility to use my privilege to help facilitate change until I started to work with C. So it is really only in the last five years that I could accept being called ally. In 2007 I was honoured, through no initiation or solicitation on

my part, with a name, ‘Wa KeeinSka Weyan’ or White Thunder Woman. This name was gifted to me in a Yuwipi ceremony by the ancestors Stone Man and Morning Star Woman. The proper protocols were followed and I honoured this name with a give-away one year later in another Yuwipi ceremony. What the woman who facilitated my receiving this name said to me is “you have already done the work you need to do to prepare for receiving a name. You have been preparing for years.”

This journey to becoming an ally would not have been possible without the patience and willingness of a great many people. I started my child welfare career working in fly-in Aboriginal communities in Northwestern Ontario. Nothing, including University, had prepared me for the experiences I would have in those communities. My first trip to the communities was in May 1985 and I do not remember thinking ‘oh wow, look at all the stupid, dirty, lazy drunk Indians’ – I clearly remember my first thought being “what can I possibly do here that fifteen social workers before me haven’t already tried.” I certainly had no frame of reference for the poverty, colonial impacts, internalized oppression, etc. that I was seeing. I did not have an understanding of myself as a privileged White person who was looking at the other side of that coin - oppression. I was not anti-racist or anti-oppressive but I did have instincts that served me well in those first two years.

I remember standing in a yard in Poplar Hill, Ontario in May 1985, listening to the flies waking up from their winter nap, I understood right then and there that I did not know a thing about the reality of life for people living on Reserve. As “all knowing” as I thought I was, I knew in that instant that I had a lot to learn. I had the honour to be taught by people like EW and AF, the Band Social Workers; Chiefs C, W and K; Elders AW, HL, FA, MW and numerous others. It was my privilege to sit in Pow Wow, tent revivals, and sacred circles while I received my education on Reserve.

I remember one granny who used to call me when her daughter was drinking and leaving her children alone. Granny was always willing to care for the children so the next time I was in the community I would go to the daughter’s home. The granny would come over while I was there and yell at me and accuse me of being a baby snatcher. I was never confused by this. I understood that she had called because she was concerned about her family members and was using me to scare her daughter into making changes. I also came to understand that she called me because she knew I was going to follow-up on her concerns in a good way.

I will not mislead anyone by pretending that I did not struggle with fear when flying into the remote communities. A healthy fear that communicated to me the need to follow the protocols I was taught. I still remember the words of the Chief who sat on the panel that resulted in my first job in child protection. He said, “Grace, when you are coming to my community, you must let me know this ahead of time, and when you arrive, you must come to see me first. That way I can ensure your safety in my community. If I don’t know you are coming or that you have arrived, I have no way of keeping you safe there.” I heeded those words and applied them to every community I worked in. There was no room for arrogance or posturing. For some reason I have not yet figured out, I understood that being White was not going to shield me in these communities. Respect for the people and their protocols would shield me. I walked alone after dark in the community where I most often spent the night and I was never harmed or threatened with harm.

For reasons I have not yet been able to explain, I knew instinctively that I could not practice what I will call traditional or typical child welfare in these remote communities. I knew that taking children from their homes and communities was the worst thing I could do. I do not know how I knew these things. I have heard Aboriginal friends and colleagues call this ‘ancestral knowledge’ – or the ‘knowing’ that comes from the ancestors. I too have had many ‘mystical’ type of experiences while working in Aboriginal communities. As a result I acknowledged the existence of the “unexplainable”. The questions remain: Why me? Why not me? What was it that made this journey possible?

I certainly made many mistakes in my career. What I do feel good about is that I was unwilling to uproot a child from their family and community without good cause. In the northern fly-in communities I did everything I could to prevent children from returning to town with me. I met extensively with Chief and Council on planning for children; involved the family when I was allowed to; placed children with other Aboriginal peoples in other reserves rather than placing in White homes. My reasons may have been naïve but I was thinking about the children and what it would be like, for them, to yank them out of the only home/world they knew. I remember standing in one of the communities and looking around at a 360 degree angle trying to imagine what would happen for children to be removed. This was all they knew of their world and who was I to drag them down to a White home so far away from all that would be familiar and safe for them. I am not sure I had an understanding of the importance of maintaining

connections in the beginning (1985) but I was able to do many non-traditional things (to the culture of social work) that left children in their homes and communities without leaving them at risk.

I have come to know that using the legislation as a shield instead of a sword opened up many more options for children. I made use of community resources like the school, nursing station and family support workers.

I have had many kind and patient teachers along this path. There are too many to be able to write about each so I will give them credit as follows:

- JM Friend since third grade; still in my life; recommends books by Aboriginal authors; forwards internet links on Aboriginal issues she thinks would interest me
- FA Elder, now deceased. Inviting me into her home to visit and eat. Willing to teach me through story-telling – talking with me at breakfast in 1987 about relationships and the early days of her own marriage when jealousy was causing violence and problems. I did not understand the full benefit of that story until 2006 when I realized that jealousy has never been an issue in my relationships.
- MW Elder, now deceased. Remembering me as the little girl who played on her reserve. Willing to teach me. She knew whose child I was and still decided I was worthy of learning from her. She did not hold who my family was against me and entrusted me with cultural and community information that was crucial to my working with the Child and Family Service agency.
- RL Elder, now deceased. Kindest man I ever met. Willing to teach me. E.g. cultural knowledge about the pipe, pipe ceremony, smudge, dance. Always made a point of inviting me into the dance. Spoke with me often.
- RK Friend since 1989. Has been willing to teach me many things – the language, the politics, the meaning of the Supreme Court decisions, the struggles, the abuse, the complexities, the challenges; willing to trust me with her children while simultaneously protecting them from White people. I wrote in September 1992, “I had asked RK what I am supposed to do to make my feather ready to be used because I have been unable to pick it up so far – she said today that she had a dream that I am to use the feather to pray for the children – so that there will be someone to be their voice – that my spirituality will be there for them – that I will have a spiritual connection to them no matter where I am.”
- AH Elder, no longer in my life. Willing to teach me the language, the history – humility. I learned a lot about myself from A. This Elder was the wife of the driver of the school bus I rode to high school. She indicated that she had heard about this White girl riding the ‘Indian’ bus from her husband and had always been curious about me. She too privileged me with cultural information including a willingness to teach me the Ojibwa language.
- PN Friend and mentor no longer in my life - incredible instructor willing to invest the energy

into my growth and recovery. I wrote in December 1989, “P helped me to start looking at myself, encouraged me to grow and heal”; “helped me to risk with the (training) group – to confront the ‘White/Native’ issue – this has paid off”; February 1990, “I am grateful to P because she did save my life in a way...”

- TM Friend and mentor since 1990 – willing to teach me. Still in my life. He said to me one time, “Grace, Aboriginal peoples have to do the work with Aboriginal peoples, that’s just how it is.” We talked about the quality of that service and T said, “when Aboriginal peoples are tired of getting substandard service from their own people, they will start sending people back to school.” One day he said something about giving me something to help me understand – what he said was, “Grace, you have to understand that Aboriginal peoples believe, ‘I am Aboriginal because you are White’ and it will always interfere in the work.” The point of this teaching did not come to fruition until 2008 when I finally got it – that statement is true when I consider that White people have defined themselves by what they are not – not brown, not red, not yellow, not black, not Aboriginal... I don’t know if it would have made any difference if T had said, “I’m Aboriginal because you are not.” It may have taken the same amount of time to ‘get it’. I did let him know that the lesson finally came home and that he hadn’t wasted his time teaching me. T indicated that he knew that or would not have bothered with me.
- MH Colleague. Hired me twice and trusted me with a number of responsible positions
- AH Friend and colleague. Rescued me from front-line work and trusted me with an Aboriginal program to work with and move to the next stage of delegation.
- JP We made such a great court team. Really excellent legal counsel.
- CW Friend, colleague and mentor since 2002. Willing to invest the energy in my learning – her solid understanding of racism and power dynamics involved have been invaluable to my coming to see the daily experiences of racism in Aboriginal people’s lives. C recommends literature and encourages me to do my own research. She supported my receiving a name. We have many debates – one that has been going on a few years is around who gets to teach what to whom. I am currently losing this debate as I come to see that as a White ally, it is my responsibility to help White people to learn about themselves as racists and how they contribute to the oppression of Aboriginal peoples. That way, when an Aboriginal person has an opportunity to teach, those White people will be ready to receive the lesson. I would like to live in a world where Aboriginal peoples can teach White people but this unwillingness to learn is just one of the many blatant forms of racism that gets denied. I have learned a great deal about myself in this relationship.
- JA Friend since 1998 – considers me one of the few people she trusts; knows she is welcome to stay anytime she is in town...and is willing to stay in my home.
- CS Friend and colleague since 2005 – willing to share the culture – facilitated my receiving a name. I learned a lot about myself from CS.

- L Friend and colleague since 2001. Trusting me to do a job in an Aboriginal organization.
- M and J Friends since 1995 – not currently in my life – willing to just hang out, go to movies and shopping – willing to stay in my home and to have me in theirs.
- AF Colleague from 1985-87 – willing to teach me, to work with me
- S Elder, now deceased – willing to accept and trust me
- CA Elder, not in my life – willing to accept and trust me
- LL Friend from 1993-1998 – helped me to understand the politics and share her struggles. I wrote in May 1994, “in conversation with LL re: self-government and the reserve system, she helps me to understand that the reserve provides a land-base and a place to call home – Native people will really be lost if they are displaced – there are no pat answers – the reserve system is a double-edged sword – the thing they need to keep them together is the very thing that is destroying them – there has to be another answer – LL was struggling with what she saw in South Africa – that the poverty and oppression is so bad it makes the conditions Aboriginal people live in look luxurious – there is nothing being handed out in the townships – no education, no welfare, no medical care – she is not sure how to reconcile this struggle.”
- BP Friend, colleague – willing to live in my house; trust me with her children.
- JC Friend, mentor, instructor – willing to supervise a White student; patient with me; willing to work on projects with me; has been instrumental in my being published.
- JM Elder who has treated me kindly, shared her experiences of racism in the health care system; entrusted her painful experiences with residential school and Indian hospitals and shown me what resiliency looks like in action.

All of the Aboriginal staff I have ever supervised (SD, CF, HL, MB, DP, JW, FB, AC, JM, BJ, CW, CS, CP, KG, SH, JM, CM, SW, AH, AL) – all fabulous teachers in quite unique ways.

There are many more people who deserve to be mentioned. I will just acknowledge the openness, generosity, hospitality and willingness that I experienced and enjoyed in each of the First Nations and Aboriginal communities and agencies I had the honour and privilege of working with and in. I had occasion recently to print out the lists of First Nations in Canada. I have been privileged to be welcomed on 76 reserves in my life-time.

I worked in an Aboriginal child welfare agency in Ontario as they progressed from providing prevention services to full child protection services. There was one situation involving an Aboriginal child that stands out for me regarding my being able to retroactively explore my becoming an ally. The agency was jointly involved with the Children’s Aid Society (CAS) in a case where an Aboriginal child had been placed with White foster parents who had been allowed

to move from Northern to Southern Ontario with him. There was extended family living on a reserve very close to the First Nation to which this child belonged. Under Ontario law, the Band had the jurisdiction to present a plan for the court's consideration. During the Crown Wardship hearing, the CAS, Aboriginal agency, Band and mother all agreed that the best interests of the child would be met by placing him with his extended family for adoption. The foster parents opposed this plan and the hearing was a very long, drawn out affair. I wrote in March 1990, *“talked with the [foster parents] parents today – tried to explain that we are not ‘against’ them – that they have done a wonderful job of preparing [the child] for adoption – that the only strike against them is the fact that they are not Native and can never, no matter how sensitive and well meaning they are, raise him to know and be proud of his Native heritage given the prejudice and ignorance that exists in this society...they can't model the Native culture for him and that is the bottom line...”*

To make a very long and tragic story short, Crown Wardship was granted and CAS changed their plan and decided to leave [the child] with the White family. The Aboriginal agency requested a Director's Review which resulted in [the child] remaining with the White family because too much time had transpired and bonding was the primary issue privileged over culture. I have thought about, and even dreamt about, that little boy many times over the last 20 years. Unfortunately there was nothing in the literature or research at the time to 'prove' that the disconnection from family, extended family, community and culture would do harm to this child. There was lots of anecdotal evidence about placements breaking down, suicide, loss of language and culture but the White 'professionals' were not convinced these were more important than the bonding.

We clearly know today the devastating results of this type of practice. What was it that enabled me to be able to see it that clearly 20 years ago when only Aboriginal peoples were starting to make the links between Residential School and foster care?

In 2000 I moved to Victoria to take a job as a practice analyst. One of the delegated agencies with which I worked had been in the news and the relationship of the agency with MCFD was strained. I focused on the relationship in the beginning – use of food, humour and humility. In 2001 a case of theirs went to a Children's Commission Tribunal and I worked closely with staff and agency to prepare for this hearing. It was a horrendous experience for everyone and we 'trauma bonded' during that case. I felt tested in my role as both an MCFD

employee and an ally. It was a tough balance as I knew I would be holding the agency accountable for earlier placement decisions they had made while I was supporting them in their plan to now place the children with extended family. The relationships I developed are what made the difference. Then the facts are the facts – no arguing them with defensiveness or accusation. We shared laughter and tears during that tribunal and even got together for a critical incident debriefing afterwards.

There are many ‘a ha’ moments I have had in this journey to becoming an ally. Having the experience of sitting in a healing circle and ‘knowing’ that I was exactly where I was meant to be at that time; coming to understand some of the differences – that I was able to attend Aboriginal functions but my Aboriginal friends were not always able to attend White functions – not because they weren’t invited but because they knew they would not feel welcomed. I can honestly say that I was welcomed and accepted everywhere I went when invited. Feasts in many communities – children sat on my lap and people spoke to me. I was accepted by every Chief and Council I worked with. In one community where I worked, members of Chief and Council would stop by my office to speak with me, joke with me, etc.

Let me tell one story of a cultural faux pas I committed. This is where I have a clear view of my privilege intersecting with Aboriginal peoples. I was invited to a Potlatch and honoured with the privilege of sitting with the Bear Clan. I was provided cultural guides to help me understand the process, the protocols, and the culture. Overarching this was the ‘privilege’ I was exercising in trying to control what was on the plate I was served. “No fish please” I said. The ultimate insult to the people who had provided and prepared the food and could have resulted in the entire Clan having to pay the host Clan. Fortunately, the plate would have gone to the person beside me and so, I was given a plate without fish. What I did get was a plate of moose meat – hair and all. The lesson was well learned.

The issue of White privilege is perhaps one of the more important ‘a ha’s’ I have had. I have come to understand that the playing field is not equal or even. I have come to understand what I enjoy, by virtue of being White that comes at the expense of Aboriginal peoples. Any oppression I may experience from being female and lesbian does not change the race privileges I enjoy. The oppression that comes from racism is a special dynamic that is reserved, in Canada, for Aboriginal and other racialized peoples.

Coming to understand my own racism and the stereotypes that are deeply embedded is perhaps the most important of the lessons I have had. One of the biggest issues is around alcohol. Hearing Aboriginal peoples talk about drinking – or seeing them drink – my first thought used to be “you can’t do that.” I am able to recognize that this is the ‘all Aboriginal people are drunks’ stereotype that was embedded so many years ago and I am finally dispelling this myth from my psyche.

I have always been fortunate to work with people who were patient with my learning. I also never tried or pretended to be anything but White. In September 1995 I wrote, *“I have decided I am going to address the Native/non-Native issue right first thing Tuesday so the issue can be put to rest before it becomes a problem – I am not Native – that isn’t going to change in my lifetime never mind in the 12 days – I am not the White teacher who [harmed] them – I am not going to be punished for old [stuff] I didn’t do – I am not going to be used as their excuse to not learn – I don’t want to be battling with them for 12 days about something I can do nothing about.”* In this situation, I did know it was a huge honour and privilege to be asked to do that particular training but I certainly did not appreciate how difficult it must have been for them walking into the training room and seeing this White woman standing at the front of the room. There were White teachers who, literally, harmed them and I did not have a conscious appreciation of the fact that I had a responsibility to not perpetrate further trauma. I did not as far as I know but I cannot say this was always the case in my practice.

I know that my belief in the ‘drunken Indian’ stereotype contributed to my holding people’s children hostage while they completed alcohol treatment programs. This was just part of the checklist applied to parents whose children were in care from neglect due to alcohol. Remove, put together a list of things they have to comply with, return the children. I did not consider at the time how utterly powerless those parents must have felt. I also had the good fortune of receiving training from Michael White¹⁹ whose ground breaking work enabled me to involve parents in the planning and help them to make the decisions around what would happen when their children were removed due to alcohol related neglect.

In 1994 I was invited back to the Aboriginal child welfare agency in Ontario to assist with putting together the off-reserve transfer of children in care and set up the child protection

¹⁹ Narrative therapy premised on people’s narratives and externalizing problems so people can assess the degree that the problem interferes in their lives.

unit. I believed the mandate was to create a Native child welfare program, not recreate a White CAS program. I was alone in how that vision would happen. The Executive Director did not know what was needed and was listening to a White, male consultant who had worked for the White CAS a long time and who was cloning the CAS system to implement at the agency. After a number of disagreements and heated arguments, the ED finally blew up at me one day and said “I am creating a Brown CAS, that’s it, Grace.” I knew then that my days with the program would be ending. In June 1995 I wrote, *“I have made and announced my decision to not renew my contract at [the Aboriginal agency]. I am finished now – I have fulfilled the contract I made with them last year. I feel no guilt about this decision. This was a horrendous week and it served to seal my decision. I am tired of fighting this battle - this week it felt as though I was the White woman fighting for a culturally relevant program...that no one else seems to want! The fight was about not taking on so much that we box ourselves into a corner – one the Ministry wants us in – strictly protection – no family support. The decisions being made come down to hurting kids worse – I can’t participate in that. Decisions at the expense of children – why can’t [the ED] see it?”* and then in July, *“[consultant] has [executive director] convinced to hire a White CAS social worker – I let this all go – it isn’t my fight – I strongly believe a Native person has to be hired now – hiring a White social worker will only delay the inevitable. [The agency] has a White child protection program right now – Native children are not being served differently than they were at CAS – so why does [the agency] exist? It has to be Native people struggling with these issues and problems so this program becomes one that is different – and better for Native children...I can’t accept what is happening for children at [the agency] and I can’t seem to express myself in a way that I can be heard so...my leaving is exactly the right thing.”*

I can see now that this is all a part of my White identity development.

My journey to becoming an ally has been an interesting one. There have been highs and lows but for the most part, it was fairly easy – especially in how I was treated by Aboriginal people. I only recall blatant discrimination once and it was not the agency or agency staff I experienced this with, it was staff from one of the communities. Otherwise I gave, and received respect. Even when we disagreed, we still respected each other. I remember one heated exchange about a plan of care being put before the courts. The agency lawyer thought the community Chief and I were having a big fight – that was not the case - it was my job to ensure any decisions he made were in the child’s best interest and not his own.

I also felt a responsibility to hold staff I supervised accountable when they missed court appearances or did not follow up on commitments made on behalf of the agency. I knew what the White colleagues in the other agencies were saying about the agency and the staff. I did not want that agency falling victim to the stereotypes.

Perhaps a great struggle came from dealing with the White colleagues both inside and outside the agency. After I had left the agency the first time I wrote in November 1992, *“I have none of the bullshit from the goings on at [the agency] – none of the stress and struggling there. I am not the scapegoat any longer – I set myself up by not keeping my mouth shut but I can’t stand injustice, dishonesty, delusion, manipulation, oppression. The [White manager] is keeping the workers oppressed and it feels so natural to them that I was the enemy upsetting the status quo.* I did not know it at the time but this was what Tatum (1997) refers to as living in ‘smog’ for racialized people. There is no awareness of breathing it in but the harm is being done.

I experienced what I will call ‘a special racism’ from White colleagues that I have come to recognize as unique to White allies. It is not racism in its true sense because the power issues between White people are based on dynamics other than colour and race. What I am describing is the treatment White allies receive from White friends, family and colleagues when confronting racism and injustice or when advocating for, in my case, an Aboriginal person or for an alternative, culturally appropriate plan for Aboriginal children. This treatment was delivered with the same contempt with which I saw my Aboriginal friends, colleagues and clients treated. My credentials would be questioned, my ability and competence brought into doubt. I have come to understand this as my being a ‘race traitor’ – someone who was seen to be betraying some unseen, unspoken ‘code’ that one should never speak up against or confront Whiteness.

Can anyone be an ally? I am not so sure about this. I would have said, even five years ago, that yes, anyone can be an ally if they are willing to:

- listen,
- learn,
- put the ‘self’ aside and really hear,
- understand how White people contribute to the problem and how to be part of the solution,
- use the privilege of being White to benefit Aboriginal peoples,
- confront racism and injustice wherever you see it – in your home, in your family, in your workplace, with your friends, on the street, in the stores, in the hospital, in the police station.

Ultimately, none of this matters if there is no honest discussion about Whiteness and how the privileges bestowed upon White people come at the oppression and expense of Aboriginal peoples and other racialized people.

After overseeing and participating in the training of approximately one thousand White social workers, I know that not everyone can be an ally. Most see it as ‘too much work’ and just not worth the effort. Many remain stuck in Helm’s (1993) stage of disintegration where they are unable to move beyond feeling guilt and shame and are immobilized by it. Some are so entrenched in the Discourses of Domination that they are unable to hear that another way or explanation is possible.

But the need for Aboriginal children to maintain the connections is real – it is a basic human need. It is the spiritual and cultural needs that are not met and it is nothing less than spiritual and cultural abuse to deny those needs. The irony is that White social workers remove children from parents to ensure the basic needs for food and shelter are met. Who will remove them from the white social workers to ensure the spiritual and cultural needs are met? I have come to understand that this is just a different kind of death if not nourished.

Being an ally is not an easy path. I have heard heart-wrenching accounts that reflect the impacts of colonization and residential school that leave me disturbed for a long time. I cannot even imagine what it is doing to the person who experiences the impacts on a daily basis. In August 1996 I wrote, *“I am feeling a deep sorrow about the things [my friend] shared last night – the horrors she witnessed as a child – I had no idea and I don’t know what to do with my feelings. The sorrow is in a place deep inside of me – that little girl saw her mother suffer every possible degradation – gang rapes – many, rapes – many beatings, being naked passed out in the community...I feel sad for her. And, knowing how I feel sitting here now, I can’t imagine how she is feeling on that train today – she looked so vulnerable...”* and the next day, *RK experienced racism at [my White friend’s] house – from [my White friend] and her family...I am surprised, sad and disappointed. I did not think it would be an issue – I don’t see that [my friend] being Native is an issue – I don’t expect it to be an issue for anyone else. It did not occur to me to mention that she is Native – RK said [my White friend] was visibly shocked – I missed it completely.”*

I do believe that racism plays a role in hampering White professionals with the process/experience of becoming a White ally. There are many who would argue that it is the

racism they experience from Aboriginal peoples that is hampering social workers from taking the necessary steps. That is not what I am talking about. Anything I experienced working with Aboriginal peoples was, at best, discrimination and I saw it as a valuable lesson. In April 1992 I wrote, “*one lesson in this is that I can now have empathy for people who suffer from discrimination – the feeling is one of complete helplessness, powerlessness, defeat – because there is absolutely nothing one can do about it – for example – I can’t change the fact that I am White – nor would I want to – but this is what is being used to attack me – it is intangible and can’t be measured – I can’t apologize or make amends for this – there is nothing I can personally to do improve this situation.*”

I am not talking about the blatant, “KKK” type of racism. I am talking about the internalized, unconscious, unintentional racism that prevents White people from understanding that their actions are influenced by racism and harmful to Aboriginal children, families and communities. The fact is the ‘drunken Indian’ stereotype does not apply to most Aboriginal peoples. I believe, however, that an intake call that puts Aboriginal people (and particularly Aboriginal women)²⁰ and alcohol together in the same sentence starts an inevitable, predictable chain reaction that results in children being removed – whether they are at risk or not. If those who would challenge this would look at the statistics, they would see a clear pattern. White children are not removed from parents who have been drinking. White parents are lauded for getting babysitters while they are out drinking. Who is the sober responsible person once the sitter has left the home?

There is a lot of learning and un-learning to do in the journey to becoming an ally. Coming to understand public drunkenness as a form of resistance and resilience was quite liberating for me. I now understand the use of alcohol as a form of self-medicating to cope in a world filled with resentment and contempt for Aboriginal peoples.

I have come to learn and understand the history as it was, not as it has been portrayed by White people. I have gained a much better understanding of the impacts of colonization and the deliberate attempt to eliminate Aboriginal peoples from the Canadian fabric. Coming to understand and appreciate the contribution of Aboriginal peoples to the world and Canadian society. There is so much they do not get credit for. Read *Hidden in plain sight: Contributions of*

²⁰ See the Native Women’s Association (2007) and Gosselin (2006) as a place to start to begin understanding the gender issues that arise from this same dynamic

Aboriginal peoples to Canadian identity and culture (Newhouse, D, Voyageur, C. and Beavon, D. (Eds.) (2005)) for an eye-opening experience.

I remember an incident when my White supervisor said to me, “Grace we are here to make the Indians look good.” I was so shocked by this that it took a few days to recover. What I wrote in June 1991 was, “*my interpretation of what [my boss] said yesterday is that we (the White staff) are there to make the Native staff look good – this really hit me today – how condescending and insulting to the Native staff – this will only serve to have them feel more incompetent because they know they didn’t earn the reputation/recognition they would get in this process – this further oppresses them and destroys their self-esteem.*” What was so upsetting for me is that I always understood that my employment in an Aboriginal agency was temporary in nature. In that agency I was quite vocal about needing to mentor Aboriginal staff into supervisory and managerial positions. I viewed the work as ‘driving from the back seat’ and did not want recognition or reward from others. I suppose I had some early recognition that there are times when the Aboriginal peoples with whom you work have a difficult message to deliver to White people and those White people will only hear it from another White person. As an ally, I understand that it is my role to deliver that message. I also know the potential impacts of such actions – that the White people will slot me into a ‘special’ category so they can feel comfortable in their own skin.

The situations that typically influenced or affected my experiences of becoming a White ally generally involved injustice. In the case of the mainstream organization I worked for, this involved becoming aware of practice that enabled social workers to lie about the circumstances of a removal or the deception used to get parents to sign adoption papers or permanency orders. I have been privy to knowing of some truly shameful behaviour.

Another influence would be coming to know and understand the neo-colonial nature of child welfare and delegation of Aboriginal agency staff or coming to understand that decolonization means ‘get out of the way and support us in doing it our own way.’ Aboriginal peoples do not need any more help learning how to negotiate the White system or help with managing their oppression. As I came to know there were many ways to do the work differently, ways that did not involve separating children from their families, communities, cultures and contexts, I became more determined to work with Aboriginal agencies/staff/governance at making the necessary changes to the system.

If I had it to do over, yes, I would still become an ally. However, I would learn how to handle racism differently and sooner. I can see how I have been reactive to it instead of being proactive. I would also get better informed, sooner. I have only been reading the literature and research for the last five years or so. There is much out there still to learn.

What has been most rewarding about becoming an ally are the people I have met along the way. The relationships I enjoy, the teachings I have received, and the sacred experiences I have been privileged to be part of. The extreme lessons in humility I have received have been invaluable. In March 1991 I was facilitated in a process that had me go to each person I was in training with to admit my mistakes and make amends. Some of the people there used what I said against me at another time. I understood I had to keep going no matter what. There will be many barriers and tests put in your way by both White and Aboriginal peoples. Being an ally is not an automatic lifetime title. You have to keep paying the dues to maintain the membership.

The other rewards include the ‘gifts’ that are offered by Aboriginal peoples when you are invited into their spaces. In September 1994 I wrote, *“one of the nice things about being back at [the Agency] is the use of sage/sweetgrass and smudging. I have really missed that. It feels so very comforting to participate in the smudging. [The Executive Director] said he has made it mandatory that all meetings start with smudging and prayer.”* And, in October 1997, *“I want to do work with Native Child protection – if M calls today with a firm offer, I will go and work with him – if not, I will take the [other Aboriginal agency] position – I am tired, very, very tired – and I need to do something that can stimulate my creativity. Working with Bands gives me the spiritual element missing here [mainstream organization].”*

As a White person I already benefit from the oppression and marginalization of Aboriginal peoples. I own land in the traditional territory of the Coast Salish peoples – something few original inhabitants of this land enjoy; I am subject to laws, policies and procedures made by and for White people that places me at an advantage in most institutions. I also benefit financially by earning my living trying to minimize the consequences of the White colonization. The benefits I enjoy come at the expense of Aboriginal peoples and that places a responsibility on me to do something differently.

I struggle with the extreme amount of energy it takes to confront racism and stereotyping when it is done in my presence. This is especially true with my friends and family. I struggle with the losses that come from being any ally - the loss of relationships because of racism;

alienation from family members because of racism; suspicion from Aboriginal colleagues because I am White and occupying Aboriginal space.

One huge struggle is feeling like a fraud. I know there are still deep roots of stereotypes held that I hope do not surface but which linger just the same. One I can think of is the stereotype that Aboriginal peoples are stupid. I know this is buried in me and I work very, very hard to dispel it. Like the drunken Indian stereotype, it pops up now and then. I comfort myself with the ‘belief’ that I do not act on these thoughts and therefore, it is all good. But the thought is still there and this troubles me very much. Just putting this down here opens up the door to my Aboriginal friends, family and colleagues wondering if I think they are stupid. I do not think this. (and no, K that is not what was going on that day in the board room) It is very difficult to say how I know the stereotype still lurks except that it enabled me to understand the roots of something said recently by a treaty negotiator. What was said was “why would we negotiate with people who don’t even brush their teeth every day.” I do not condone this action – what I understand is that this person believes the stereotype that all Aboriginal peoples are stupid and acted upon that belief. I know Aboriginal peoples are not stupid. Aboriginal peoples have survived despite us and I have a deep appreciation and admiration for their intelligence, resilience, tenacity and strength.

My final thoughts about whether or not there is anything else about becoming an ally I would like to share...yes, the use of language. I notice that my language has changed from using ‘Native’ and ‘Indian’ to ‘Aboriginal’ and ‘Indigenous’ over time. It is also critically important for White and non-Aboriginal people to understand what the Indian Act and colonization did to Canada’s First Peoples. The whole status issue and how this has become a way for Aboriginal peoples to discriminate against their own; how seeing Aboriginal peoples discriminating against their own gives White people permission to maintain the status quo. (e.g. ‘well they treat each other like that’).

Allies have a responsibility to continually learn. Most White people only know and think about Aboriginal issues (e.g. Residential School) as an intellectual exercise and a discreet time in history. Allies need to be willing to keep learning until they ‘get’ the visceral understanding. My experience of seeing White social workers rolling their eyes at the ‘same old, same old’ is a clear sign of complacency for me. There is danger in thinking you have learned ‘enough’ to be in the

Aboriginal community. I am continually reminded how much I do not know and this keeps me from getting in front of the work.

I have been called many things – bitch, Iron Lady (Margaret Thatcher), advocate, ally, bloody-minded, stubborn, insubordinate, tenacious, and tough. I had to let these roll off me because it means I am doing something to unsettle the people around me. I know I am also fair; I own my mistakes and failings, I share the credit and the blame and I practice diligent humility. I do what I ask others to do, I lead by example. I am tough and I have high expectations and thus am frequently disappointed by others.

Finally, being an ally requires action, not just words. You have to be willing to speak up publicly – to respond to racism and injustice in the media, on the blogs, in the letters to the editor. You can't be an ally from the bench. This is not a spectator sport. An ally has to be in the arena to do the work. Being privileged to work in Aboriginal spaces comes with responsibility. Being in that space is not a right and remaining in that space is not a given. When I occupy space that should be occupied by an Aboriginal person, I am acutely aware that the accommodation is mine to make. To understand the racialized discourses and guard against the cries of reverse racism; to not get into thinking I am being discriminated against. I can leave any time and my career will be intact. Even if the program fails, I will be lauded for 'hanging in there with the Indians' so long. I won't be blamed for failure – I will be rewarded for having been there. The work will be an asset on my Curriculum Vitae. So my responsibility is to ensure I do nothing that will bring discredit to the Aboriginal peoples I work with.

I know that what I write here will strike a chord in others and produce various reactions: some will agree with what I have written, some will not agree. Some will be angry, some will feel accused or ashamed; some will feel validated. I cannot control these things for this is my story and therefore my truth. Each of us filters information according to what is true for us. I remember one participant in CAT who personalized what I shared as an attack on her. How did that happen unless she recognized herself in what I said? She was not willing to own what she saw there and lashed out at me. Fortunately I did recognize it and told her I would not carry her shame and guilt for her.

I am beginning to think that this is a key to oppressive social work practice. Social workers give their guilt and shame to clients to carry for them and punish them when they drop the ball (e.g. drink alcohol/use drugs, leave the children alone, etc.) How can social workers

possibly practice anti- oppressively without a solid understanding of Aboriginal peoples and how oppression is steeped in everything about their lives and existence?

I am an anti-racist social worker in a culture of racism – few social workers will publicly admit to being racist because of the public images of racism – KKK, White supremacy, lynching mobs. Racism is much more subtle and insidious in daily life and doesn't make the news unless extreme (e.g. the case in Courtney last summer when the three White men were hurling racial epithets, assaulting and threatening to lynch a Black man in the McDonald's parking lot)

An understanding of the Discourses of Domination (e.g. equal opportunity) is critical to becoming an ally. There is a privilege bag of choices and an oppression bag of choices. Racism has the power to keep the oppressed from making choices from the privilege bag – if they try, the privileged make it about themselves and scream 'affirmative action' and 'reverse racism' because it takes away their exclusivity to that bag. If the oppressed do not make choices from the privilege bag then there is something wrong with them – they are lazy, uneducated, making bad choices, unwilling to help themselves. It is a vicious cycle and Aboriginal peoples would benefit from White allies who understand these dynamics.

Summary

Each of these participant stories provides a rich source of data to now begin analyzing for understanding the process of becoming an ally.

Chapter 5: The Findings

To maintain the status quo is to continue to practice social work as a form of social control
(Cheryl Schultz, 2003. p. 42)

Returning to the four writing styles that Chang (2008) outlines as options when writing an autoethnography, my primary style as I begin reporting out on the findings is *Analytical-Interpretive*. This is because I will be “highlighting the relationships among the data”; “looking for interconnectedness within the [themes]”; looking at a broader context to make sense of the relationship between [my journey and the context of the other participants' journeys]”; and then connecting these to broader societal issues”. (p. 146-147).

The research questions (below) provided a starting place for gathering data:

- What is a White ally?
- What are the barriers?
- What are the theoretical frameworks that provide a foundation to help better understand the process?
- How do White social workers become allies in their child welfare work?

Many themes emerged from the data and are captured within the following headings: Relationships; Personal Journey; Professional Journey; Racism/Discrimination; Reverse Racism; and White Ally Potential.

The theme *Relationships* emerged in the participants' discussion and recollection of their contact with Aboriginal people. Participants spoke of memories of childhood relationships and experiences with Aboriginal people that were significant and meaningful and which likely influenced their later ability to develop and maintain relationships with Aboriginal peoples. As adults, participants spoke of both their personal and professional associations with Aboriginal peoples and the imperative to having a critical understanding of the impacts of colonization in order to maintain those relationships. The need to have both humility and humour emerged as critical to the building of these relationships. This theme begins to answer the question: How do White social workers become allies in their child welfare work?

The theme *Personal Journey* included a discussion of the messages and influences participants received as children about Aboriginal people. The issue of cultural identity and the

seeming cultural disconnect many White Canadians have with respect to their cultures of origin surfaced. In addition, feelings of blame, shame and guilt were examined by participants. This was a significant issue and shapes the experience and development of becoming an ally. This theme contributes to answering the question: What are the barriers?

The theme *Professional Journey* included participants' reference to having an ethical duty, moral imperative or sense of social justice regarding the need to practice differently with Aboriginal people. This theme included discussion of the responsibility White social workers have when working in Aboriginal spaces and their professional duty to "do no further harm". Discussion about ideology and an honest self-appraisal of the costs, conflict and rewards of becoming an ally in the context of one's social work practice occurred. This theme contributes to answering the research questions: What are the barriers?; What are the Theoretical Frameworks that Help to Better Understand the Process?; and, How do White social workers become allies in their child welfare work?

The theme *Racism/Discrimination/Reverse Racism* provides an opportunity to explore 'what is in the way' of social workers practicing differently as well as the emergence of the Discourses of Domination that can interfere with some people becoming allies. The issue of Whiteness and White privilege also came to light. The invisibility of Whiteness to White people emerged as a significant barrier to consciousness about privilege. This theme begins to answer the questions: What are the barriers? and What are the Theoretical Frameworks that Help to Better Understand the Process?

The final theme, *White Ally Potential* provides an overview of the participant's views of what is required in order to become an ally. This includes a list of reasons that may inhibit or prevent others from becoming an ally. This theme begins to answer the questions: What is a White ally? and What are the Barriers?

Theme 1: Relationship

All five participants in the research talked about their relationships with Aboriginal peoples. There is research from a variety of sectors that supports the importance of building effective and meaningful relationships with Aboriginal peoples and other racialized peoples (Bishop, 2002; Goodman, 2001; Helm, 1993; Kendall, 2006, Kivel, 2002; Lucas, 2008; Tatum, 1997; Walmsley, 2005; Weaver, 2005) to enable moving beyond the stereotypes, biases and deeply embedded negative attitudes and beliefs. Three sub-themes emerged that support

relationships as the overarching issue: Contact with Aboriginal peoples (both personal and professional); Humility/Humour; and Understanding the Impacts of Colonization.

Contact with Aboriginal peoples

Personal

It would seem that ensuring White children have opportunity to interact with Aboriginal people in a positive way may lead to social workers becoming allies in their child welfare work. Three of the participants wrote about the contact they had remembered as children or teens. Anna spoke of this contact being positive through her step-mother's professional work with the local Aboriginal artists. James and I both had a lot of contact with other Aboriginal children with whom we played and went to school. We continue to enjoy relationships with some of these friends currently. Only James and I wrote specifically about personal relationships, as adults, with Aboriginal peoples. My own life is enriched by these relationships and I am honoured that they call me friend. Jane and I wrote of having Aboriginal peoples as family members or as friends who come to our homes. Jane and Bob indicated they do not remember having any contact with Aboriginal peoples as children with the exception of Jane whose father took her to one or two Pow Wows.

On-going personal relationships are also important for reminding White social workers of the advantages and privileges they enjoy at the expense of Aboriginal people. The experience of being in relationships with friends and colleagues who are the targets of the oppression, marginalization, and racism so entrenched in Canadian society makes those issues personal for allies.

Professional

All of the participants spoke at length about the relationships they have formed with colleagues and clients over the years. All made reference to the importance of forming relationships that were respectful, reciprocal, and accountable. All indicated that a willingness to learn and grow from these relationships was core to their becoming allies. This is supported by Walmsley (2005) who writes:

It is less about formal assessments and safety plans and more about building reciprocal helping relationships with the members of a community to ensure the safety and well-being of children....to be credible and to be visible in the community. (p. 110)

Humility/Humour

Four of the participants wrote of situations where they were humbled by the lessons learned from being in relationship with Aboriginal peoples. With one exception, all of the participants wrote about the need to learn about themselves. They did not use the words ‘critical self reflection’ but what they shared is certainly in keeping with the research on educating for diversity and social justice. (Goodman, 2001; Kendall, 2006; Solomon & Levine-Rasky, 2003) All participants spoke of their ignorance and simply not knowing. All agreed that they had to be willing to learn from the Aboriginal peoples with whom they worked. For some the learning came from relationships with clients and others with colleagues.

Anna acknowledged having had a tendency to be impatient while the client took the necessary time to tell their story - she found that she “rushed respect”. Anna and I both wrote of being willing to be confronted, owning our mistakes and making amends for these. Anna credits Aboriginal peoples with where she is in her career.

James and I wrote about how humbling it is to have the privilege of participating in and learning about the culture of the people with whom we are working. He also wrote of the special opportunity of witnessing healing in ceremony and the opportunity to “reconnect with something larger and older than myself.”

Bob and I shared a story about a ‘cultural faux pas’ that we each committed. Bob spoke of a time early in his work with Aboriginal peoples when he not only interrupted, but questioned an Elder during a circle. To interrupt an Elder is the highest form of disrespect, especially when done by a White person. Having the humility to speak of such a faux pas is indicative of the self awareness and reflection involved in becoming an ally. Bob also wrote very eloquently of the need to be willing to learn in silence and through observation. He concluded this particular story by saying “White men talk too much.”

My own cultural faux pas occurred in a Potlatch when I asked the person serving me food if “I could have a plate with no fish.” With much grace and patience, my cultural mentors explained that refusing food offered is the highest form of insult to the people who had prepared that food. In order to amend the situation, they indicated that the plate I was being offered was intended for the person sitting beside me (who was just away from her chair) so they put the food on her chair. I was given a plate of food with no fish...and a chunk of moose meat that still had the fur on it.

The lesson I learned that day resonated on many levels and was an early glimpse at just how unconscious I was about the privilege that comes with being White. Tatum (1992) refers to this as ‘living in smog’ - where one is unaware that they are living in and breathing it every day. The damage of our being unconscious of the privilege of being White has consequences. This incident with the plate of food was learning for me and also affirmation that Aboriginal peoples have tremendous capacity to forgive when a White person is willing to learn. I was not shamed or made to feel badly. Instead I was provided a powerful and lasting lesson. Had that plate actually been intended for me, the Clan who had invited me to sit with them would have had to pay the host Clan for my insult – a costly mistake for a willingness to teach a White woman.

It has been my own observation that White social workers often enter the work with Aboriginal peoples thinking or believing that they are the ‘experts’ and further that there is nothing they need to learn from Aboriginal peoples. I base this observation on years of working with White social workers who would not follow established community protocols or who would not engage the community in the planning for children. For example, I remember one day receiving a call from the Chief of one of the remote communities at the Children’s Aid Society (CAS) office where I worked. The Chief was very angry and wanting “one good reason why he should not pass a Band Council Resolution (BCR) to ban one of the social workers from his community”. I could not think of one good reason because this social worker had refused to follow protocol. I had been given the task of mentoring him because I had a very good relationship with the people in the communities and our supervisor felt that this worker needed to know what I did to develop and maintain those relationships. I had already shared with him what the Chief of a different community had said to me in my interview to always let him know that I was planning a trip to his community. After that, I always planned my trips to communities ahead of time and the first stop I made was the Band office. In spite of the importance of this information and protocol, the other worker did not do this. Not only that, but he also placed a child who was not from the community without talking to Chief and Council. That Chief did pass the BCR leaving this person with no ability to do his job. It is not clear to me if this person ever did understand what had happened. His belief that he had a ‘right’ to work independently to the protocols in those communities eventually cost him his job.

It was humbling when I began to understand that even with the mandate to do the job, I did not have a right to be in the Aboriginal community. By this I mean that I believe it was a

privilege to be allowed into that space and to be entrusted with the responsibility of protecting their most cherished members – the children. It was through understanding this as a privilege that enabled me to use the mandate as a ‘shield’ rather than a ‘sword’. Perhaps it is a failure to “critique [this] entitlement to wield the institutional authority” (Jeffery, 2002, p. 3) that gets in the way of non-allied social workers who resort to using the legislation as a sword to battle their way into communities and homes to ‘save’ children.

Only Anna and I spoke of the humour involved in relationship with Aboriginal peoples. This surprised me because it was the use of humour that ‘saved the day’ many times in my journey to becoming an ally. Anna shared that during her time in a delegated agency she had “never laughed so hard in her life.” By her description it was easy to imagine what that would have been like. My experience of the humour is varied – either being the one laughing or the one being laughed at. The important lesson in building meaningful relationships with Aboriginal peoples is the ability to laugh at oneself. The mistakes I have made are too numerous to put down here but what ‘saved the day’ was that I did not react in anger or let my ego rule the situation. I had done some ‘dumb White thing’ and I could appreciate why they were laughing at me. My laughter in response spoke volumes about my willingness to be human. This is supported by Weaver (2005) who advises that humour is a skill required for working with Aboriginal peoples and encourages social workers to “accept being the target of humour” (p. 221).

What I consider a key piece to relationship building that was missing, in an explicit way, in the participant journals was something I call ‘presence in the community’. By this I mean my own belief that being seen in the community in a capacity other than a child welfare worker was necessary to advancing the relationship. I was willing to step beyond my professional self and be seen as a regular community person. When I was invited by the Family Support Worker to attend Tent Revivals in one remote community, I went. When I was invited to attend a community feast, I did. When I was invited to participate in a ceremony, I showed up. James also spoke of participating in ceremonies. All of these occasions provided opportunities to engage with people at a personal level. To sit beside a family willing to let you talk with their children; to share in the community’s chosen form of worship; to eat the food prepared; and to experience, as James described, something so much bigger than yourself, in ceremony, these are what separate the

workers from the allies. I was in a better position of planning *with* the community when I had the privilege of being seen as credible *by* the community.

Humility and humour are one of the answers to how *White social workers become allies in their child welfare work*. The ability to admit to ‘not knowing’ and a willingness to learn about self and other in the relationship requires both.

Understanding the Impacts of Colonization

Thomas and Green (2007) write, “Another set of skills required of social workers is a fundamental understanding of colonialism and colonial relations” (p. 98). This is supported by McKenzie and Morrissette (2003) who point out that understanding the Aboriginal perspective requires recognition of the effects of colonization. This understanding is also integral to the ability of the social worker to form relationships.

Wade (1995) takes this further when he writes,

The history of European violence against Aboriginal peoples is well known in a restricted circle but quite unknown to many members of the dominant culture who have been educated in institutions which actively promote colonialist mythologies about the benefits of European exploration, settlement and civilization. (p. 167)

All five participants made the link between the behaviours they observed from the Aboriginal peoples with whom they worked and Canada’s colonial history. Anna, James, Bob and I spoke of recognizing that the over-representation of Aboriginal children in care is due to colonization and resulting colonial impacts. This speaks to the ability to separate the ‘people from the behaviour’ and avoid the essentializing or blaming Aboriginal peoples for circumstances beyond their control. Anna was able to see the current delegated model within a neo-colonial framework. Jane spoke of having ongoing conversations with Elders about current issues and the “residue” of historical issues. All shared examples of how the history and impacts were made personal for them in some way. An important variable was being able to hear about colonization in a way that made it more than an intellectual exercise. Anna, Jane and James also credited their learning about colonization to selected professors and specific curriculum they covered in University.

I believe that it is by understanding this is a shared history (that there are impacts for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people) that changes how this history is heard and understood. Aboriginal peoples experience the trauma and the ongoing oppression of that history. White and

other non-Aboriginal people have been denied access to the truth of, and enjoy the benefits of, that history.

By having a good understanding and analysis of the historical impacts of colonization on Aboriginal peoples in Canada, social workers are better able to bring empathy to the critical relationships and work with Aboriginal children and families. As McKenzie and Morrissette (2003) write, “in a sense, all of us carry the baggage of colonization, either as victims [Aboriginal peoples] or oppressors [White and non-Aboriginal peoples]” (p. 278). Knowing this brings empathy to a new level. As Goodman (2001) writes, “The presence of empathy can foster positive social action whereas its absence can perpetuate injustice. Suppressing empathy for people in oppressed groups is a powerful tool in maintaining oppression” (p. 127).

Conversely, failure to understand the colonial impacts will remain a barrier to social workers becoming allies. Coming to understand the colonial impacts is one of the ‘crucibles’ that makes it possible to move to a different stage in one’s White racial identity development. This understanding, while apparently unconscious to the participants, is also how one comes to see the importance of critical race theory and the centrality of race in institutions like child welfare.

Theme 2: Personal Journey

The questions provided in the journal guide enabled participants to share the events in their personal lives that have contributed to their becoming allies. Three sub-themes emerged that provide insight into aids and barriers to becoming allies: Childhood Messages and Influences; Cultural Identity/Disconnect; and Blame/Shame/Guilt.

Childhood Messages and Influences

Anna, Jane, James and Bob were all raised in British Columbia. Anna and Jane were raised in West and North Vancouver with privilege. Bob and James were raised in working class families – Bob in East Vancouver and James in Prince George. I was raised in Northwestern Ontario with privilege. With the exception of me, all of the participants report being raised by open-minded, liberal parents who were accepting of difference. Anna spoke of her father telling them the ‘truth’ about what White people did to Aboriginal peoples and also sending a clear message that it is White people who are responsible for rectifying past injustices. Jane recalled her father taking them to different neighbourhoods in Vancouver – rich and poor and encouraging discussions about reasons for the differences. James remembers his father being

upset that the Aboriginal tenants in the neighbourhood were being taken advantage of by their non-Aboriginal landlords. Bob characterized his parents as ‘left-wing anti-government’ people; something which he believes left him open-minded and able to later accept a non-western perspective of history. I was raised by parents steeped in racist ideology and who clearly communicated what they believed to be the inherent deficiencies of Aboriginal peoples.

From outside the home, Anna remembers a grade four teacher who taught the accurate history of Canada and a Sunday school teacher who taught them about prejudice based on skin colour. Anna recalls that this same Sunday school teacher also “taught us to be a ‘good’ person who was compassionate and caring.”

Jane does not remember learning anything about Aboriginal peoples from school or church. Bob learned little about Aboriginal peoples except what he saw in western movies and says he always recognized that the movies were not real. James recalls there being racial divisions in high school and hearing racist slurs in the school yard. However he was mostly struck by the absence of Aboriginal peoples in any of the extracurricular activities in which he participated. The exception to this was church and he noted that the “Aboriginal people were the largest population served at church meals.” I recall a grade ten teacher in high school teaching us about the treaties Canada signed with Aboriginal peoples. This left me intrigued to learn more and helped me to counteract some of the stereotyped messages I was being given at home about Aboriginal people being inherently lazy, drunk, and stupid.

Participants were asked to describe any ‘unlearning’ they may have done with respect to what they were taught or came to believe about Aboriginal people that they now know to be false. I am the only one who wrote about having to *unlearn a false history*. All the other participants believed they were not given much false history and so had nothing to unlearn as they began learning the actual history of Aboriginal people. I was asked recently if I really thought it was possible to ‘unlearn’ anything. Upon further reflection, I agree that once you have learned something, it remains with you whether you want it to or not. So perhaps it is not that any of us had to unlearn the false history or negative messages but rather that becoming an ally involves a lot of new learning.

It would seem that receiving positive messages about Aboriginal people or about how to treat people respectfully, is one of the ways that White social workers become allies. However my own experience of receiving quite negative messages from family and community about

Aboriginal people would seem to contradict this conclusion. Perhaps, I am the exception to the rule. I would think it would behoove us all to ensure that our children learn about Aboriginal children in a positive light.

Cultural Identity/Disconnect

Interestingly, all five participants share a cultural heritage described as British (Irish, English, Welsh, Scottish). James also spoke of his Austrian roots. All were raised as "Canadians" with little knowledge or connection to the countries of origin. James shared the insight that his family's loss of culture was due to "ancestors wanting a new life and leaving the old one behind."

This loss of culture and connection is discussed in the literature. Those who write about Whiteness and White privilege (see Goodman, 2001; Kendall, 2006; Kivel, 2002) point out that White immigrants often gave up their languages, accents and cultures in order to enjoy the privileges and advantages that come with a White Canadian identity.

As I examine our stories, I am convinced that each of us was searching for something spiritual that was provided by our connection with the Aboriginal community. Anna spoke of not knowing about her own spirituality before working in Aboriginal communities and Bob indicated he is more spiritual as a result of working with Aboriginal peoples. I know that for myself, I learned about my own spirituality in the Aboriginal community. I was raised in the United Church but what I learned there was what I believe to be religion, and not spirituality. When I hear an opening prayer being conducted in a traditional Indigenous language, something shifts in me as though I am being prepared for what will transpire in the meeting, gathering, training, etc.

Examining this issue of loss of identity and disconnect from ancestral culture is critical in the development of awareness of one's racial identity. The multiple losses immigrants experience in order to assimilate into Canadian culture are profound.

Blame/Shame/Guilt/Remorse

All five participants spoke of feelings of blame, shame, guilt or remorse. As Bishop (2002) writes, "Many people resist beginning the process of becoming an ally because it is so difficult and painful" (p. 112). Anna experienced shame when she realized she had made a stereotypical assumption that someone was on welfare when s/he was not. Jane wrote of being

ignorant of colonial history and its impact. James and I spoke of benefiting from racism and oppression through employment opportunities. Bob indicated feeling stupid for not knowing about the experiences of Aboriginal peoples in Canada and the child welfare system. I carried remorse about my friend who experienced racism in a situation into which I brought her.

All participants understood to varying degrees that the key to working as an ally is to not take on any blame from generalized statements about "White people" and not to respond defensively about being White. The literature refers to guilt as immobilizing (Bishop, 2002) and unproductive. I now know it is our own unresolved feelings that come from the experience of being White that inhibits or prevents us from moving beyond feelings of guilt and shame. I believe that we know on some deeper level that we may be doing harm but we do not want to deal with the guilt that this knowledge could create. Lopes and Thomas (2006) write,

Shame, in the context of White privilege, is partially distress that one has done something that hurts someone else. But it's uglier than that. Shame says, "I should have known better; I can't believe I did that; what kind of person am I that I did that?" Shame is also regret at being caught and concern about what others will think when they find out. In this context, shame keeps the focus on the White person, distracts us from grasping the real effect our actions have on people of colour, and prevents us from making proper reparation. (p. 230)

I remember one participant in CAT training in 2005. She started crying in the final morning circle and was unable to stop until approximately six hours later. She had come to the final day of class prepared to share all of the ways she had harmed Aboriginal children in her practice. She was willing to feel the enormity of the responsibility that comes from honestly examining one's practice. While following up with her later, I believed that she had arrived at that place where she could work through the emotional response to her learning and was able to integrate the learning in a way that would shift her practice.

Racial and social identity development models provide a theoretical foundation to better understand the process of becoming an ally. Having an understanding of the ways that the Discourses of Domination operate as barriers to this process is also critical. As social workers make the connections between colonization and its legacy, they often experience feelings such as guilt. Sometimes these feelings can trigger a blaming response - like blaming Aboriginal peoples for their current circumstances. The comment "the past is in the past" captures this rhetoric. This attitude effectively moves one from feeling guilty or examining the legacy of colonization, by placing the responsibility for change onto the shoulders of Aboriginal people. It is too easy to

default to the ‘but I wasn’t here’ defence to resolve these complicated feelings. However growing as an ally requires the courage to accept that the past is not in the past for Aboriginal peoples and that as White people, we inherited these dynamics and continue to benefit from the actions of those who came before us. According to the racial and social identity development models, this realization moves us along in the stages of our development.

Theme 3: Professional Journey

It is clear from this study that most of the work of becoming an ally takes place through the professional experiences we all have. All of the participants including me have had opportunities that placed them in Aboriginal communities and/or agencies and working with Aboriginal peoples. Five sub-themes emerged that help put the professional journey into perspective: Ethical Duty/Moral Imperative/Social Justice; Responsibility when Working in Aboriginal Space; Do No Further Harm; Costs/Conflict/Rewards; and Ideology/Affinity.

Ethical Duty/Moral Imperative/Social Justice

Without exception, each of us spoke of feeling an ethical duty or responsibility to work differently with Aboriginal peoples; of seeing the injustice and/or wanting to be a change agent. Anna, Jane and I spoke of our willingness to leave our jobs if we felt our values and principles were at risk of compromise. This finding is not surprising given the roots of the social work profession. People who are in this work are well intentioned and want to make a difference. They want to help and work to improve conditions for people who are marginalized and oppressed.

However, good intentions are not always enough to ensure social justice. As one of the barriers discussed earlier, the discourses of democratic racism prevent social workers from understanding their complicity in the ongoing neo-colonial agenda. Two of those discourses - colour blindness (a belief that race does not matter and that treating everyone equally will ensure equity) and reverse racism (the claim that White people are becoming disadvantaged because there are affirmative action programs that address inequalities and/or failing to recognize the power issues inherent in racism) - were clearly reflected in some participant journals.

Critical race theory as a theoretical framework will help social workers understand that the process of becoming an ally includes acknowledging the centrality of race and racism in society and thus in the institution of child welfare. It is necessary for allies to recognize that White is also a race, an ideology and a social location - one that has historically been upheld as

'superior' to all other races and which has resulted in Whiteness being embedded within all institutions. Whiteness then is the standard by which Aboriginal peoples are measured and is the organizational mechanism that sustains systems of privilege and power. Working differently within these systems requires understanding and thinking differently.

Responsibility when Working in Aboriginal Space

There was general recognition of being *invited* into a discreet Aboriginal space. Anna and I recognized that our time in an Aboriginal agency was temporary; and Anna, Bob and I discussed the need to support and promote Aboriginal colleagues in doing the work. Bob and I spoke of the need to follow the protocols of the community/agency. James and I agree that Aboriginal services should be delivered by Aboriginal people.

This perspective confirms that working in Aboriginal spaces brings responsibility to take action. Simply taking up space is not enough. Allies recognize that working in an Aboriginal agency or community is a privilege that is earned. Child protection workers have a mandate to work in Aboriginal communities but this is conditional and has limitations. Colonialism has left very little space for Aboriginal peoples to call their own - ideologically or physically or intellectually. Aboriginal communities and agencies have many reasons for hiring White staff or for allowing White staff to do certain work. This is because there is a strategic place for White allies within this environment. For example, a White person is well positioned to deliver difficult messages that other White people would not be able to hear if it came from Aboriginal people. I am more than happy to deliver those difficult messages if it results in the Aboriginal people with whom I am working being treated with the respect they deserve.

What most of the participants and I share is an understanding that while in Aboriginal spaces, any accommodation is ours to make. Anna, Jane and I wrote about knowing we do not bring an Aboriginal cultural context but we do have skills that can be useful. As allies, it is our duty to learn to work within or alongside an Indigenous context. To work effectively in Aboriginal spaces and earn the trust of the Aboriginal peoples who are there requires working diligently to ensure we (as White people) are not trying to make that space White.

Do No Further Harm

This theme refers to the participants' awareness of the importance of this value in the practice of child welfare with Aboriginal peoples. Anna spoke of hearing a clear "us and them"

division between social work staff and clients and the need for social workers to make personal change because “institutions act out in unhealthy ways.” Jane wrote of mainstream child welfare perpetuating colonial ways and James of how wrong it is to remove Aboriginal children. I wrote of knowing that removing Aboriginal children from the community harms the children. Bob questioned how White social workers, the very people who put high numbers of children in care, have the ability to reverse this situation. He also pointed out how intimidating the system can be for Aboriginal peoples. Both Jane and Bob spoke about the need for White social workers to ‘get it’ and the limitations on their ability to do so. Jane and I noted the neo-colonial nature of delegated work and James wrote of the need to de-colonialize how the work is done so the harm can be minimized or prevented. Anna wrote that White colleagues do not often believe in the Aboriginal agency’s ability to do the work. I do not recall any of the agencies in which I worked needing White people to ‘believe’ in their ability to do the work – they believed in themselves. What I failed to understand is why the people who ‘don't believe’ did not just ‘get out of the way’ instead of creating barriers that make the work in Aboriginal agencies more difficult.

I called this section ‘do no further harm’ because the allies in this study recognize that harm has been done and understand that they, as individuals, need to make the changes and take the steps necessary to do, as James’ said, “address the oppression and injustice.” This requires critical self reflection and critical interrogation of the system in which we work. Without a heightened awareness of the issues and insight into ways the current system is harmful, social workers continue to practice the status quo - in ways that potentially cause harm. This is accomplished simply by not doing anything differently – by maintaining the status quo – something that is never neutral. (see Goodman, 2001; Kendall, 2006; Kivel, 2002)

A good example of this dynamic is the intention and then utilization of the Risk Assessment Model for Child Protection in British Columbia. This tool was designed as a strength-based tool to assess family dynamics in the context of risks for a child. When applied as intended, social workers were to evaluate the family on a continuum/scale from one to five. The premise was that every family has strengths that can be drawn upon to bring to the Risk Reduction Plan. Unfortunately this tool was often used to magnify the deficits in a way that made the strengths seem insignificant. The reasons for this are a topic for further research. Each of the participants in this study wrote of a situation that opened their eyes to the harm being created and which led to understanding that doing something different started with them.

Simply *believing* that we do good practice with Aboriginal peoples is not good enough. As Schultz (2003) writes, “self-reflection differs from self-education in that it involves the painful work of examining one’s own complicity in an oppressive culture” (p. 29). Only the very brave among us will do this. Becoming a White ally requires this.

The participants, for the most part, were not conscious of the theoretical frameworks that may have influenced a shift in their practice. I am positing, however, that both critical race theory and racial/social identity development theory provide a vital basis for social workers to understand the dynamics involved in the institutional racism that governs their work and to better understand their own journeys. As well these models provide a tool for examining one’s complicity in maintaining the status quo. Understanding the discourses of democratic racism as a barrier to changing the status quo is another way that social workers become allies in their child welfare practice with Aboriginal peoples.

Costs/Conflict/Rewards

Overall, the participants in this study wrote that the rewards of becoming an ally far outweigh any conflict they experience or costs they might incur. Conflict was described in terms of allies having what Anna called “value conflicts with White colleagues” and/or with friends and family. Jane, James, Bob and I all talked about “heated discussions with friends”; how “educating others is contentious”; “being tested by White friends”; and “fighting family values.” Anna and Jane indicated a willingness to give up employment with the mainstream organization if their integrity was being compromised. I have actually left mainstream employment for this very reason. The rewards people shared ranged from Jane’s finding it rewarding to “see children and families have control over what happens in their own lives” to James “being witness to positive moments with people”. Most acknowledged that they had received far more than they had given in the relationship with Aboriginal peoples. Bob shared that he learned different values from Aboriginal peoples that resulted in his “outlook and goals being different”; James gained “a new perspective on his own family, culture and traditions”; and I learned humility through working with Aboriginal peoples.

James, Bob and I indicated that we had learned about ourselves in the journey to becoming allies. James and I wrote of the rewards we gained from the relationships we formed with Aboriginal peoples. Again, James and I wrote of being privileged to witness and participate

in ceremony. I also found it rewarding that I was gifted with a name and the teachings, language and cultural protocols from various cultural groups with whom I worked.

I wonder as I write this if the people who are unable to take the journey to being allies deny themselves the rewards of such a journey out of fear. Frankenberg (1996), in describing her process of becoming an ally, writes:

I viewed my racial privilege as total...terrified to speak in gatherings that were primarily of colour, since I feared that anything I did say would be marked by my whiteness, my racial privilege...to speak would expose me as race-privileged. Expose me as white...what did I think I was, invisible? That silence would protect me? (p. 14)

Could there be an element of this with the White social workers who would like to become allies but are afraid to speak up? Fear of doing something that exposes or makes visible their Whiteness and privilege? As a White person, I need to know when I must be silent and when I need to speak. I also need to recognize when each course of action is appropriate.

Ideology/Affinity

All of the participants, including myself, wrote of having a sense of belonging in the work and with Aboriginal peoples. Words used include “feeling familiar”; “respectful place to be”; “best place to work”. Anna, Jane and I wrote of thinking differently; of not liking the Western medical model approach to the work but rather working in a way that made sense intuitively. Anna summed it up best when she wrote that “mainstream pathologizes and with Aboriginal peoples it is a healing journey”.

I have struggled to find an explanation for why some of us are able to understand that the White ideology with which we are raised is just not effective when applied to the work with Aboriginal peoples. I came across a concept called ‘third space’ (see also Bhabha, 1998; Richardson, 2006) that has helped me to gain perspective on this issue. Gonzales-Mena (n.d.) writes,

According to Dr. Isaura Barrera, Professor at the University of New Mexico...when in "third space," one can understand the validity of an opposing view and see "multiple truths," "Third space" is not the same as meeting half way, but rather is a process of changing the context of the issues altogether in order to reconcile contradictions. (p. 71)

Gonzalez-Mena (2001) expresses this in a slightly different way:

...in third space you can see multiple truths and the validity of each...you can see beyond perspectives to a larger, unifying picture. To get to third space you have to be aware that it exists. You also need communication skills. Patience and willingness to be uncomfortable are important too. (p.370)

While this is a valuable topic to explore further, there is no room in this thesis to do so. I will conclude by saying that if I understand this concept correctly, in cross cultural work, White allies who are willing to practice differently are able to enter this third space with Aboriginal peoples and find that place is where it is possible to have more than one truth or world view co-existing. Having the ability to enter third space is what an ally has and it is also how social workers become White allies in their child welfare practice.

Theme 4: Racism/Discrimination/Reverse Racism

The final theme to emerge from the data is racism/discrimination/reverse racism with one sub-theme that I have called Awareness of Whiteness/White Privilege. I was genuinely surprised by these findings as I had an assumption that allies understood racism as an issue of power and something only experienced by Aboriginal and other racialized peoples. I have come to understand that the power dynamics involved in racism make it impossible for White people to experience the oppression and marginalization that accompanies racism. However there are costs to White people from the racism that is perpetrated on racialized people that can help frame what emerged from the research.

All participants indicated knowing that there is racism directed towards Aboriginal peoples in the form of stereotypes. Only one other besides me acknowledged that our own unconscious racism could result in us unknowingly making racist comments or offending through ignorance. Anna spoke of falling into using stereotypes and how badly she felt when she realized she had made an assumption that a family she was working with was on welfare when in fact the husband was working. Anna also wrote about seeing the impacts of other people's stereotypes in the lives of Aboriginal peoples. She shared that one of the children in the care of her agency was assumed to be impacted by pre-natal drinking. When she had occasion to spend time with this child, she realized that this was not true and could see that others had not taken the time to see if the assumption of FASD was correct. Anna felt this boy had been "written off" because of this incorrect assumption. Fortunately, Anna was in a position to turn this around for this child.

Jane wrote of being aware of racism and confronting it with friends and family. James acknowledged that “racial relations have played a significant role in Aboriginal communities” and that he had to unlearn early beliefs that Aboriginal people were inherently flawed.

Anna, Bob and I shared experiences where the racism directed towards Aboriginal peoples in this country is re-directed toward White allies. Anna wrote of other White people making assumptions about how “hard it must be” to work with Aboriginal people and being seen as a “hero” for doing this work. Bob shared that he has had people say “sounds like you are turning Indian” [like that would be such a terrible thing]. I wrote of the contempt people have for Aboriginal people being re-directed toward me when I advocated for a child, or presented a plan that went against what the mainstream agency was proposing.

There is a dynamic created when some White people receive cultural awareness or cultural competency training.²¹ Rather than taking the information and using it to understand how they knowingly or unknowingly contribute to the oppression of Aboriginal peoples, they leave the training thinking that the work is in helping Aboriginal people to better manage their oppression. Anna and I shared experiences we had with people using their new knowledge in this way. This is usually demonstrated by White people “teaching” Aboriginal peoples about their history and oppression [as though Aboriginal peoples don’t know this]. As I write this, I am aware that there have likely been occasions where I have also defaulted into doing this. I know that it is only through critical self-reflection and learning about the complex dynamics of oppression that I now know how disturbing and troubling it is for Aboriginal people to learn their history from White people. This is because when I, for example, learn the history, it remains, for the most part, an intellectual exercise; when Aboriginal peoples learn Canadian history, their lives begin to make sense in profound ways. We know from experience that learning this history provides context for the experiences of Aboriginal peoples, but does not in and of itself provide a skill set for resolving any of the issues that have been identified in this thesis.

None of the participants indicated that they had ever experienced being called a racist. Three of the participants did make reference to experiencing what they called ‘racism’ or abuse/resentment/hostility from Aboriginal colleagues. Only one of the three participants indicated feeling harmed by this dynamic. The other two felt that being called a racist should not

²¹ When used in this context, cultural competency is defined as the knowledge, awareness and skills one requires to become competent in cross-cultural encounters, it does not involve becoming competent in a particular culture (see Cross et al., 1989; Obomsawin, 2009; Smylie, 2000)

be unexpected given Aboriginal peoples' historical experiences with White people. This is the 'the myth of reverse racism' discourse and I believe this concept is misunderstood. When I read accounts of what the participants describe as reverse racism, I do not attribute it to racism. I also experienced anti-White sentiment in many of the places I worked but I understood that it was, at best, discrimination. I do not believe it is possible for me, as a White person, to experience racism in this country. This is because I live in a world where, as a White person, I sit on the power side of the equation. My own experience with discrimination provided me insight into the powerlessness one can feel when the issue is the colour of your skin and there is nothing you can do to change that.

Rather than interpret the behaviour of Aboriginal colleagues as 'racist' I would encourage people who are becoming allies to think about this situation differently. This is one of those costs to White people of racism in Canada. Racist behaviour is what Aboriginal people, like other racialized peoples have come to "expect [as] the usual, not the exception" (Kendall, 2006, p. 130) when they encounter White people. I have come to accept that Aboriginal peoples will be suspicious of me until my actions prove otherwise.

One of the other discourses that emerged in this theme is what is known as the 'myth of colour-blindness'. This theme emerged in the writings of two participants. This discourse is expressed in comments such as "I see/treat everyone the same" or "we are all one race, the human race". These comments indicate a support for equality and intend to demonstrate a non-racist or non-discriminatory belief system. One of the results of this orientation can be that race is therefore dismissed as inconsequential. This is because in this race conscious society, most of us have been taught that it is 'good' to deny difference, especially racial differences. A colour-blind stance, a position that infers noticing skin colour as negative, can interfere with our ability to recognize the racially-based inequality of power and privilege that comes from racism. The BC Task Force on Family Violence quoted in *Liberating our Children Liberating our Families*, states that "most people from the dominant culture make the mistake of thinking that...treating everyone the same way is not racist. In fact, without recognition, respect for, and accommodation of differences, responses are almost inevitably...racist." (p. 43).

Not examining our own racism means we learn about racism at the expense of Aboriginal people. Never being called a racist does not make us anti-racist. Not being overtly racist does not mean we are not complicit in perpetrating racism in other forms. Understanding

critical race theory therefore becomes critical to the process of becoming White allies. Being an ally is not an ‘all or nothing’ proposition. There are people who are considered allies who continue to struggle with deeply entrenched stereotypes about Aboriginal people. Perhaps being known as an ally puts pressure on one so identified to deny they are racist. Regardless the reason, the participants did not indicate an enhanced understanding of their own racism and how they are working through it in their work and relationships with Aboriginal people. Developing insight into the progression through the stages of racial and social identity development helps to move people through the barrier created by racialized dynamics. Determining where one is in the process is part of critical self-reflection. Being honest about where one is in the process shapes the ways that social workers can become White allies in their child welfare practice.

Although the participants may not express a conscious understanding of the stages of racial and social identity development, their comments reflect the stages discussed in Appendix J: Racial and Social Identity Development Models. Using Helms (1992) model as an example, participants made comments that reflect each of the stages/statuses as follows:

<u>Stage/Status</u>	<u>Participant Comment</u>
Contact	<i>We do not see colour when choosing whom we spend time with. We look at their character and values.</i>
Disintegration	<i>First learned about colonization and really started to grasp the “monumental destructive ramifications of colonization on Aboriginal peoples.” ... found this “very overwhelming” and was “embarrassed to be White.”</i>
Reintegration	No comments reflected this stage/status
Pseudo-Independent	<i>Having experienced, as a privileged, White person, the kind of demeaning treatment single mothers receive in the ‘system’, [I] felt an affinity towards Aboriginal peoples.</i> <i>Be “of the culture but not in the culture” to share, foster and reflect Aboriginal values; not confuse one’s own identity.</i> <i>Struggle continues to be “fending off some co-worker’s racism” towards him as he knows he will ‘always be White and there will always be some Aboriginal peoples that don’t see anything redeeming in White people.’</i>

Immersion/Emersion

Acknowledges that she asks a lot of questions and learns from the people in her life...knows she is White and "doesn't try to be anything else."

Feels he had many "teachers" who made the oppression real to him. Hearing tearful first hand stories or stories from those directly impacted by residential school left him knowing he had to "take it on."

I also never tried or pretended to be anything but White.

Autonomy

I know there are still deep roots of stereotypes held that I hope do not surface but which linger just the same.

Awareness of Whiteness/White Privilege

This sub-theme is a critical one for understanding how some White people are able to take the journey to becoming an ally. Knowing one's place on the dominant-oppressed spectrum is necessary to working effectively with Aboriginal peoples. It is not enough to know that Aboriginal peoples are oppressed. We need to know how systems of White dominance serve to maintain this oppression and how we are complicit.

All five participants talked about being White and/or being privileged in other ways. Anna spoke of being aware of the privilege she enjoys by being White and from the North Shore (an area in Vancouver, BC that is known to have class privilege). She feels that having privilege could actually deny people the "courage and opportunity to heal" because they have not struggled. Anna believes her own experience as a single parent on welfare gave her a glimpse of the oppression inherent in the system and helped her develop insight into ways that an added layer of oppression - race - would increase the challenges. Jane says she and her Aboriginal friends/colleagues "laugh at how White she is" and she continues to struggle with the question about why some people 'have' – privilege, access, respect, family, health - and others 'have not.'

James spoke of an occasion when he reacquainted with an Aboriginal woman who had been a neighbour when they were children. This woman commented on the different paths their lives had taken. James recognized that it was not some inherent flaw that resulted in her being the client and him being the professional. Rather, he acknowledged the benefit that was inherent in his being White. James has awareness that Whiteness factors into the work for Aboriginal

peoples and reflected in his statement, “The last thing these Aboriginal families needed was one more White guy telling them how to run their lives.”

Bob talked about recognizing that the “White community’s racism creates the conditions that drive the removal of children.” He commented on the “self-centredness of white” and of his personal observation that “White guys talk too much.”

I recognized the fact that the ‘playing field is not level’. The myth of meritocracy has us believe we all start from the same place - something that is not supported by my experience. White is privileged in any space.

The study of Whiteness and White privilege is crucial for White social workers to understand how the Discourses of Domination inhibit the examination of racist ideology, something that is tied to the oppression of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Good intentions are not enough. As Ridley (2005) says, “unintentional racists perpetuate racism not because they are prejudiced but because they deny that they are racists...admitting to racism is a threat to the individual’s conception of him- or herself as a nonracist person” (p. 161).

A number of authors (see McLaughlan, 2005; Wong, 2004; Yee, 2005) write about Whiteness and racism in social work. McLaughlan (2005) sums this up when he writes,

...seeing themselves as working within a caring profession and opposing social injustice, it was noted that many social workers and students found it difficult to come to terms with the possibility that they themselves may be perpetuating injustice through racist ...practices. (p. 287)

This is further complicated when, as discussed in Henry, et al. (2006), well-intentioned people:

Are prejudiced but do not act in discriminatory ways...believe in fairness and equality for all and pride themselves on their strong social conscience. They may not be aware of their aversion to [Aboriginal peoples] and appear to have a positive racial attitude. (p. 21)

Although I had hoped that critical race theory would provide a lens for the participants to discuss the racism they had perpetrated, either overtly or covertly, the participants avoided this discussion. I had asked questions which I thought would provide an opening to explore racism or supremacist thoughts and beliefs that they are still sorting through and weeding out. I find it hard to accept that I would be the only person still identifying and addressing deeply embedded stereotypes of Aboriginal peoples. I asked one of the participants, who had indicated not learning anything negative about Aboriginal peoples, what the top five stereotypes are. This person was able to provide them with ease. I asked her where he/she learned those if not through the

messages delivered by society. This person indicated that he/she would have to think about this further.

Heron (2007) provides some insight into why participants may have avoided discussing the embedded nature of racism that exists in most non-Aboriginal Canadians. In her study of White women involved in development work in ‘third world’ countries, Heron found there is an investment by these workers to “maintaining their stories of innocence, or of not seeing [their] participation in domination: namely the need to prevent the potential shattering of moral narratives of self” (p. 154). I believe this is true for White social workers as well. I have concluded that even allies struggle with “thinking of themselves as racist or oppressive because of the “stigma” that places on them...that they are somehow above all that. If they acknowledge [that there could be racist or oppressive elements to their practice] then they are bad social workers” (Wong, 2004, p. 5).

Understanding the centrality of Whiteness in the institution of child welfare comes from critical race theory. The supremacy of White remains unexamined in the work and even allies fail to grasp this fully. Once one has a firm understanding of critical race theory, moving into critical whiteness studies is another progression on the journey to becoming a White ally.

Theme 5: White Ally Potential

Unfortunately, I did not receive any responses from the executive directors of the delegated Aboriginal agencies about the criteria they consider an ally to have. On the other hand, the participants did have thoughts about what makes an ally and whether or not everyone has the potential for being an ally.

Three of the five participants answered no to the question about whether or not people could be taught to be allies. The following is a conglomeration of the variables that Jane, Bob, and James stated were barriers to everyone having the potential to be allies:

Some people just don't get it; if it can be learned it has to come from family values and being 'predisposed'; it is an innate attitude that starts early in life; requires a person with the right values, attitude and personality; to be effective need to practice with patience, humbleness, a willingness to listen and learn; recognize the importance of culture and relationships; being comfortable outside one's comfort zone; be able to practice without being the expert; recognition of how own culture and background impacts role; able to acknowledge the boundaries of how far an ally can go; accepting the invitation to enter into the space; willing to put self at risk to be a driving force for social justice; facing those who are critical of Aboriginal peoples not easy; being the

'odd one out'; have to be patient, tolerant and an educator; willing to understand how you contribute to the problem and how to be part of the solution; willing to confront racism and injustice where you see it.

On the surface, it would seem that the process of becoming an ally is complicated, dynamic and even contradictory. I agree with some of what the participants' have listed as traits allies need to possess and possible barriers faced by would-be allies. My own experience contradicts the participant claims that "one would have to have been raised with the right values or been born with the right attitude." I disagree that becoming an ally can't be taught. It is clear from the stories that becoming an ally can be learned and I am gaining a better understanding that teaching would-be allies requires a solid understanding how people learn, the dynamics of resistance, and how to work through it. It is not about creating a safe learning environment – as this can actually hamper learning – instead it is about creating a space where people are receptive to the learning despite being unsettled. (see Adams, Bell and Griffin, 2007; Goodman, 2001; Kendall, 2006; Kivel, 2002)

See Appendix K for an overview of the literature and the participant stories for the characteristics that make an ally.

Chapter 6: Negotiating the Learning, Finding our Way

Being an ally means living with the ambiguity of not knowing and the fear of making mistakes

(Karen Max, 2002, p.62)

This thesis proposes a process for becoming a White ally in social work for practitioners who work in the field of child welfare with Aboriginal people. At its most fundamental, being an ally in this context means supporting Aboriginal children in maintaining those critical connections with their families, extended families, communities and cultures in such a way that harm is reduced. In order for this to become the norm in practice, social workers will need to apply their craft in a *different* and *intentional* way. This thesis provides a space for exploring how this happens and for considering the dynamics that promote this practice. It describes a process of critical self reflection which involved social workers who are considered White allies by their Aboriginal supervisors and colleagues. By describing the journey of these social workers who have become White allies in cross-racial work with Aboriginal people, it is hoped that this thesis will provide a model for others who wish to take a similar path.

This is an autoethnographical study and Creswell (2007) suggests that an interpretive approach is core to this type of qualitative research. He states that such an approach “recognizes the self reflective nature of qualitative research and emphasizes the role of the researcher as interpreter...” (p. 248). As an interpreter, I am influenced by the fact that I am seen as ally and see myself as an ally in child welfare practice with Aboriginal peoples. With this in mind, after reviewing and coding the data, re-storying the participant accounts, identifying and analyzing of themes, and reporting the findings, this is my interpretation from the analysis of the data.

This study was guided by the stories of five social workers and the journaling which promoted self reflection. From these stories emerged common themes that invited analysis. Their narratives, experiences, and insights are interwoven with mine to generate an understanding of the process of becoming a White ally and a model for others.

I found that the process of becoming an ally is complicated, dynamic and even contradictory. It seems that allies are curious, not passive, and able to grasp opportunities to cultivate relationships and experiences that are out of the ordinary. They tend to recognize that Aboriginal people live within a socio-historical context that has generated a legacy of

stereotyping, oppression and racism. This legacy contributes to a national discourse about Aboriginal people which allies both recognize and challenge by making space for a non-Western version of history and ideology.

Allies have empathy for Aboriginal people without condescension. They also see their work as a potential site of resistance. They do not want to further contribute to the harm of Aboriginal children, families and communities and so intentionally work in a different way to ensure they are not complicit in that practice. Allies exhibit an ability to situate their experiences within a colonial paradigm. They are able to stop blaming Aboriginal people for their current circumstances, while holding them accountable for the actions that result in their children being at risk. This can be a delicate balance.

Allies recognize that mistakes are inevitable and expected. They also know that learning from those mistakes is required. They can suspend disbelief while remaining curious, knowing that this can open up many opportunities for growth and learning. The participants did not believe that the process of becoming an ally can simply be taught. On the contrary what this study revealed is that becoming an ally is learned through experience and critical self reflection.

For some allies learning starts early in life with the teachings from parents, educators and friends. For others the learning begins in University with certain instructors and/or curriculum. For a few the learning comes from researching the literature. Most allies seize the opportunities to learn from an Elder, a client, or a specific situation. For all the learning is ongoing.

The experience of learning about our colonial history and the impact on Canada's Indigenous population is life-altering for those who would be allies. Learning that we are racist and complicit in the ongoing racist agenda is both disturbing and humbling. Understanding that there is a different way of approaching the work with Aboriginal peoples is liberating.

What I found surprising was my own journey became the "outlier" in this research. Outlier is defined as something that is situated away from or classed differently from a main or related body; "a statistical observation that is markedly different in value from the others of the sample" (Gladwell, 2008, p. 3). I remark on this because I was apparently the only one raised in an overtly racist culture. I also seem to be the only one in the study who has constantly journeyed and reflected on my experiences through the lens of critical race theory. Discourses of Domination, racism, democratic racism, and White/social identity development models have guided and continue to guide my own critical reflection.

All of the participants were raised in Canada and thus overtly or covertly imbued with the value of privileging White people over Aboriginal and other racialized peoples. As I conclude this autoethnography, I accept that as an outlier I am the “product of history and community, of opportunity and legacy. [My] success is not exceptional or mysterious. It is grounded in a web of advantages and inheritances, some deserved, some not – but critical to making [me] who [I am]” (Gladwell, 2008, p. 285). I recognize that I, as well as other allies before and after me, benefit from some very kind and patient teachers. These teachers have bestowed epistemic privilege upon me such that they knowingly or unwittingly contributed to who I am in this journey to becoming an ally.

There are theories that help us to understand the process. For example, an understanding of critical race theory becomes critical to the process of becoming White allies. The powerful discourses (myths of colour blindness, colour aversion, reverse racism, equal opportunity, meritocracy, denial, blaming the victim) that inform attitudes and beliefs about how race can be discussed serve to further marginalize and minimize and neutralize the dynamic of race. Without centering race in discussions or analysis of diversity, oppression or social work, there is a risk of reproducing and sustaining the racial status quo that privileges White people. Therefore critical race theory provides a vital framework to understand the primacy of race and its role in shaping all relations including structural, systemic, and individual.

I recognize that the anti-oppressive curriculum taught in many institutions posits that there is no hierarchy of oppression - that all forms of oppression are equal in their damaging outcomes. However, when it comes to the experiences of Aboriginal peoples in Canada, clearly race trumps all other oppressions. Being able-bodied, Christian, wealthy, and heterosexual does not protect Aboriginal peoples from everyday racism or other structural or institutional forms of racism. It is important for White social workers, if they wish to be allies, to critically interrogate this issue of race in their interactions with Aboriginal children, families and communities. As Jeffery (2009) writes, “An anti-racist social work approach requires us to make visible the ways in which racism insidiously and systematically permeates the social world in which we work” (p. 54).

Furthermore, denial of the centrality of race and defaulting to a colour-blind stance can become a barrier to becoming an ally. As a result of this denial we cannot truly understand our shared colonial history. Race is what marks the different experiences of this history for White

people and for Aboriginal peoples. We are not all the same. Our experiences with history are so different because some are colonizers and some colonized. Schick and St. Denis (2005) support teaching the discourses to students when they argue that:

... by way of promoting racial equality and anti-oppressive curriculum in schools, discourses that do not take into account the effects of racial discrimination, such as multicultural discourses, are not only insufficient but even counter-productive. Without acknowledging racism and race privilege in curricular practices, the effects of colonization continue. (p. 296)

Social workers who want to make the journey to becoming an ally can begin their journey to becoming an ally at any stage of their racial/social identity development. We can choose to be an ally at any stage; there is no need to wait until the final stage. As this research has outlined, we all make mistakes, we move back and forth between the stages. The important thing is to start. In her discussion about the need for educators (and we can substitute allies) to understand where they are in their social identity development, Goodman (2001) writes,

Ideally, it would be nice if we all could reach [the highest stage] in our social identities before being educators...this is not the case, nor would it be practical. We cannot afford to wait until we have it "all together" to educate others about issues of social justice...we can do some honest self-assessment and then make responsible choices about what to do. (p. 175)

It is possible to be an ally at any stage in the White racial/social identity development as long as one continues to learn. As Barker (2006) writes,

[Having a] legitimate lack of knowledge is understandable, and speaks only to the need for education; to be in a position of privilege and power and to not question the source of that power and privilege indicates a deliberate choice of colonial action and intent. (p. 6)

This reminds us that there is potential for allies to do harm if they do not continue to learn and move through the stages of social and racial identity development.

I have learned from this research that most people are moved to become allies because of experiences that challenged their complacency and make it impossible for them to return to business as usual. My hope is that the process will help potential allies to understand what is happening to them and support them as they take the necessary next steps. Individuals and individual acts can and do make a difference. This process is intended to assist (willing)

individual social workers in their journey to becoming White allies in their child welfare work with Aboriginal peoples.

In their discussion about using the Medicine Wheel²² as a tool for practice, Thomas and Green (2007) provide a perfect analogy of the process for becoming an ally:

Once you have journeyed around the Wheel, you have the opportunity to learn from your experiences and journey around the Wheel again, this time learning from your mistakes...if we remember what the challenges were in our previous journey, then our next journey can be different and more effective. (p. 92)

In conclusion, the findings from this study outline how White social workers become allies in their child welfare work with Aboriginal children and families. It is possible for willing White social workers to learn how to be allies. My hope from this research is that individuals will be influenced to change how they are and how they practice with Aboriginal people. Each person's journey is unique to the experiences that they have and the teachers who cross their paths.

I have learned from my story and the stories of the other participants that it is possible to make this journey. I do not think that any of the participants have misrepresented the difficulty of the journey but all have indicated that the rewards far outweigh the costs of doing nothing or risks of the loss of friendships/relationships/employment. I also believe there are many who will choose not to make the journey. The reasons will be as varied as the people who are making the decision to not begin or continue this journey.

This is a life-long process. Despite barriers, pit-falls, distractions or detours it is a journey we all must make if we want to do no further harm. I hope these stories will inspire you to begin

²² The Medicine Wheel is a tool used by some Indigenous cultures to represent balance in one's life – it follows the 4 directions; encompasses the four primary colours (Red, Yellow, Black, White); addresses Mental, Physical, Spiritual and Emotional aspects of human life, etc. This diagram shows an example of a Medicine Wheel:



(Thomas and Green. 2007, p. 92)

your own journey. For those who are on the journey, I hope there has been additional learning to help move you to a different place on that journey. For those who want to use this research as an excuse for not taking up the journey, I hope you are not working with Aboriginal peoples.

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Appendix

[Read then delete text in [] including the brackets when ready to enter content.]

Any appendix pages are numbered consecutively in Arabic numerals with the rest of the text. Each appendix should be identified with consistent identifiers, e.g. Appendix A, Appendix B, etc. with each label followed by the description of the appendix contents. All appendices are listed in the Table of Contents.

Suggestion: One way to format appendices for good appearance in the table of contents is to type the identifier (e.g. Appendix X) followed by a soft carriage return (Shift + Enter key) and then type the description. This will prevent the Appendix X label from appearing on one line and the description on the next. Also keep the description portion short in order for it to fit on one line in the table of contents.

Appendix A: Letter of Introduction



Research Title: **Becoming a White Ally in Child Welfare Work with Aboriginal Children, Families and Communities**

Researcher: **Grace Atkinson**
MSW Candidate
University of Victoria
Victoria, B.C.
250-382-2316
ghatkins@uvic.ca

Hello! My name is Grace Atkinson and I am currently completing an MSW degree at the University of Victoria.

You have had the honour of being identified as someone the Aboriginal community considers to be a White ally in the important work of protecting Aboriginal children.

I am conducting research, under the supervision of Dr. Jeannine Carrière (250-721-6452; carriere@uvic.ca), to discover whether people who choose to become allies in their child welfare practice with Aboriginal peoples share enough common traits or experiences that it is possible to put together a framework for others when they are ready to shift their practice. This research will result in my completing a thesis and ultimately a master's degree in social work.

If you are interested in participating in this very important work, please contact me and I will provide you with a more thorough outline of what will be involved.

Thank you.

**Appendix B:
Letter to the Partnership Table**

Grace Atkinson
849 Maltwood Terrace
Victoria, B.C. V8X 5C8
250-382-2316 (home)
250-888-8451 (cell)

May 13, 2009

Partnership Table of the First Nations
and Aboriginal delegated Child and Family
Service Agencies

Attn: _____

Re: MSW Research Study: "Becoming White Allies in Child Welfare with Aboriginal Peoples: A Framework for Success"

Hello and thank you for your assistance with this request.

As some of you may know, I have been pursuing an MSW degree these past few years and am finally at the stage of conducting the research to complete a thesis. The Ethics Committee at the University of Victoria has approved my application to conduct the above-noted study.

To complete this study I will need to recruit 2-3 other White social workers, in addition to myself, who are willing to write about their journey and experience with becoming an ally in their practice with Aboriginal children, families and communities. I intend to use both an autoethnographical account of my own journey to becoming and being a White ally and an autobiographical narrative account from other social workers whom the Aboriginal community identifies as White allies and who agree to participate in the study.

My use of the term "White ally" is specific to both heritage and ideology. While there are practitioners who do not have White heritage but do have White ideology (for example, other people of colour from countries that have been colonized by White Europeans), there is no room in this study for examining the dynamic of people of colour performing Whiteness on Aboriginal peoples. This study is specific to those White social workers, entrenched in White ideology, making the journey to practicing in a way that makes space available for the centering of Indigenous ideology.

I hope this study will answer how White social workers become allies in their work with Aboriginal children and families. I am interested to know if there are enough common elements

in the participants' stories to be able to determine if it is possible to draft a potential framework for social workers to refer to or if becoming an ally is something that can be taught so there are greater numbers of social workers willing and able take the 'ally' path in their child welfare careers.

I believe my own standing as a White ally is reflected in the name I have been gifted with: 'Wa KeeinSka Weyan' or 'White Thunder Woman' given by the ancestors Stone Man and Morningstar Woman in a Yuwipi ceremony in 2007.

In preparing for this study I find there is clearly a gap in the literature that would limit what those social workers who want to shift practice find when they go looking for ally role-models. It is my intent to begin filling this gap with knowledge gathered from this study.

With 25 years of field research completed I believe there is something in my lived experience that can assist social workers who really want to shift their practice and ensure that Aboriginal children remain connected with family, extended family, community and culture. I would like to combine my own journey to becoming a White ally with those of other social workers whose practice with Aboriginal children and families is recognized by the Aboriginal community as culturally appropriate and safe.

I state my bias up front. I do not understand and have little patience for social work practitioners who refuse to recognize the harm they are doing and make the changes necessary to ensure better outcomes for Aboriginal children, families and communities that come in contact with mainstream child welfare mandates. The ultimate merit, for me, other than completing this degree, is that a framework for becoming an ally emerges from this study and inspires enough social workers to become White allies such that "no further harm" is done to Aboriginal children and their families.

All of you make up a community of executive directors who share the value of best practice in Aboriginal child welfare. Many of you work with MCFD social workers on a daily basis in ensuring the safety and well-being of Aboriginal children in British Columbia. This provides you with the knowledge and experience needed to be able to determine what the criteria of an ally is and which social workers meet the criteria required of an ally. As such, I am requesting three things from you: first, what the qualities of a White ally are; second, who, either currently or formerly employed by MCFD demonstrate the qualities associated with becoming a White ally; and third, to give the attached letter to the identified allies so they can choose whether or not to participate in this study.

Again, thank you for your time and assistance with this request.

Sincerely,



Grace Atkinson

**Appendix C:
Consent Form for Participation in a Research Study**



Research Title: **Becoming a White Ally in Child Welfare Work with Aboriginal Children, Families and Communities**

Researcher: **Grace Atkinson**
 MSW Candidate
 University of Victoria
 Victoria, B.C.
 250-382-2316
ghatkins@uvic.ca

You are being asked to participate in an autobiographical narrative/autoethnographical research study that will gather information regarding your experience of becoming a White ally in your child welfare work with Aboriginal children and families.

This qualitative research study is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Jeannine Carrière (250-721-6452; carriere@uvic.ca) as part of a thesis for partial fulfillment of MSW requirements at UVIC.

You have been chosen because the Executive Directors who make up the Partnership Table of the First Nations and Aboriginal delegated child and family service agencies have identified you as someone they consider to be an ally. This is quite an honour and there are a few ethical issues to consider before proceeding:

Unless otherwise indicated by you in writing, all information you provide will be kept confidential and your identity protected. Your participation is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time without having to explain and with no consequences to you. If you wish to remain anonymous, you will be asked to provide a 'pseudonym' to be known by in the thesis.

Since it is possible that you may be a colleague I have worked with or conducted training with, I want to assure you that this relationship will not unduly influence your participation in this research.

The potential risks to you, should you choose to be identified, are:

- Potential back-lash from colleagues who are unable to critically reflect on their child welfare practice with Aboriginal children, families and communities.
- Potential for emotions to surface that you were unaware of or have not taken the opportunity to reflect on in your journey to becoming a White ally.

Given this, I will be working with you in developing a 'Safety Plan' to address the steps that will be taken should you experience any harm as a result of your participation in this study. You will find more information about this in Appendix E: Participant Safety Plan.

The potential benefits of your participation are:

- Contributing to the limited literature available to White child welfare practitioners seeking information regarding the process of becoming a White ally.
- Potential for increasing the number of White allies working in the system thus improving outcomes for Aboriginal children and families involved with the child welfare system.
- Continued opportunity for critical reflection of your practice with Aboriginal children and families.
- Participating in the exploration and development of a practice framework for becoming a White ally with Aboriginal people in child welfare practice.
- Increase the number of colleagues you can rely on to practice in a good way with Aboriginal children and families.

You will be provided with a series of questions and asked to use these questions to guide you as you journal your story of how you are becoming a White ally. I am anticipating that it will take approximately 1 hour to answer each question which would allow for 5 questions per month. After three months, I will ask you to submit your typewritten journal to me for analysis and 're-storying'. I will combine your narrative account with those of two other social workers and my own in the hopes of formulating a process for others to use in their journeys towards becoming White allies. I will follow up with you to ask clarifying questions and provide you the opportunity to review and revise the analysis I conduct of your work, based on your journal, for revision and edits as necessary. I will also provide you with a copy of my own story to ensure transparency in this process. I anticipate the total time commitment to be 18-20 hours over a 4-month period of time.

Informal discussions will not be taped but notes will be taken to ensure accuracy of what you have shared. Again, any transcripts or quotes used will be provided to you for verification of accuracy.

Information from this study will be disposed of as follows:

- All copies of your journal, transcripts, hard copies and electronic copies of your information will be stored in my personal laptop and in my office at home and will be deleted 6 months after the thesis has been approved through the defense and sign-off process set out by UVIC.

- The thesis will be posted on the UVIC web-site for use by other practitioners wanting to become White allies in their work with Aboriginal children and families.
- The findings from this research may be used for presentations at conferences or to publish journal articles for use by professionals wanting to become White allies.

Your time and participation in this study is most appreciated and will be invaluable in contributing to assisting other social workers on their journey to becoming White allies. Your signature indicates that you have read the above information; have had an opportunity to ask and have your questions answered; have developed a Safety Plan; and that you are agreeing to participate in this research study which includes keeping an electronic journal.

Consent to participate:

Print Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

This study has received ethical approval from the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria. If you have any concerns you can reach them at 250-472-4545 or email them at ethics@uvic.ca.

Appendix D: Journaling Guide



The lived experience of becoming a White ally in child welfare work with Aboriginal children and families.

Becoming a White ally is a journey that few social workers are able to take. You have been identified by the Executive Directors who make up the Partnership Table of the First Nations and Aboriginal delegated child and family service agencies as someone who is considered to be a White ally. Congratulations!

You are being asked to journal for the next three months about your lived experience of becoming a White ally. It is your own journey to becoming a White ally that I am hoping to capture in this research.

The following questions are intended to guide you in your journaling. Please plan to journal in an electronic format that you will be able to provide to me by email in three months time.

Because telling a story always involves other people, I will ask that you please protect the identities of the people you write about in your journal. You may want to create a legend for yourself that helps you keep track of which “journal identities” you have given to specific individuals.

Some of these questions will be difficult to answer and may result in you needing to take a break or to withdraw from this research project. I encourage you to connect with me to discuss any difficulties or challenges you are having in this process. Likewise, I will connect with you on a regular basis to find out how you are doing with your journal.

Should you ever feel that you need to involve other people in the process of working through this journaling guide, I ask that you discuss this with me prior to involving others so that I can ensure there is adherence to the ethical principles that guide research conducted by students at the University of Victoria.

The following questions are intended to assist you in the journaling of your story. I will ask that you use these questions to guide this process but not as a template that could constrain the telling of your story. It is your personal reflections, insights, struggles and successes that I am hoping to capture in this study.

1. Do you know you are considered a White ally? How do you know? Who told you that?
2. Where and with whom were you raised? What is your cultural background? What was your contact with Aboriginal people when you were growing up?
3. What did you learn from your parents, school, church, government and media about Aboriginal people in Canada?
4. Tell me about your journey to becoming an ally. Where did that journey begin? Was there one defining moment that stands out for you? Who are the people who walked with you on this journey? Who were your teachers and guides? Are these people still in your life?
5. Did you start out in your career as an ally?
6. Has your commitment to being an ally been tested? How were you held accountable?
7. Tell me about the “a ha” moments you have experienced on your journey.
8. Tell me about the biggest “battle” you ever had in your role as an ally.
9. What kind of journey have you had? Difficult? How so?
10. Do you think anyone can be an ally?
11. What role, if any, does racism play in assisting or hampering a White professional with the process/experience of becoming a White ally? Describe any ‘unlearning’ you may have done with respect to what you were taught or came to believe about Aboriginal people that you now know to be false.
12. What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of becoming a White ally?
13. If you had it to do over, would you still become a White ally? Is there anything you would do differently?
14. What has been most rewarding about your becoming a White ally?
15. Is there anything about being a White ally that you continue to struggle with?

Please do not hesitate to contact me if there are questions you do not understand; are having difficulty in answering the questions; or just need to discuss the experience of participating in this study.

Thank you.

Grace Atkinson

Appendix E: Participant Safety Plan



The lived experience of becoming a White ally in child welfare work with Aboriginal children and families.

As outlined in Appendix C: Consent Form, you have been advised and are aware that there are potential risks to you in participating in this research study.

While it is difficult to anticipate all of the potential risks, the following have been identified and require a plan for addressing should it become necessary:

- Potential back-lash from colleagues who are unable to critically reflect on their child welfare practice with Aboriginal children, families and communities.
- Potential for emotions to surface that you were unaware of or have not taken the opportunity to reflect on in your journey to becoming a White ally.

It is hoped that you experience no harm as a result of participating in this study. In the event that you begin to experience any level of harm, you are agreeing to explore the following options to minimize the harm to you:

1. Having an immediate discussion with me regarding the type and level of harm you are experiencing;
2. Contacting the Employee Assistance Program at 1-800-XXX-XXXX and making an emergency appointment to see a counsellor;
3. Contacting the following community resources:
 - Agency _____; Contact # _____
 - Agency _____; Contact # _____
4. Connecting with the following support people:
 - Family members:
 - Name _____; Contact # _____
 - Name _____; Contact # _____
 - Friends:
 - Name _____; Contact # _____
 - Name _____; Contact # _____

Other White allies:

Name _____; Contact # _____
 Name _____; Contact # _____

5. Referring to the following books/articles about being an ally:

Book: _____;
 Article: _____;

In addition, you understand that I am a student researcher and as such will be keeping the thesis supervisor apprised of the situation and the options you have chosen.

Please ensure that the people identified in section 3 above are aware of your participation in this study and their role should this Safety Plan become necessary.

Thank you again for your willingness and agreement to participate in this very important study. Please do not hesitate to contact me at 250-382-2316 if you have any questions or concerns.

Date: _____

 (participant)

 Grace Atkinson, Researcher

This study has received ethical approval from the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria. If you have any concerns you can reach them at 250-472-4545 or email them at ethics@uvic.ca.

I _____ have reviewed the above Safety Plan and do not feel that I require one to participate in this study. I have supports available to me should I experience any adverse reaction to participating and agree that I will notify Grace Atkinson immediately should I need additional supports.

 Participant

 Grace Atkinson, Researcher

**Appendix F:
Research Screening List**

- _____ MCFD/non-Aboriginal child welfare experience
- _____ length of time in the field
- _____ EAP program
- _____ time to journal
- _____ ability to journal electronically
- _____ access to electronic signature or scanner for emailing documents
- _____ knowledge of the literature
- _____ knows other White allies
- _____ family/community resources available for support
- _____ willing to be named
- _____ other

**Appendix G:
Sample Thematic Chart**

Theme 2: Personal Journey			
Participant	Childhood/messages/influences	Cultural identity/Cultural disconnect	Blame/shame/guilt
Anna			
Jane			
James			
Bob			
Grace			

Appendix H: Review of the Legislation and Standards that Govern Child Welfare with Aboriginal Children, Families, and Communities in British Columbia

A review of the *Child, Family and Community Service Act (CFCSA)* reveals that there are 26 sections specific to the involvement of the Aboriginal community and family and preservation of the Aboriginal child's cultural identity.

The original policy manual that accompanied the *CFCSA* was known as Volume 2A. This had no fewer than 20 sections specific to practice with Aboriginal children, families and communities. The procedures set out in policy guided social workers to build relationships with the child's Band or Aboriginal community; to prioritize placements according to Section 71 (3) of the *CFCSA*; to preserve the child's cultural identity and so on. Volume 2A was replaced with a number of practice standards documents in 1998.

Currently the standards and policy are encompassed in a document titled 'Child and Family Development Service Standards' (CFD) which includes children in care service standards (CIC). Of the 25 CFD standards, 21 or 84% make specific reference to working collaboratively with the Aboriginal community in the planning and delivery of service. Of the 16 CIC standards, 11 or 69% make specific reference to culturally appropriate planning and delivery of service to Aboriginal children including the preservation of their cultural identities.

All of the documents I have discussed to this point reference the values, goals and principles of preserving cultural identity and connections; and, respect for Aboriginal people as deserving the same level of service and respect as non-Aboriginal people.

For example, from the *CFCSA*:

- | | |
|------------------------------|--|
| Guiding principles: | Sec. 2 (f) the cultural identity of [A]boriginal children should be preserved; (p.8) |
| Service delivery principles: | Sec. 3 (b) [A]boriginal people should be involved in the planning and delivery of services to [A]boriginal families and their children; (p.8) |
| Best interests of child: | Sec. 4 (2) If the child is an [A]boriginal child, the importance of preserving the child's cultural identity must be considered in determining the child's best interests (p. 9) |

From the CIC Standards:

Standard 1: Preserving the Identity of an Aboriginal Child in Care.

In partnership with the Aboriginal community and identified delegated agency, take ongoing action to establish or preserve the identity of Aboriginal children in care by:

- Exploring the child's cultural connection, heritage, community or tribal history and descent
- Developing a cultural plan to promote the child's Aboriginal identity
- Making applications to pursue membership or entitlements, and
- Honouring and following the placement priorities for Aboriginal children in care [Sec. 71 (3) of the *CFCSA*] (p. 89).

The standard statement has an 'intent' section that says:

It also includes finding ways to help the child explore and understand the history, geography, language, customs and spiritual beliefs of his or her community, and to *develop lifelong relationships with people in that community* (italics added) (p. 89).

From the CFD Standards:

Standard 2: Children and Families from Aboriginal Communities.

To preserve and promote a child's Aboriginal heritage and connection to his or her Aboriginal community, the following must be involved in all significant decisions when determining the child's Aboriginal connections, heritage and descent, and when assessing, planning and providing services for the child:

- The child
- The child's family
- The child's extended family
- The child's Aboriginal community
- The identified delegated agency and any other community agencies involved with the child and family, and
- Any significant people identified by the child and his or her family or Aboriginal community (p. 15).

The standard statement has an 'intent' section that says:

This standard acknowledges the importance of promoting and maintaining a child's Aboriginal heritage and connections with his or her Aboriginal community. Involving the Aboriginal child's family, extended family, community and others acknowledges their traditional responsibilities and roles in identifying resources for the child and in ensuring that services are sensitive to and build on the strengths of the child, family, extended family and Aboriginal community (p. 15).

Despite all of these provisions in the documents that guide practice with Aboriginal children, families and communities in British Columbia, 52.4% of the children in care are Aboriginal. 1,795 or 38% of these children are served by one of the 24 delegated First Nations/Aboriginal child and family service agencies in British Columbia. This leaves 2934 Aboriginal children in the care of MCFD. Approximately 15% or 440 of these children reside in Aboriginal foster homes.²³

²³ MCFD Aboriginal children in care October 2009 report

Appendix I: The Discourses of Democratic Racism

The Discourse of Denial: the assumption that because Canada is a society that upholds the ideals of a liberal democracy, it could not possibly be racist; resists the notion that racism is systemic and inherently embedded in Canada's cultural values and democratic institutions (p. 24).

The Discourse of Political Correctness: an expression of resistance to social change - when the demands of the marginalized minorities for inclusive language and proactive policies (such as employment equity) and practices are discredited as an "overdose of political correctness"...used to deride the aspirations of minorities (pp. 24-25).

The Discourse of colour-blindness: White people insist that they do not notice the skin colour of a racial-minority person; refusal to recognize that race is part of the "baggage" that people of colour carry with them. While people think this is a good way of avoiding appearing racist, this only serves to deny the unique history, culture, and context of Aboriginal people (p. 25).

The Discourse of Equal Opportunity: belief that there is an equal playing field and that individual merit determines who will succeed; ignores the social construction of race, in which power and privilege belongs to those who are White (among other markers of privilege); demands no form of proactive institutional or state intervention such as employment equity or anti-racism policies (p. 25).

The Discourse of Blame the Victim: if there is equal opportunity and racial equality then a minority population's lack of success must be attributed to some other set of conditions; suggests that certain minority communities are culturally deficient – lacking intellectual prowess or more prone to aggressive or deviant behaviour; failure to succeed and integrate into mainstream dominant culture due to members' refusal to adapt their cultural values to fit into Canadian society making unreasonable demands on the "*host society*" (emphasis added to show the irony of this discourse regarding Canada's First Peoples) (pp. 25-26).

The Discourse of White Victimization: argument that White European immigrants also experience prejudice and discrimination in Canada; assumes that race, ethnicity and immigration experiences are the same for everyone; skin colour does not disappear, like an accent, over time; ignores White European history of colonization, subjugation and oppression of [Aboriginal peoples] (p. 26).

The Discourse of Reverse Racism: belief that Whites are now the victims of a new form of oppression and exclusion; anti-racists are accused of being radical

and using their platform to subvert Canada's fundamental institutions, values and beliefs [all of which are intended to keep White dominant] (p. 26).

The Discourse of Binary Polarization: fragmentation into “we” – White dominant culture or culture of organization – hard-working, law-abiding, decent “birthright” Canadians and “they” – “other”, possessing “different” (undesirable) values, beliefs, and norms, positioned outside of the “imagined” community of Canada; supported by stereotypical images with little basis in reality but having significant social impact (pp. 26-27).

The Discourse of Moral Panic: economic and political destabilization creates a climate of uncertainty, fear, threat; moral panic of those identified with the mainstream experiencing a loss of control, authority and equilibrium; results in fear that cultural and racial differences imperil the national culture and identity resulting in a discourse intended to exclude ethnic and racial “other” (p. 27).

The Discourse of Multiculturalism: Tolerance, Accommodation, Harmony, and Diversity: dominant culture creates a ceiling of tolerance – a stipulation of what differences are tolerable; a belief that “we” cannot tolerate too much difference because it generates dissent, disruption, and conflict; paying unnecessary attention to “differences” leads to division, disharmony, and disorder; “their” idiosyncratic cultural differences are accommodated where possible – thus concealing the structural and systemic inequality of unequal relations of power that continue to exist in a democratic liberal society (p. 27-28).

The Discourse of Liberal Values: Individualism, Truth, Tradition, Universalism, and Freedom of Expression: a set of beliefs that includes the ideals of the primacy of individual rights over collective or group rights; the power of (one) truth, tradition, and history; an appeal to universalism; the sacredness of the principle of freedom of expression; and a commitment to human rights and equality. Any attempt to revise the history of injustice is seen as violating these sacred principles, values and beliefs that are purported to transcend all cultural and racial boundaries (p. 28).

The Discourse of National Identity: marked by erasures, omissions, and silences; cultural plurality was ignored at Confederation and Aboriginal and other cultures were omitted from the national discourse and thereby rendered invisible; the dominant culture is reluctant to include identities of “others” that it has constructed, perpetuated, and used to its advantage (pp. 28-29).

In addition to these twelve discourses of democratic racism, Henry and Tator (2006) add an additional two that pertain exclusively to Aboriginal peoples in Canada:

The Discourse of Paternalism: a sense of dominance, superiority, and munificent benevolence of a colonial government intent on “Christianizing” and “civilizing” the Aboriginal peoples to retrieve them from their assumed inferior,

unchristian, uncivilized state; reinforced by the scientific racism of Social Darwinism and by the Christian duty to evangelize and civilize, non-Aboriginal people were provided with a discourse to justify plundering Aboriginal lands and destroying their cultures, languages, and traditions – it also provided the framework for the Indian Act and the treatment of Aboriginal peoples as wards of the state (p. 122).

The Discourse of a Monolithic “other”: the inability of non-Aboriginal people to recognize the enormous complexity and sophistication of Aboriginal societies and the enormous ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and economic diversity of the Aboriginal population; this discourse imposed a common history of “Indianness” as determined and defined by mainstream Canadian society (p. 122)

Appendix J: Social and Racial Identity Development Models

White Identity Development	Janet Helms (1992, pp. 55-62)	Beverly Tatum (1994, pp. 95-102)	Social Identity Development	Hardiman and Jackson (1997) (in Goodman, 2001, pp. 54-56)	Social Change Action Continuum	Wijeyesinghe, Griffin and Love (1997) (in McGibbon and Etowa, 2009, p. 160)	Stages of Cross-Cultural Awareness	Christensen, C. (1984, in Adleman and Enguïdanos, 1995, p. 214-226)
<p>Contact</p>	<p>Enter with either naïve curiosity or timidity and trepidation about Aboriginal peoples – superficial/inconsistent awareness of being White.</p> <p>Whether one has individual racism at this point is not the issue – automatically benefits from institutional and cultural racism whether aware of it or not.</p> <p>Generally have positive feelings about the ‘idea’ of Aboriginal peoples and fair treatment of Aboriginal peoples.</p> <p>Common observation that the bulk of the information</p>	<p>Have internalized many of the prevailing society stereotypes of Aboriginal peoples they typically are unaware of this socialization process (described as living in smog). They often perceive themselves as colour-blind, completely free of prejudice, unaware of their own assumptions about other racial groups</p>	<p>Naïve</p>	<p>Little or no awareness of social identities and systemic inequality;</p> <p>Usually the case for very young children;</p> <p>May be aware of differences but don’t attribute meaning or judgment to them</p>	<p>Actively Participating</p>	<p>Telling oppressive jokes; putting down, intentionally avoiding, or discriminating against Aboriginal peoples</p>	<p>Unawareness</p>	<p>Accepts idea of equality, multiculturalism; or the superior/inferior positions of own/other groups in society</p> <p>Oblivious to all but most blatant acts of racism or ethnic discrimination, and often re-labels such acts as being due to something else</p>

White Identity Development	Janet Helms (1992, pp. 55-62)	Beverly Tatum (1994, pp. 95-102)	Social Identity Development	Hardiman and Jackson (1997) (in Goodman, 2001, pp. 54-56)	Social Change Action Continuum	Wijeyesinghe, Griffin and Love (1997) (in McGibbon and Etowa, 2009, p. 160)	Stages of Cross-Cultural Awareness	Christensen, C. (1984, in Adleman and Enguñados, 1995, p. 214-226)
	<p>available to Whites [and Aboriginal peoples] about Aboriginal peoples, is negative.</p> <p>Likely to continue to engage in minimal cross-racial interaction</p>							
Disintegration	<p>Conscious but conflicted acknowledgement of one's Whiteness.</p> <p>Questioning racial identities person taught to believe.</p> <p>Guilt, depression, helplessness begin as 'incongruence' occurs.</p> <p>Dissonance – White moral ambivalence.</p> <p>(moral/discourse confusion)</p>	<p>Growing awareness of racism and White privilege as a result of personal encounters in which the social significance of race is made visible – can be triggered by relationship or educational opportunity.</p> <p>Those whose parents are actively anti-racist may feel guilt but are often unprepared for racism outside the family.</p> <p>Deny, withdraw or turn discomfort into action –</p>	Acceptance	<p>Acceptance of and participation in the value system and social arrangements of an unjust society;</p> <p>Internalization of the dominant belief systems including the stereotyping and messages about the superiority of their own group;</p> <p>People in privileged groups commonly deny that there is a problem and are angry at having to deal with it or be implicated in it; they are unaware of their privileges and tend to see</p>	Denying or Ignoring	<p>Enabling oppression by denying that Aboriginal peoples are oppressed;</p> <p>Person does not actively oppress but by denying that oppression exists, they collude with oppression e.g. refusing to believe that oppression at the hands of White colonial governments is directly related to the current struggles of Aboriginal peoples</p>	Beginning Awareness	<p>Begins to be aware of ethnic and racial stereotypes, and to wonder if, and how, these relate to discriminatory acts</p> <p>Begins to question assumptions and beliefs previously accepted about social position of various cultural, ethnic, and racial groups.</p> <p>Accompanied by attempts to disassociate self from sharing responsibility for suffering and harm of disadvantaged</p>

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		feeling alienated from friends and family		<p>assimilation as the way for people from the oppressed group to behave and be successful;</p> <p>They often blame the victim</p> <p><i>Active Acceptance:</i></p> <p>People consciously and overtly express an oppressive perspective;</p> <p>Tend to rationalize inequalities, attributing them to innate deficiencies;</p> <p>They may claim that people on welfare are just lazy and could find good work if they wanted;</p> <p>In the most extreme, people in active acceptance may join supremacist organizations</p>				and oppressed minority groups

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				<p><i>Passive Acceptance:</i></p> <p>Unintentional or covert perpetuation of systems of inequality;</p> <p>People often deny differences, injustices, or their own collusion;</p> <p>Colour blindness is one way to avoid acknowledging systematic inequalities in power and privilege;</p> <p>These individuals may insist on treating everyone the same, regardless of background (ignoring cultural differences or experiences with oppression) or wonder why someone can't just act more 'White' so they fit in better;</p>				

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				<p>They will also maintain a sense of superiority, assuming that they need to help the disadvantaged group because its members are unable to take care of themselves or cannot make appropriate decisions;</p> <p>By simply accepting the dominant ideology, Beginning Awareness people in this stage unconsciously maintain injustice</p>				
Reintegration	<p>Conscious acknowledgement of White identity.</p> <p>Accepts belief in White superiority and Aboriginal inferiority.</p> <p>Institutional and cultural racism justified as earned privileges –</p>	<p>Need to relieve the tension between noticing and not noticing racism.</p> <p>Guilt and denial can be transformed into fear and anger directed at Aboriginal peoples.</p>	Resistance	<p>Comes after people have been confronted with some experiences and information that contradict and challenge worldview and beliefs;</p> <p>They begin to question the oppressive</p>	Recognizing, Taking no Action	<p>Being aware of oppression, recognizing oppressive actions of self and others, and taking no action o stop it;</p> <p>Inaction often the result of fear, lack of information, or confusion about what to do</p>	Conscious Awareness	<p>Fully aware of cultural, ethnic, and racial differences, but unsure of how to integrate and use emerging knowledge and understanding in daily life.</p> <p>The following phases may be</p>

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	<p>negative conditions evidence of Aboriginal inferiority.</p> <p>Guilt and anxiety become fear and anger.</p> <p>Avoiding Aboriginal peoples or involved in excluding/being violent towards them.</p>	<p>Blames ‘other’ for racism and absolves people of responsibility.</p> <p>Temptation sometimes felt to slip back into collusion and silence.</p> <p>White people don’t see themselves as part of a group so hearing that racism is a system of advantage for Whites and disadvantage for Aboriginal peoples crushes the myth of meritocracy – start to hear you don’t deserve your position (didn’t earn it through hard work, ingenuity and skill)</p> <p>Invisible legacy of racism (another cost).</p>		<p>ideology and seek to uncover the ways in which inequality is manifested individually, institutionally and culturally;</p> <p>People in the dominant group begin to acknowledge their own discriminatory behaviour and examine ways in which they have been complicit in supporting and perpetuating inequality’</p> <p>They shift from blaming the victim to realizing the role of privileged groups in maintaining oppression;</p> <p>They gain an understanding of privilege systems and structural inequality;</p> <p>This is often accompanied by</p>				<p>experienced; curiosity; denial; guilt; fear; powerlessness; anger</p>

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				<p>feelings of shame, guilt, and anger;</p> <p>Sometimes they will want to disassociate themselves from other oppressors, to be the special or “good” one, and to try to over identify and affiliate with Aboriginal peoples;</p> <p>Primarily concerned with “who I am not” and reacting to the unjust society; may need to begin to answer “who am I?”</p> <p>Active Resistance:</p> <p>Confront discriminatory attitudes and practices, often in vocal and visible ways, such as writing letters, interrupting stereotypical comments, and changing</p>				

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				<p>organizational policy</p> <p><i>Passive resistance:</i></p> <p>May be aware of injustice but engage in little behavioural change, avoid taking stands or actions that entail risk, or decide to distance themselves from mainstream society</p>				
Pseudo-Independent	<p>Begin to question justifiability of racism.</p> <p>Redefining positive White identity.</p> <p>Acknowledging the responsibility of Whites for racism and own witting or unwitting perpetration of it.</p> <p>No longer comfortable with racist identity.</p>	<p>Deepening awareness leads to commitment to unlearn ones' racism.</p> <p>Intellectual understanding of racism as a system of advantage.</p> <p>Escape the feeling of self-conscious and guilt by associating with Aboriginal peoples.</p>	Redefinition	<p>People try to find new ways of defining themselves and their social group;</p> <p>In conjunction with others in the same social group, this process of identification leads people to new ways of naming themselves;</p> <p>This can result in more complex</p>	Recognizing, Taking Action	<p>Being aware of oppression, recognizing oppressive actions of self and others, and taking action to stop it</p>	Consolidated Awareness	<p>Positive acceptance and integration of self-identity and acceptance of other cultures, ethnic groups and races.</p> <p>Accompanied by desire to help other or dominant group members to reach this new level of understanding.</p>

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	<p>Intellectual acceptance and curiosity about Aboriginal peoples</p> <p>Helps Aboriginal peoples change to be more White...by White criteria [helping them manage their oppression].</p> <p>Looking to Aboriginal peoples to explain racism.</p> <p>'race traitor'</p>	<p>Must be able to embrace who we are in terms of our racial and cultural heritage</p>		<p>sense of themselves and a better understanding of the interrelatedness of different oppressions.</p>				
Immersion/Emersion	<p>Replace myths with accurate information.</p> <p>Begin to change White people.</p> <p>Emotional and cognitive restructuring.</p> <p>Re-express emotions previously denied.</p> <p>Begin to tackle racism and</p>	<p>Need to find healthy White people.</p> <p>White people just seek new ways of thinking about Whiteness, ways that take them beyond the role of victimizer.</p> <p>Read works by anti-racist allies.</p> <p>One of the consequences of racism in our</p>	Internalization	<p>Once people become comfortable with their new sense of identity, they are able to internalize it and apply it in different parts of their lives;</p> <p>To sustain this new identity in a hostile world that socializes and pressures people to maintain the current social order, it must be</p>	Educating Self	<p>Taking action to learn more about oppression and the experiences and heritage of Aboriginal peoples by reading; attending workshops; seminars or cultural events; participating in discussions; joining organizations that oppose oppression; and attending social</p>	Transcendent Awareness	<p>Cross-cultural awareness is a "way of life", and need no longer be consciously sought.</p> <p>Comfort is experienced in all human environments, with individual responding appropriately, but effortlessly and spontaneously.</p> <p>Although aware</p>

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	<p>oppression.</p>	<p>society is that those who oppose racism are often marginalized, and as a result, their stories are not easily accessed.</p> <p>Having access to the stories makes a difference to those Whites who are looking for ways to be agents of change.</p> <p>The role of the ally is not to help victims of racism [or help them manage their oppression] but to speak up against systems of oppression and to challenge other Whites to do the same.</p> <p>Telling stories of racism to Aboriginal peoples may reopen that person's wounds.</p> <p>Feelings of guilt and shame start to fade.</p>		<p>nurtured and supported by others;</p> <p>People at this stage need peers or organizations where there are people who share the perspective and can affirm this sense of identity</p>		<p>action and social change events.</p>		<p>of how others, of minority and majority backgrounds, may view one's actions and responses, this is not a major factor in determining behaviour in cross-cultural situation.</p>

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Autonomy	<p>Internalizing, nurturing and applying new definition of Whiteness.</p> <p>Race no longer represents a threat.</p> <p>Can abandon all levels of racism.</p> <p>Seeks opportunity to learn from Aboriginal peoples</p> <p>Sees how other oppressions relate to racism.</p> <p>Ongoing process.</p> <p>*Attitudes change faster than behaviours.</p>	<p>Incorporate newly defined [positive] view of Whiteness as part of a personal identity.</p> <p>Even when active antiracist thinking predominates, there may still be particular situations that trigger old modes of responding.</p> <p>A White person who has worked through his/her own racial identity process has a deep understanding of racism and an appreciation and respect for the identity struggles of Aboriginal peoples.</p> <p>Affirmative action is seen as putting White people at a disadvantage.</p>			Educating Others	<p>Questioning and engaging in dialogue with others; rather than only stopping oppressive comments or behaviours, also engaging people in discussion to share why you object to a comment or action</p>		
					Supporting and Encouraging	<p>Supporting others who speak out against oppression or</p>		

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						who are working to be more inclusive of Aboriginal peoples by publically backing up others who speak out, forming an allies group, or joining a coalition group.		
					Initiating and Preventing	Working to change individual and institutional action and policies that discriminate against Aboriginal peoples; planning and implementing education programs or others events, working for passage of legislation that protects Aboriginal peoples from discrimination		

Appendix K: Characteristics of an Ally

(To be read top to bottom, not left to right)

From the Literature	From the Literature	From the Literature	From the Literature	From the Literature	From the Participants	From Me
(Adams, Bell & Griffin, 2007, Appendix 6G)	(Bishop, 2002, p. 111)	(What people of colour want from White allies - Kivel, 2002, p. 96)	(Christensen, 1995, p. 226)	(Social work practice with Canadians of Aboriginal decent - McKenzie and Morrisette, 2003, p. 258)	(Bob, James)	
Feels good about own social group membership; is comfortable and proud of own identity	Knowledge of own roots	Don't assume you know what is best for me	Acknowledge racism exists – individual, institutional and cultural levels	Understanding of an Aboriginal world view	Be 'of the culture but not in the culture' to share, foster and reflect Aboriginal values; not confuse one's own identity	Aboriginal peoples come to your home to socialize
Takes responsibility for learning about own and targeted group heritage, culture, and experiences, and how oppression works in everyday life	Understanding that good intentions do not matter if there is no action against oppression	Find out about us	Examine how one perpetuates racism in attitudes and behaviour – personally and professionally	Understanding the colonization process	Practice with patience, humbleness, and a willingness to listen and learn	You are in the homes of Aboriginal peoples for non-work purposes.
Listens to and respects the perspectives and experiences of targeted group members	Knowledge and sense of history	Listen to us; Respect us	Recognize that cross-cultural awareness is a developmental process which...requires the practice and integration of new learning and skills	Recognition of the importance of Aboriginal identity and consciousness	Learn about the culture – to be open to being taught, to listen and to participate when expected	Aboriginal peoples look forward to seeing you.
Acknowledges unearned privileges received as a result of advantaged status and works to eliminate or change privileges into rights that targeted group members also enjoy	Honesty, openness, and lack of shame about own limitations	Talk to other White people	Work consciously and systematically toward becoming an <i>anti-racist</i> [social worker]	Appreciation of the value of cultural knowledge and traditions in promoting healing and empowerment	Recognize the importance of culture and relationships between people and foster these with their clients	You are invited and attend cultural ceremonies.

Recognizes that unlearning oppressive beliefs and actions is a lifelong process, not a single event, and welcomes each learning opportunity.	Acceptance of the struggle	Teach your children about racism		An understanding of the diversity of Aboriginal cultural expression	Recognize their own culture and background and the effect this has on their work	Aboriginal children you are not related to call you Aunt or Uncle.
Is willing to take risks, try new behaviours, act in spite of own fear and resistance from other members of advantaged groups		Take risks, Make mistakes			Be comfortable in the grey area outside their comfort zone and able to practice in this area without being the expert	You physically touch Aboriginal peoples on a regular basis.
Acts against social injustice out of a belief that it is in her/his own self-interest to do so		Don't take over			Not presume to be experts in a culture or Aboriginal community – always the student.	Being an ally extends beyond your paid work.
Is willing to make mistakes, learn from them, and try again					Have a good understanding of the issues	Your White colleagues treat you badly for being an ally with Aboriginal peoples.
Is willing to be confronted about own behaviour and attitudes and consider change					Need to have a thick skin	
Is committed to taking action against social injustice in own sphere of influence					Need to be able to engage with Aboriginal peoples in a different way	
Understands own growth and response patterns and when she/he is on a learning edge.					Need a certain amount of tolerance and patience	