

THE FACILITATION OF SPIRITUAL CONNECTION FOR THE
FIRST NATIONS' PEOPLE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
A CRITICAL INCIDENT ANALYSIS

by

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Abstract

Limited research has been conducted into First Nations' healing, particularly in the area of First Nations' spiritual connection. First Nations' spiritual connection is perceived to be important from a counselling perspective.

The intent of this study was to construct a fairly comprehensive guide of what helps and what hinders spiritual connection among members of British Columbia's (BC's) First Nations, through a First Nations' voice.

Eleven adult members of First Nations living in BC were interviewed to obtain information in the form of critical incidents regarding what helps or what hinders spiritual connection. From these interviews, 29 categories were described as what helped or hindered spiritual connection. These are: ceremonial activities, Elder's teachings/guidance, establishing a connection with nature, prayer, family connection, changing thinking, spiritual beliefs, supernatural experiences, residential school, helping others, seeking help, dreams, role model, spiritual practices, self awareness/self acceptance, receiving your name, cultural preservation/ reclamation, sacred object, First Nations' traditional beliefs, alcoholism and drug recovery, visions, establishing social connection, creative activity, philosophy of life, joining organized religion, teachings/ guidance, cultural connection/cultural awareness, relationship to the Creator, speaking a traditional First Nations' language.

The findings of this study contribute to the field of counselling psychology by providing a reasonably comprehensive scheme of categories and themes that describe, from a First Nations' perspective what facilitates spiritual connection.

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CHAPTER I: Introduction

The field of multicultural counselling and therapy recognizes that current theories of counselling and psychotherapy inadequately describe, explain, predict and deal with current cultural diversity in North America (Sue, Ivey & Pedersen, 1996; Sue & Sue, 1990). Sue & Sue (1990) emphasize that counselling services are biased in their very nature, with services offered being culturally insensitive and inappropriate to the life experiences of culturally diverse clients. One cultural group that has experienced cultural insensitivity is that of the First Nations' people. First Nations' people have suffered a legacy of injustices which have resulted in a loss of their land, cultural identity and self-esteem (Feehan & Hannis, 1993; Green, 1997; LaFromboise, Trimble & Mohatt, 1990; Locust, 1988; McCormick, 1995; Mercredi & Turpel, 1993; Ross, 1992; York, 1989). Historically, the relationship between First Nations' people and mainstream culture has been defined by deceit and disrespect (Green, 1996; Krotz, 1980; Mercredi & Turpel, 1993; Ross, 1992). Issues of land treaties, physical, sexual, mental and emotional abuse in the Residential Schools are but a few important factors contributing to the resultant mistrust First Nations' people experience toward mainstream society.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the meaning and experience of what events help or hinder spiritual connection for individuals within British Columbia's First Nations' cultures. Also, this study aims to develop a set of categories that

describe what facilitates spiritual connection. This study intends to identify critical incidents involved in the facilitation or hindrance of spiritual connection for First Nations' people. It aims to provide counsellors and mental health providers with culturally sensitive data with respect to First Nations' culturally defined concepts of spiritual connection and healing.

Rationale for the Study

There are many reasons to conduct this type of study among First Nations' people of British Columbia (BC). There are troubling statistics regarding the precarious existence of First Nations' people documented in the literature. As of 1990, British Columbia's First Nations' people were reported by British Columbia's Division of Vital Statistics (1994) to be dying at an average rate three times higher than that of BC's average population. Obviously, First Nations' people are suffering from inadequate treatment of health problems resulting in their alarmingly high death rates. Also, among First Nations' people there are above average rates of substance abuse and suicide. York (1996) reports that there is a high rate of mental illness, including depression among First Nations' people.

In First Nations' populations, substance abuse involving narcotics and alcohol is pervasive. Intergenerational effects of these abuses is evident in teenage pregnancies, low birth weight babies and Fetal Alcohol Syndrome all of which are deleteriously affecting the life chances of the future generations (May, 1994). A startling statistic reported by Bellett (1994) reveals that BC's First Nations' suicide rate is seven times higher than that of the average population. In light of these tragic

accounts, the need for culturally sensitive counselling and mental health services for First Nations' people is crucial. These figures illustrate the necessity to conduct research with First Nations' people to inform mental health service providers of the cultural structures, customs and beliefs with which First Nations' people maintain their spiritual, intellectual, physical, and emotional health.

This study focuses on a significant area of First Nations' healing, spiritual connectedness, which seeks to find and maintain balance in all dimensions of life. Spiritual connection is attained through the union between the individual, Creator and Creation. This connection is important to the belief system of the First Nations' as it is interpreted differently by each individual, thus it is of utmost importance that First Nations' people inform research by their own accounts of spiritual connection. First Nations' people have not been afforded the opportunity to express their cultural concerns in a safe environment. This has been largely due to governmental opposition enacted through policies and political agendas (Mercredi & Turpel, 1993; Ross, 1992). In addition, systemic societal pressure put upon First Nations' people to remain silent has devastated their culture. For First Nations' people, their collective voice has been weakened through social oppression and thus the opportunity to educate the mainstream culture as to their needs has been significantly diminished (Feehan & Hannis, 1993; Green, 1996; LaFromboise et al., 1990; McCormick, 1995, 1996, Sue et al., 1996).

Thus, First Nations' cultures pose a unique challenge to the field of counselling, as culturally sensitive and relevant techniques as well as specific interventions need to be developed to serve this population. As mental health

professionals, we must understand the First Nations' position as that of individuals whose collectivistic culture has been denied them and stripped from them by the mainstream society (Green, 1996; Locust, 1988; McCormick, 1995, 1996). First Nations' cultures have valuable contributions to make to both the discipline and theories of Counselling Psychology in the areas of holistic health facilitation and holistic health promotion (McCormick, 1995; 1996). First Nations' contributions to the field of mental health which detail culturally embedded First Nations' health practices would provide the means to educate and culturally inform the mainstream population. The opportunity to communicate the meaning and relevance of cultural practices and beliefs would empower First Nations' people (Sue et al., 1996). First Nations' people can access and share their own culture more authentically than could individuals from other cultures who attempt to make culturally bound assumptions. In addition, this contribution provides new perspectives in healing practices for other cultures. In particular, culturally relevant health practices can be communicated from a cultural perspective so that meaning is not lost because of cultural misinterpretation.

For both clinicians and researchers, there is the need to provide the opportunity for First Nations' people to express their own collective "voice". Only then can we begin to develop and incorporate counselling theories, approaches and interventions in a manner amenable, acceptable and ultimately useful to the First Nations' cultures.

Operationalization of Constructs

First Nations : In the literature, several terms are used for Indigenous peoples of North America. In this study, I have attempted to be consistent in my use of First Nations' cultures or First Nations' people to identify these indigenous cultures. However, Aboriginal, Native and Indian are also terms used to describe these cultures.

Spiritual connectedness: Is defined from the First Nations perspective. It involves the incidents and events leading up to realizing a feeling of connection to the Creator and Creation. The Creator will vary in terminology, other common terms are "Great Spirit" and "God". Spiritual connectedness can further be described as the connection one feels with one's self, family, community, environment and culture.

Collectivistic culture: Refers to a culture in which the collective whole has greater import than the individuals who together form the collective whole.

Individualistic culture: Refers to a culture in which the individuation of the person is valued. Individuation from family, and community is required in order to attain independence and a sense of individual identity.

Mainstream culture: The culture of the majority of the North American population, wherein values and traditions are rooted in White, Anglo-Saxon beliefs.

Acculturation: Culture change resulting from continuous first hand contact between two distinct cultural groups.

Delimitations/Limitations

Limitations of this study are realized in the fact that the researcher is not a member of the First Nations' cultures. This could be interpreted as an attempt to devalue or appropriate First Nations' cultural traditions (Sue et al., 1996), and may have functioned to hinder participants in their ability to trust and share culturally significant health practices. Furthermore, data have been analyzed from the researcher's personal orientation and thus may be compromised by personal orientation.

Although the Critical Incident Technique identifies culturally embedded categories in which to situate critical incidents instrumental in the promotion of spirituality in First Nations' cultures, there is a strong argument to incorporate a phenomenological approach. A phenomenological study, focussing on the experience of spirituality in and of itself would provide more information about the actual construct of the First Nations' perspective of spirituality but would not focus on the actual incidents that facilitate spiritual connection.

The sample size was set at ten because redundancy of spiritually critical incidents was anticipated at ten participants. Also, limiting the study to particular characteristics such as participant age, gender, level of acculturation, and specific culture might be worthy of consideration as these parameters might provide more accurate and culturally specific information. On the contrary, by interviewing a broad range of First Nations' people, the researcher aimed to glean information regarding the diverse culturally based notion of spirituality as well as how it is attained and maintained. It should be noted that sampling procedures utilized

convenience sampling as participants were contacted mainly through word-of-mouth and personal contacts. Because this research is largely exploratory, its strength is in its lack of defining parameters.

Delimitations of this study include the fact that the methodology of The Critical Incident Technique provides an autonomous voice for First Nations' people. This minimizes effects of researcher bias upon interpretation of the results. Also, independent "categorizers" were incorporated in this study to ensure that data interpretation is as reliable as possible. Categorizers included a member of the mainstream culture as well as a member from a First Nations' culture.

Moreover, this study aims to provide an opportunity for First Nations' participants to take back some power and control of communicating their experiences by contributing their valuable knowledge in a manner that is acceptable to them. This study endeavours to provide an experience of empowerment and self-determination for the participants.

Chapter II: Review of the Literature

Background

The concepts of interconnectedness and balance are universal within the diversity among First Nations' cultures (Berry, Irvine & Hunt, 1988; Garrett & Garrett, 1994; LaFromboise et al., 1990; McCormick, 1995,1996: McGaa, 1992; Sue et al., 1996; Ross,1992; Thomason, 1991). The root of these beliefs is the essence of spirituality. This notion of spirit provides the connection between an individual's emotional, physical, mental and spiritual domains (Garrett & Garrett, 1994; LaFromboise et al., 1990; McCormick, 1995,1996; McGaa, 1992; Ross,1992; Sue et al., 1996; Thomason, 1991). First Nations' people strive to maintain balance within themselves, and among family, community and culture. First Nations' collective culture is one of collectivism, where the individual is considered as a relational being; connected to family, community and culture. An individual is believed to be an integral part of the greater whole, which lies in opposition to the western, mainstream notion of developing one's own individuality and personal autonomy.

There is a dearth of published research on First Nations' values, traditions, and beliefs which are interconnectedly woven into the very fabric of the culture. Perhaps the lack of research is a result of the intricate, cyclical nature of these beliefs such as growth and harmony (Garrett & Garrett, 1994), because it is difficult to abstract the domains from one another and to make meaning of them in isolation. In contrast, mainstream society's notion of spirituality is nebulous at best and is characterized as either having a religious basis or as having a very separate existence from one's own tangible experience (Fox, 1996; Porter, 1995; Suyemoto &

Macdonald, 1996). Based on the dichotomous views of spirituality by both First Nations' cultures and mainstream society, Feehan & Hannis (1993) emphasize the significance for mainstream health care providers to be familiar with resources and spiritual practices in the First Nations cultures.

First Nations' Worldview

In order to examine the First Nations' culturally derived concept of spirituality, it is necessary to investigate the framework of First Nations' worldview and how it relates to the four components of the Circle of Life. The Circle of life is represented by the Medicine Wheel (Fox, 1996; Garrett & Garrett, 1994; LaFromboise et al., 1990; McCormick, 1995; McGaa 1992). Central to First Nations' beliefs is the concept of the circle which is held sacred because it is the most direct representation of the Great Spirit. The Great Spirit causes everything in Nature to be round and to progress in a cyclical manner (Fox, 1996; Garrett & Garrett, 1994; LaFromboise et al., 1990; McCormick, 1995, 1996; McGaa 1992). Hence the notion of interconnectedness with one's surroundings.

The continuity of the circular metaphor (McGaa, 1992) is reinforced in the First Nations' culture through the concept of wholism. Wholism implies that health encompasses several domains of an individual's existence: familial, environmental and spiritual harmony. Health as an outcome, results from the maintenance of balance between these components. First Nations' people strive to remain connected to the four components of the Medicine wheel (Garrett & Garrett, 1994; LaFromboise et al., 1990; McCormick, 1995, 1996), in which are represented four

dimensions. These dimensions encompass the emotional, spiritual, mental, and physical domains of life. Balance between these areas signifies wholistic health.

Each of the four areas represents the four directions of the Medicine Wheel. As it is circular in nature, the Medicine Wheel represents the numerous, interconnected cyclical patterns of life. It also serves to illustrate humanity's place in the symbiotic relationship with nature (Fox, 1996). These four dimensions all function in relation to each other, just as each person exists as an interconnected link in the cycle of life. First Nations' people consider themselves to be parts of the greater whole rather than individual components existing independently (Garrett & Garrett, 1994; LaFromboise et al., 1990; McCormick, 1995, 1996; Thomason, 1991; Zellerer, 1992). Interconnectedness is essential to First Nations' worldview, wherein the individual is considered in the context of community (Berry et al., 1988; McCormick & France, 1997).

In summary, spirituality is the framework through which the four domains attain and maintain their interconnectedness. It is a natural connection found in all things (McGaa, 1992). Perhaps a more culturally sensitive term for spirituality is "spiritual connection" or getting spiritually connected. First Nations' people view spirituality as facilitative in "becoming a part of it" (Epes Brown, 1989; McCormick, 1996). That is, becoming part of the greater whole including family, community and environment. The ultimate connection is the connection to the Great Spirit, Creator, or God who is the creator of all. In the development of this relationship, First Nations' individuals strive to break free of the earthly instinct to develop and satisfy one's ego. This lies in contrast to mainstream culture where ego development is

promoted. This individuation of self and ego can yield imbalance in one's life. First Nations' people intend to realize a greater purpose, that is to experience self-transcendence (LaFromboise et al., 1990; Locust, 1988; McCormick, 1996) which means placing emphasis on maintaining the spiritual connection with everything in one's life.

The First Nations' culture values collectivism, which considers the individual as an integral component of her/his environment, the family, the community and culture. While the culture is manifested in the microcosms of the family, community and environment, the individual can be understood to consist of the integration of mind, body and spirit (Bellrose cited in Feehan & Hannis, 1993). Because all of these components function in an integrated manner, they are quite indivisible. This is contrary to the manner of interpreting the meaning and relationships between mind, body and spirit in western culture. A short discussion of differing aspects between First Nations' cultures and mainstream culture is useful in acknowledging the contrasting perceptions of spiritual connection.

Spiritual Connectedness and Spirituality

In order to illuminate the differing interpretations of spiritual connectedness between the First Nations cultures and the mainstream, it is enlightening to examine research on religious and spiritual beliefs. Suyemoto & Macdonald (1996) conducted a qualitative investigation on the content and function of spiritual and religious beliefs among 28 predominantly Judeo-Christian undergraduate students. It should be noted that age related issues, such as life experience and normative

age-related experience are limited in this chronologically young sample. Their results shed light on the relationship spirituality has with religiosity in non-Native populations. Moreover, the investigation yields information with respect to the discontinuity of mainstream spiritual beliefs. Seven distinct belief domains are subsumed by the concept of religion. These beliefs are situated in the following areas: higher power, creation, soul, life after death, spiritual connection with others, fate and supernatural occurrences. These mainstream belief domains exemplify the lack of integration and the perceived separation among the entities of spirit, body and mind (Porter, 1995). Porter supports that there has been a great separation between spirituality and mainstream society's current collective conscience and culture. Whereas, in the First Nations' cultures, religion, psychology and physiology intertwine (LaFromboise et al., 1990).

Suyemoto & Macdonald identified that some mainstream interpretations of constructs such as fate are considered to be predetermined and thus will act upon an individual in a prescribed manner. This is distinguished from the First Nations' perception that an individual can determine her or his own fate through maintaining balance among beliefs, thoughts and actions (McGaa, 1996).

Life after death is seen as another separate journey. Many participants in the Suyemoto & Macdonald study had questions about the nature of the afterlife as well as the effect of present beliefs on the afterlife. These results suggest that for some participants, there seems to be an implicit sense that an individual gets a second chance to make responsible decisions in a dimension of existence separate from the current lifetime. McGaa (1992) comments on the difference between the First

Nations' interpretation of life as a continuous cycle, in comparison to mainstream culture's interpretation. In light of this, McGaa (1992) suggests that the First Nations' cultures can teach the mainstream valuable lessons about remaining holistically healthy.

In addition, there are other differing opinions with respect to First Nations' and mainstream spiritual connection. Whereas, some views within western society seek to manipulate nature, it should be noted that there are other approaches that are concerned with conserving our environment and our resources. The First Nations' perspective advocates that nature be respected and nurtured. Fox (1983) further describes the harnessing of nature by western civilization as the spiritual degradation of humanity. Therefore, this fundamental difference in spiritual perspectives between First Nations' cultures and mainstream culture cannot be said more succinctly than how it is put forth in the Bible, Genesis (1:26):

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

Counselling Issues

The rather cavernous gap between First Nations' and mainstream concepts of spirituality provides numerous challenges for counselling and psychotherapy. This challenge is apparent when one considers that approximately 50% of First Nations' people who seek counselling, do not return after the first visit (McCormick,

1995,1996; Sue &Sue, 1981; Thomason, 1991). This dropout rate is attributed to the fact that counselling procedures incorporated by counsellors reflect mainstream values (McCormick & France, 1997).

Mainstream counselling is very much future-focussed, with the individual striving for self-actualization to live more effectively, gain a sense of individuality, and to better meet the needs of the future (Sue et al., 1996; Sue & Sue, 1990). Mainstream counselling approaches also advocate a one-to-one relationship between counsellor and client. Contrasting this relationship, First Nations' cultures appreciate living in the present and they value the contextualization of the individual within her/his family and community relationships (McCormick, 1996; Sue et al., 1996; Thomason, 1991). An individual's problem is considered in the context of the community, and it is expected that the healer diagnose the problem within the framework of the community support. In stark contrast to western culture's notion of self-actualization (the development of one's own individual identity), the First Nations' culture encourages self-transcendence, which is the journey one experiences in life as a means of personally integrating oneself with and in one's family, community, environment and culture. It is a cultural philosophy that First Nations' people strive to respect the balance of life and maintain their place in the interconnected relationships of culture, family, social and environmental community.

Consequently, the manner in which healing is understood and facilitated should be interpreted directly from the culture. First Nations' culture is compromised if it is viewed through the lens of mainstream culture. To provide culturally sensitive mental health support, Ibrahim (cited in McCormick, 1996) emphasized the

necessity of understanding an individual's comprehension of how things and people relate to one another. The manner in which we understand how change occurs, and assumptions about how problems arise are examples of how we see the world.

First Nations' cultures are replete with well-defined cultural beliefs and healing systems which give rise to a wealth of healing resources. The facilitation of healing is mediated and effective in a culturally endorsed manner. If mental health care providers ignore or overlook these healing resources, the therapeutic relationship will most likely be undermined (McCormick, 1996). Western Counselling models have been created by and for mainstream culture. Application of these theories in a different cultural context, particularly, First Nations' culture, will lead to alienation and mistrust (Garrett & Garrett, 1994; LaFromboise et al., 1990; Locust, 1988; McCormick, 1995, 1996; Sue et al., 1996).

By synthesizing valuable concepts from both mainstream and First Nations' cultures, mental health care providers can utilize western approaches and techniques to complement First Nations' practices. If this integration is done sensitively and in an informed manner, then helpful resources can be provided for First Nations' clientele (McCormick, 1996).

Traditional First Nations' Counselling Expectations

It is of paramount importance that traditional First Nations' cultures have the opportunity to voice their expectations of counselling and therapy (LaFromboise et al., 1990, 1980; McCormick, 1996; McCormick & France, 1997). As had been previously stated, First Nations' people believe that health involves more spiritual

and holistic consideration than do mainstream, western counselling models (Locust, 1988). First Nations' people value maintaining balance and connectedness with one's environment, family and community, and transcending one's ego for the realization that one is part of a larger entity. Western counselling models, however do not encourage these culturally based concepts (Fox, 1996; McCormick, 1996; McGaa, 1992). Thus, as counsellors and mental health care providers, we must be cognizant of the very essence of culturally sensitive counselling and we must learn from acceptable forms of counselling interventions from the First Nations' culture.

This chasm-like separation between mainstream culture and First Nations' culture results in cultural discontinuity which provides a challenge for all mental health professionals: Native and non-Native alike. Perhaps the seriously daunting challenge resides with non-Native mental health care providers in terms of complementing the western counselling model with culturally endorsed First Nations' healing practices. As counselling practices and interventions are developed within and for mainstream culture, it is hardly possible that a mainstream perspective will adequately address the issues unique to First Nations' people (LaFromboise et al., 1990).

Counsellor Role

In order to foster collaboration and trust within the therapeutic relationship, counsellors of the western cultural orientation must establish their own personal trustworthiness with the individual. Empirical research reveals that First Nations'

students preferred a counsellor who proved their trustworthiness through knowledge of cultural issues (LaFromboise, Dauphinais & Rowe, 1980).

Counsellor role has also been a source of conflict for First Nations' people. It would appear that First Nations' expectations of counselling would lead to the conclusion that counsellor ethnicity is of great importance in the establishment of trust, empathy and understanding in the therapeutic relationship. One empirical study, examining First Nations' students' perspectives on positive helper attributes reveals that First Nations' youth prefer a counsellor who is able to express knowledge of issues relevant to First Nations' cultures. A sample of 150 Native students and 50 non-Native students were surveyed and results showed that counsellor willingness to go outside of the office to meet First Nations' students was associated with trustworthiness as was the degree of counsellor professionalism (LaFromboise et al., 1980). Garrett and Garrett (1994) state that counsellors establish trust through attentiveness and provision of structure for the client and by providing direction to the process, while displaying cultural sensitivity to traditions and customs.

However, it must be noted that other studies concluded that counsellor ethnicity was of significance for First Nations' clientele (Thomason, 1991). Ultimately, the establishment of counsellor trustworthiness is necessary if the therapeutic relationship is to develop. The dilemma faced by both counsellors and First Nations' people is apparent as belief systems vary from tribe to tribe and between clans (Locust, 1988). The ideal helping situation would be to have a

trusted First Nations' healer from the First Nations' community and a mainstream counsellor who is willing to learn and appreciate the nuances in the specific cultures.

In conclusion, there are also issues of acculturation affecting First Nations' people (Heinrich, Corbine & Thomas, 1990; LaFromboise et al., 1990). This is especially evident for First Nations' people who are living in urban areas, where they may feel especially dislocated from their cultural customs and traditions (Krotz, 1980). In light of the many issues facing First Nations' people, it is evident that they must be given the opportunity for self-determination in the area of culturally sensitive counselling interventions.

The lack of research initiatives in the area of counselling First Nations' people highlights the urgent need for research into culturally relevant issues for these cultures. This should be effected by giving First Nations people the opportunity to educate western mental health providers as to the unique requirements of their cultures.

Chapter III: METHODOLOGY

This investigation incorporates The Critical Incident Technique which was incorporated as a methodology in the 1950's and 1960's. Flanagan (1954) developed this technique from studies in the Aviation Psychology Program of the United States Army Air Forces in World War II. Flanagan's methodology helped to identify factors that were both effective and ineffective in learning to fly, being a good leader, or accomplishing a specific activity.

The methodology chosen for this study is The Critical Incident Technique because it allows for the participants' "voice" to be heard in the consideration of what facilitates spiritual connection for First Nations' people. The participants for this study consist of First Nations' people who can readily describe their personal experience, the events leading up to their feeling of spiritual connection and what happened as a consequence.

A review of the literature suggests that there is a paucity of research generated knowledge examining spiritual connection in First Nations' cultures. Although literature exists, which involves First Nations' spirituality, it inadequately addresses the complexity of the subject matter, and it has largely been written for a spirituality seeking, popular psychology readership. Moreover, much of the literature is informed opinion, and there has been little research conducted as to the counselling implications of First Nations' spiritual connection.

In addition, this research design allows for the generation of a rather comprehensive resource guide of what facilitates spiritual connection among First

Nations' people. This chapter will begin with the presentation of the basic principles of the Critical Incident Technique (Flanagan, 1954). This will be followed by a description of the sample, interview procedures, and the procedures incorporated for making use of the information gathered.

Critical Incident Technique

The Critical Incident Technique (Flanagan, 1954), is a research scheme incorporating an interview format wherein participants provide descriptive accounts of events that facilitated or hindered a particular aim. The Critical Incident Technique is designed to identify descriptive and qualitative data of an experience which has remained largely unexplored in the literature.

The Critical Incident Technique is a structured research approach made up of a set of procedures for collecting experiential information from individuals about their own direct observations of their own or other people's behaviours. Woolsey (1986) emphasizes that the research should focus on incidents that were directly observed or experienced which are critical in significantly affecting the outcome in question. Co-researchers or participants are selected based on their ability to provide descriptive accounts of events that hindered or helped a particular aim. In this study, a critical incident can be defined as an event that facilitates or hinders the process of spiritual connection for members of British Columbia's First Nations.

The Critical Incident Technique has been chosen because it provides First Nations' people the opportunity to contribute their own experiences with their own voice. In this manner, there is less chance of the researcher imposing personal

values on the meaning of the data. It is recognized however, that researcher orientation is unavoidable in creating the categories from the data. That is why participant review has been utilized, so that interpretation of data is as accurate and authentic as possible.

Upon completion of the interview, critical incidents are identified and are extricated as accounts. These are subsequently grouped by similarity to comprise a set of categories encompassing the events. Categorization of events provides a map of what facilitates or hinders the aim in question. These thematic outlines can be used for theory development and interventions, test construction, practical programs, and for further research in order to refine, extend or revise the categories (Flanagan, 1954).

Participants

Potential participants in the Lower Mainland area of BC were made aware of the study through posters, informational flyers and through a network of contacts in the Vancouver area. Interested volunteers were provided with an informational letter describing the purpose of the study in more detail. In addition, they were given another letter, describing the researcher's background. Participation in the study involved four criteria: participants had to be identified as a First Nations' member living in British Columbia because it was thought that it would be beneficial to limit participants to representatives of BC First Nations. However, 3/11 participants are not originally from BC, but they have lived here for an average of 5 years. In addition, the participants had to be adults, nineteen years of age and

older. The participants had to be able to recall a time when she or he felt a sense of spiritual connection or a renewed sense of spiritual connection. Finally, participants had to be able to recount their experience clearly and completely in the English language. Informed consent was obtained from participants, prior to the first interview.

The participants in this study ranged in age from mid-30s to late 50s. The mean age was 46 years of age. Geographically, the 11 participants came from 11 different home communities in British Columbia, Alberta, and Manitoba. Four of the participants were female and seven were male. Three of the participants actually came from other provinces in Canada, but they have lived in BC for at least five years. Two of the participants were University students, while 9 were employed in a variety of occupations including traditional Native carvers, community support workers, business administration, community agency employees, and spiritual advisors.

Hindrances or problematic issues presented by participants included separation, loss, childhood abuse, Residential School experience, substance abuse, and issues concerning cultural identity development. These issues functioned as hinderances for all participants and this researcher thought that it would be redundant to note them separately for each participant. In keeping with this line of thinking, the focus of the current study is on the facilitation of spiritual connection for First Nations' people living in BC.

Critical Incident Interview

In this study, the Critical Incident Interview involved two parts, an orientation and an elicitation of the incidents. The orientation clarifies the nature of the study and provides the opportunity to establish rapport with the participant. Specifically, the orientation functioned as an attempt to communicate the aim or nature of events to be reported. The researcher was mindful of the phrasing of the aim so that members of First Nations' would readily understand the aim as that of spiritual connection rather than the general themes of cultural connection or the facilitation of healing. The second part of this interview was an attempt to elicit events that facilitated or hindered spiritual connection. Participants were encouraged to describe events clearly and in as much detail as possible. The researcher's role was to listen carefully and to ensure that events were complete and accurate. It was essential to learn what happened leading up to the event, what actually happened, and what the outcome was. Active listening skills were used, as well as occasional summary statements, clarification comments, and reflections to ensure that the speaker was accurately understood. An example of this dialogue follows:

Participant: Just being closer to Nature made me feel better.

Researcher: How did it make you feel better?

Participant: I felt connected being there, with the trees, the animals and the water.

Researcher: You felt comfortable and peaceful there?

Participant: Yes, my soul was at peace.

Researcher: How did that affect your sense of spiritual connection?

Participant: My spirit connected with the spirits of Mother Nature

Orientation to the Study

The researcher provided information as to the purpose of the study as a means of orientation for each participant. The following general statement was used by the researcher:

Thank you for coming and taking the time to speak with me today. As I mentioned to you before, the purpose of this study is to find out what helps and what hinders BC First Nations' people in becoming spiritually connected. I intend to meet with people like yourself, so that you can tell me what has helped and/or hindered this process and what the outcomes have been. My intention is to generate a comprehensive map of what has helped you, so that other people can learn from your experience and possibly be able to create similar opportunities/possibilities in their lives so they too could potentially get spiritually connected. Thank –you again for sharing your experiences with me

Orientation Statement

During this initial interview and before each interview commenced, participants were presented with a consent form (Appendix A) which explained the purpose of the study, the types of questions to be asked, confidentiality involved in the study and their option to withdraw from the study at any given time. Upon reading this consent form, the researcher offered to clarify any questions participants may have had. When all the details had been addressed, and the participant was satisfied with her/his understanding of the study, the form was then signed by both participant and researcher.

To ensure that participants thought specifically about their spiritual connection, they were asked about their idea of spirituality or spiritual connection. In the effort to reduce any ambiguity concerning these terms, the following statement was used by the researcher:

Can you tell me what your idea of spirituality or spiritual connection is? That is, what do you consider to be the spiritual aspects of your life, and how do you get connected to your own spirituality.

Elicitation of Events

Interviews took approximately one hour to complete and they were audiotape-recorded. Interviews took place at participant's workplaces, UBC, and at the residence of the Researcher. The interview began with the researcher asking the following questions:

Example of Introductory Questions

Think back to a specific time when you remember feeling a new sense of spiritual connection or a time when you felt a renewed sense of spiritual connection. What helped the process of getting spiritually connected? What did not help?

Think of a specific time when you found yourself in a situation that helped/did not help you feel spiritually connected. Take your time to think of this specific incident in as much detail as possible. What were the general circumstances leading up to this event?

Participants were given time to remember when they felt a sense of spiritual connection or a renewed sense of spiritual connection. The participant's initial response was usually sufficient to get an idea about a time when they felt spiritually connected. Participants were then asked to identify what specifically about this event was helpful to them in feeling spiritually connected.

Questions for clarification were asked by the participant in order to ensure understanding. Participants were also asked to identify outcomes arising from the incident or event that resulted in their feeling spiritually connected. The researcher asked questions for clarification to ensure the specificity of incidents that were actually involved in the process of realizing spiritual connection. Throughout the entire interview, the researcher was mindful in refraining from providing hints or posing leading questions to participants. Specific open-ended questions for clarification were asked.

Examples of Clarification Questions

What exactly happened or what did you do that was helpful?

How was this meaningful for you?

How did you know that it was helpful/unhelpful in your spiritual connection?

What made this incident so helpful/unhelpful?

What was the outcome of what you did?

For each incident, the researcher asked, "What was meaningful about this incident?" When the participant was finished recounting an event, the researcher asked the participant to think of other events that helped in the experience of spiritual connection. This process was repeated until the participant could not think of any other new events. Participants were also asked to think of events that hindered their spiritual connection. This question was asked because it was thought that this information would strengthen the validity of the study. Participants were able to recall similar thematic hindering events because of the Canadian and BC political stance on First Nations' issues such as Residential Schools and the bans imposed on First Nations' cultural ceremonies and gatherings. In addition, some participants were able to recall hindering events specific to their individual situation.

The interviews were conducted during February and March 1998. Upon completion of the initial interview process, events were extracted and sorted according to the specified criteria below, until a set of categories was developed. Categories were then validated in several ways.

Second interviews are considered to be a nuance in the Critical Incident Technique because they add a phenomenological approach to the study. The second interview also further validates the emerging categories (Woolsey, 1986). Second interviews were arranged with participants from 4-6 weeks after the initial interview. One follow-up interview was conducted over the telephone at the convenience of one participant. Data had been partly analyzed by this time, according to the procedure that will be described. Follow-up interviews gave participants the opportunity to check on the accuracy of the researcher's

interpretation of their accounts of spiritual connection. Participants were asked to comment on the accuracy of interpretations and to make any corrections, additions or deletions as they deemed necessary in order to make the interpretation as accurate as possible. Participants were also given the opportunity to add any other significant events that helped or hindered their spiritual connection.

The following is a sample of the questions asked during the second interview:

Follow-up Interview Statement

As we discussed, the purpose of the second interview is to check the categories and incidents which I have defined and also to find out if there are other helpful or unhelpful critical incidents that you have identified since our last meeting.

Question

These are incidents I have identified as important in your spiritual connection. They have been taken from our first interview. Many of the accounts appear in your own words, however, due to the need for clarity, some of them have been paraphrased. In order for the research to be as accurate as possible, please take your time and read them over carefully, making sure that the content of each incident is correct. Feel free to make any corrections, additions, and deletions as you see fit because you are the expert on your own experience. Your feedback will help me in presenting accurate results from our interview.

Upon completion of this follow-up interview, participants were given a \$15.00 honorarium as a gesture of gratitude for their time and efforts for sharing their personal experiences with the researcher.

Data Collection and Procedures

The first step in a Critical Incident study is to identify the purpose of the study in simple, concise terms (Woolsey, 1984). Flanagan (1954) offers a five step approach to a Critical Incident approach: The first step is to determine the aim of the study, second, setting plans and the criteria for the information to be observed. The third step is the data collection, and fourth, the theme analysis from the data. Finally, the fifth step is reporting the findings. Another important aspect of the Critical Incident Technique is the second interview. Alfonso (1997) considers the second interview to be an innovation to the Critical Incident Technique. It adds a phenomenological component to this study, where the participants validate the meaning and accuracy of the thematic categories.

Data Collection

The Critical Incident interview in this study was conducted by the researcher with one participant at a time. Participants were required to provide the researcher with informed consent, by reading and signing a consent form prior to the interview process. The first interview involved an orientation to the study and an elicitation of events. A second interview was conducted with each participant in order to present interpretations for participant verification. Interviews were audiotaped for the sole purpose of transcription. All participants were invited to answer the same thematic

questions, which were decided upon by the researcher in advance of the interview. Follow-up interviews were scheduled upon completion of data interpretation. Total time commitment was approximately one hour and thirty minutes for both interviews. Confidentiality was strictly maintained at all times. The data from the interviews were analyzed using the Critical Incident Technique.

Procedure

In January, 1998, a pilot interview was conducted with one person as a field test for the purpose of refining interview procedures, such as the appropriateness of questions in order to elicit exact incidents and outcomes that helped or hindered participants' spiritual connection. Participants for the study were recruited through posters and a network of contacts in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. Much of the recruiting was accomplished through word-of-mouth. For people interested in the study, an informational package consisting of a brief description of the researcher's background and a thorough description of the purpose of the study were provided for their perusal. These interested people were encouraged to contact the researcher either by telephone or e-mail if they required further information and also to arrange for an interview time if they wished to participate in the study. Both time and location of interviews were arranged at the convenience of the participants. Most of the participants found it most convenient to be interviewed at the researcher's residence.

Analysis of Data

The analysis of the incidents involved three steps. First, incidents were extracted from the audio-taped interviews, and these were recorded on 4X6 inch cards, one incident per card. Second, the incident cards were grouped according to thematic similarity, in order to form categories. Third, these categories were then subjected to several tests which examined their reliability and validity.

Extraction of Incidents

The 11 were audiotape-recorded interviews were assigned a code number. The incidents were transcribed verbatim. Each audiotape and transcript was carefully studied by the researcher in order to understand the full meaning of the statement. Initial extraction of incidents was then attempted. The researcher initially recorded everything resembling an event. The initial list of events was then intensely examined by the researcher and research supervisor. For this examination, three criteria had to be met for each incident: (a) Was there a source for the event? (b) Can the story be stated in reasonable completeness? What actually happened? (c) Was there an outcome bearing on the aim? Vague statements and irrelevant information were deleted to ensure that these three criteria were met.

Process of Forming Categories

After the incidents were extracted and placed on cards, each incident was recorded in its three constituent parts of: source, action taken/what actually happened, and outcome. This facilitated sorting the incidents into categories. Each of the 212 incidents, listed in their three parts were then typed onto separate cards. This was challenging as the researcher had to ensure that the three criteria were met, especially when participants recalled events with varying degrees of clarity and completeness. Thus, sometimes it was necessary to paraphrase events to convey the full meaning of the participants' messages. Whenever possible, the words of the participant were left unchanged so the essence of what was said was maintained in its purest form.

The next step in the process is to divide the incidents into groups that seem similar. The focus of sorting is on the second criterion: the action taken/ what actually happened. Some of the events appeared to be ambiguous and they were considered to be questionable events. To ensure that events were comprised of the three criteria, prototypical events were identified and used as templates for further decisions. A prototypical event was one that best described the thematic group in question as it had the greatest number of defining characteristics for that category. Prototypes served as examples for future sorting of events into similar groups/ categories. Ambiguous or questionable events were set aside to be used as challengers to the first attempt at category formation. The categorization was then subjected to the supervisor's examination and as a result, the categories were further refined and revised. Ambiguous events were used in the second attempt at

categorizing when they were used as the challenger. Categories were further refined as a result. This process of challenge and confrontation was continued until stability was achieved. Two rounds of correction were necessary to make needed changes to the placement of the events into categories to make sure they were accurate. It was also necessary to rename some of the categories so that the name accurately represented the content of incidents within the category. Twenty-nine categories emerged, which encapsulated all of the incidents.

It was expected that modifications would have to be made as the analysis progressed, in particular it was expected that categories might have to be re-named to fully represent the emerging incidents. Some categories were re-named, while others remained unchanged. For the purpose of ameliorating the descriptive value of the categories, a few incidents were re-circulated from previously selected categories to enhance the quality of relationship between category and critical incidents. Both researcher and research participant participated in this process.

Validation Procedures

Andersson & Nilsson (1964) provide research on the reliability and validity of the Critical Incident Technique and conclude that this method is both valid and reliable. Upon categorization of incidents in their study, they found that acceptable rank correlation between category sizes was .85, with explainable inter-rater inconsistencies. The necessary level of agreement among independent raters was between 75%-85% with respect to placing incidents of the same nature in the same categories. Andersson & Nilsson (1964) reported that their experience of the critical

incident technique was valid in representing content domain, so much so that other methods of assessing the same content domain failed to add new information.

Woolsey (1984) also utilized the Critical Incident Technique and she found her categorizations to be reliable if independent inter-rater agreement was 75%-85% for placing incidents into categories. This is in keeping with recommendations made by Andersson & Nilsson (1964).

In this study, two independent judges were asked to participate in verifying that two different people can use the categories in a consistent manner. One judge was a member of a BC First Nation and a retired magistrate. The other judge was a Master's student in the Department of Counselling Psychology, at the University of British Columbia. On separate occasions, each judge was provided with brief descriptions of each category and then asked to place a sample of 40 incidents under the appropriate categories. By comparing the placement of incidents by these independent judges with the original placement of incidents in the pre-formed categories, the number of correctly placed and incorrectly placed incidents could be summarized statistically as a percentage of agreement. This means that if an independent judge placed 40 incidents under the correct categories, the percentage of agreement would be 100%. A high level of agreement indicates that different persons can utilize the categories to categorize incidents in a reliable manner.

Other approaches to ensuring validity are found in Andersson & Nilsson (1964) and McCormick (1995). They describe withholding 10% of data and then categorizing these incidents in previously determined categories to check for category reliability. To ascertain if the category system is comprehensive,

approximately 10% of the incidents (22 incidents) were withdrawn and not examined until the categories were formed. Upon completion of category formation, these incidents were analyzed and classified. This tests whether the incidents can be easily placed in the existing category system. If incidents cannot be placed in the categories, then new categories might have to be formed. If the incidents can be placed in the existing categories, this suggests that the category system is comprehensive, considering these 10% of incidents. In this investigation, all 22 incidents were logically placed in the corresponding categories.

Another issue to be considered is that of the categories being sound or well-founded. In order to form a category, the researcher must identify a significant similarity in a group of incidents as they are reported by different people. If only one person or a few persons report a category of event, then it might be dismissed. One person might have distorted an event, for example. On the other hand, when many independent people report the same kind of event, the possibility of distortion loses its strength. Agreement among independent persons reporting the event is one criterion for the objectivity of the event. Agreement is assessed by the participation rates in each category, which is the number of participants reporting a category of event divided by the total number of participants.

McCormick (1995) in his study involving the facilitation of healing among BC's First Nations, describes additional techniques for assessing the trustworthiness of the categorizations: levels of agreement among participants in the study should attain at least a 75% agreement. Flanagan (1954) suggests that a category should surpass a 75% agreement. Although an actual numerical figure is not given,

McCormick (1995) suggests that a relatively high participation rate for each category (the number of participants reporting a category of event divided by the total number of participants) is a plausible measure of soundness. Borgen and Amundson (1984) in their research on unemployment, suggest that a 25% participation rate can be considered sufficient in establishing validity of categories.

In addition, expert commentary by individuals who are experts in the field is useful to gauge whether the categories are valid and useful in the context of the research area. Experts can provide collaborative evidence and content validity to the research results.

In this study two mental health professionals were asked to determine whether the categories from this study were useful to them. Both individuals were First Nations' people, one individual is a University professor in the Department of Educational Psychology, and the other individual is currently in the process of obtaining a Master's degree in Counselling Psychology, and both have extensive experience in working with First Nations' people in British Columbia.

Finally, McCormick (1995) and Woolsey (1984) suggest accessing related research literature and checking whether there is agreement with previous research. McCormick notes that if a category disagrees with previous literature, it is sufficient reason to question its validity, however, it is not sufficient reason to discount it from the data. If a category of event agreed with previous research, then there would be good reason to be more confident in its soundness. If a category of event was novel and it was neither confirmed or disconfirmed by the previous research, then it would stand alone as a research finding and as a possibility to be confirmed or disputed by

future or research (McCormick, 1995). In this study, the categories were compared with previous research to assess agreement.

Alfonso (1997) ensured validity in a Critical Incident Study on Overcoming Depressed Moods after an HIV+ Diagnosis by following the criteria for qualitative research as supported by Maxwell (1992). This involves three types of validity: descriptive validity, interpretive validity, and theoretical validity. The first type of validity is descriptive validity which involves the accuracy of the accounts. Accuracy is ensured by audiotaping the interviews and utilizing transcripts to use the participants' words (Alfonso,1997).

Alfonso reports that a second interview is also an opportunity to ensure validity because unclear incidents and emerging categories can be verified with participants in order to avoid inaccurate interpretations of the participant's accounts. Interpretive validity was ensured by Alfonso (1997), by asking questions during the first and second interviews that were directed toward obtaining information and a clear understanding of what the events and behaviours mean to participants. This type of validity maintains the perspective of the participants' authentic voice, without any modification of meaning. Finally, theoretical validity refers to the explanation of the phenomenon and its relationship to the validity of the assumptions of the study, which are based on theory and previous research.

In the current study, interviews were audiotape-recorded and they were transcribed verbatim, to ensure descriptive validity. Participant's own words were maintained as much as possible, so very little to no interpretation of the words they used was needed. In addition, follow-up interviews allowed for valuable discussion

and reflection on the initial interviews. Questions for clarification were posed during the first and second interviews to ensure interpretive validity. Also, the second interview provided an opportunity to further enhance interpretive validity as the participant could check over the categories of events as determined by the researcher. It is an opportunity for the participants to take ownership of checking the accuracy of the researcher's interpretations. Participants appreciated being given the opportunity to review categories and events, as it allowed them to deepen their understanding of this research process. Finally, theoretical validity was assessed by checking with the previous research in this area, theoretical literature and informed opinion.

The Critical Incident Technique is appropriate in terms of operationalizing the construct of "spiritual connectedness". Category creation should naturally rise from the number and nature of the spiritually critical incidents in the data.

Like other qualitative methodologies, this method could be limited because the categories chosen are subject to the orientation of the investigator. This is especially important if the data can clearly be interpreted in another manner. Therefore, it is very important to have independent judges categorize incidents to check for the reliability of the categories. Also, participant review should alleviate the potential detrimental influence of investigator bias.

Finally, the Critical Incident Technique could compromise the data because so much depends on the wording of the research questions being asked; if questions are inconsistently posed by the interviewer, with participants, then the resulting data may not be capturing the incidents which are being sought to study.

Also, the accuracy of the content of the research questions is very important because a lack of clarity in the wording may result in misinterpretation of the construct of “spiritual connectedness”. Reliability and validity of results may be questioned because there has not been very much empirical research published on this aspect of the Critical Incident Technique.

Chapter IV: RESULTS

A total of 212 critical incidents were identified by eleven adult members of Canada's First Nations (7 were members of BC First Nations, while 2 were Ojibway, one participant was Cree and one person was of Stoney heritage) concerning what facilitates spiritual connection for them.

The 212 critical incidents were sorted into 29 categories. Categories will be described, followed by validation procedures.

Description of the Categories

In this section the 29 categories will be presented in order of decreasing frequency. Categories sharing the same number of incidents are presented according to higher participation rate. For each category, examples of critical incidents encompassed in each category are presented.

Table 1. Participation Rate in each Category

Categories	Frequency	Participation Rate
Ceremonial activities	38	82%
Elder's Teachings/Guidance	18	64%
Teachings/Guidance	13	55%
Establishing a connection with nature	18	46%
Prayer	12	55%
Family connection	10	64%
Changing thinking	10	64%
Spiritual beliefs	8	36 %
Supernatural experiences	7	46%

Relationship/Gratitude to the Creator	7	27%
Residential School	6	36%
Helping others	6	36%
Seeking Help	6	27%
Role Model	5	36%
Dreams	5	18%
Spiritual practices	5	9%
Self awareness/Self acceptance	4	27%
Receiving your name	4	18%
Cultural Preservation/ Reclamation	4	18%
Sacred Object	3	27%
First Nations Traditional Beliefs	3	27%
Establishing Cultural connection	3	27%
Speaking traditional language	3	18%
Alcoholism and Drug recovery	3	18%
Visions	3	18%
Establishing social connection	2	18%
Creative Activity	2	18%
Philosophy of life	2	18%
Joining Organized Religion	2	9%

N=11

Note. Frequency indicates the number of participants reporting an incident in a category, whereas the participation rate indicates the percentage of participants reporting an incident in a category.

Category 1: Ceremonial activities (38 incidents-82% participation rate)

Participants benefitted from participating in traditional First Nations'

Ceremonial activities which involved spiritually based ceremonies such as becoming a Spirit Dancer, participating in Sun Dance Ceremonies, sweat lodges, smudging circles, healing circles, and potlatch ceremonies. Outcomes described by

participants generally involved feeling spiritual connection to the Creator when participating in traditional ceremonies. Specifically, a stronger sense of spiritual connection was attained upon reaching an altered state of consciousness or connecting to one's higher power during ceremony.

Also, a greater appreciation and clarity of the spiritually restorative qualities of Traditional ceremonies were noted. Spiritual awakening, life reflection, connection with people and community, trust in self and in others, receiving teachings, feeling reborn after a Sweat and spiritual healing, all contributed in making the participation in ceremonies become a part of one's life. Traditional ceremony brings the energy of Mother Earth together (Epes Brown, 1989).

Example 1

When you become a spiritual dancer in the longhouse, the initiation ceremony teaches you how to access that altered state of consciousness. You are connected to life when you're in the longhouse, you are connected to the higher power.

Example 2

When I became a spirit dancer it was like a second chance at life. I was a new person all over again. I was given a chance at a new life, the old you is gone and you can still retain the things that are good for you. You can change all those things that weren't good for you and live closer to the Creator.

Example 3

There was no ceremony happening in my life at that time there was nobody supporting me in my life. When I was exposed to other Nations' ceremonies to honor change of life like puberty and marriage, I wanted to be a part of it, I felt a spiritual connection with the spiritual ceremonies.

Example 4

Now I take part in sweat lodges, smudges, and speaking to people. I feel better because this helps me to connect spiritually.

Example 5

When I go to the sweat lodge it opens up a whole new world. The sweat lodge is like the womb of Mother Earth. I feel like I am coming out of there a new person. It is just like the Christian people, they get baptized and re-baptized and they say they get reborn. That is exactly how I feel every time I go to the sweat lodge. You go in there and you come out a whole different person, you are reborn in the spirit.

Example 6

During my initiation ceremony, when I became a spirit dancer in the longhouse when I was under a hat and carrying a pole, I received spiritual messages more clearly. I was trained to accept the spiritual connection.

Category 2: Elder's Teachings/Guidance (18 incidents- 64% participation rate)

This category encompasses the learning and guidance received from the teachings of First Nations' Elders. Elders are close to the Great Spirit in relation to their place in the First Nations' view of the cyclical nature of life, and they have cultural knowledge and wisdom, which they bestow on others. Elder's teachings are considered to be very important as they have wisdom about traditional Native ways of healing (Kirk, 1986).

Also, spiritual guidance was received from an Elder who has knowledge of First Nations symbology, for example the unique importance of an eagle feather, a sacred object to one participant.

Example 1

So the Elders told me that I had to take care of myself and now I have to start taking care of people. Because of what they told me, I had to deal with past issues through cleansing myself through ceremony, in order to help other people.

Example 2

The Elders were so powerful and forgiving. They taught me how to forgive and to ask for forgiveness.

Example 3

I was sleeping on the lawn of the city hall in Whitehorse. I was drunk & passed out. This Ojibway Elder came along, a man, and helped me into his vehicle and took me to detox. He visited me there, but he didn't say anything to me. He

drew a picture on the wall that signified the Wheel of life, and he started to connect me with Mother Earth and with the 4 directions, the fire, and the Creator. From that I knew that all things are connected and I am a part of all of this. He put the M.E. in the middle, which could be me or Mother Earth. I started getting connected to the seasons. And now, I do what I would normally do as a traditional person... I share my spirituality with people.

Example 4

I began to connect with my own Elders and I listened to the stories. After awhile, I spiritually connected.

Category 3: Establishing a connection with nature (18 incidents- 46% participation rate)

This category speaks to the interrelatedness of all things, especially Nature and all things created by the Creator. This category denotes the importance of maintaining a balanced relationship between Mother Earth and one's self in order to exist in harmony and peace with nature and not exploit it. It describes the attitude of relating subject to subject rather than object to object (Fox, 1983).

This category involves experiencing spiritual connection as a result of exposure to the land, trees, animals in their natural habitat, plants, water and sky. Establishing a connection with nature also involves a reciprocal relationship, wherein respect for all things natural is maintained. Participants described being able to access a feeling of spirituality in nature or in natural settings. They

described that they demonstrated respect for nature through offerings for the land or a soon-to-be felled tree. One participant described animals as friends and expressed that there is no name in his First Nations' language to differentiate between humans and animals. Powerful spiritual messages were received as a result of their (inter) connection with nature. For example, water is used as a source of healing or vehicle for spiritual cleansing, emotional catharsis, or renewal.

Participants who established a connection to nature described the need to respect Mother Earth and the need to live in peace and harmony with nature. They felt that nature is not an infinite resource, but a resource that must be sustained and respected for its life sustaining qualities. Many participants described their gratitude to Mother Nature. Expressions of gratitude involve making offerings or giving thanks to Mother Nature.

Example 1

Most times I sit there in a park and forget everything around me... Peace is enjoying Mother Nature out there, in the park, you're around trees and around grass and you got birds and squirrels and whatever animals are around... at least you've got some feel for Mother Nature there. I sit there and enjoy myself, I'm at peace and I feel spiritually connected.

Example 2

I think of the animals as my relatives, there is no word in our language to tell the difference between us and the animals. So I feel spiritually connected to them.

Example 3

Every time I went in there [the forest], especially on that particular day... I really felt the presence of spirituality with the trees and the animals. I was spiritually connected then.

Example 4

Going out in the bush or swimming in cold water is a renewal for me, I am able to meet Mother Earth by using the water as a cleanser that is good for my body. It connects me spiritually with thinking that the water is very powerful, very clean, and very healing, and because my body is 3/4 water, I need lots of it. I know that I have that spirit in me, so I give thanks

Category 4: Teachings/Guidance (13 incidents-55% participation rate)

This category refers to the helpful and spiritually relevant teachings, guidance, and stories participants engaged in teaching others or those that were received from parents, other family members, and other people. Teachings may also be received from other sources, for example, academic learning is also referred to in this category. This category does not encompass Elder's teachings.

For participants who describe teachings as important to their spiritual connection, they describe teachings about cultural concepts, such as the Medicine Wheel, which is the First Nations' concept of interrelatedness with Mother Earth.

Other incidents include being taught spiritual and cultural songs, the cultural tradition of drumming, the importance of having a Spirit Keeper or Spirit Guide in one's life.

Spiritual teachings also included in this category are specific teachings about spirituality involved in the First Nations spirit dancing initiation ceremony, where a newly initiated baby spirit dancer is likened to a infant, and must be given as much spiritual instruction as the short time of the initiation ceremony will allow. The impact of this intensive spiritual instruction is described as having several layers of meaning which become more apparent as time passes.

Spiritual guidance from the Creator is also included in this category, where it was understood that at a particular time, the Creator provides guidance and encouragement to maintain for example, teaching others about the spiritual concepts of the Medicine Wheel. Outcomes were described as feeling gratitude for spiritual gifts, reinforcing a sense of spiritual connection, and strengthening one's connection to their her/his power, and the hope of one day having a personal Spirit Keeper as a protector of one's spirit.

Example 1

I received teachings about Mother Earth and spiritual connection. I learned that we are all part of Mother Earth. The fire, the drum would be our connection to the spirit world, the door to the other side. Putting these ideas together formulated my connection to the Creator. I understood who I am and how I could build on it from there.

Example 2

I was teaching the medicine wheel to kindergarten students. I get more spiritually connected each time because I feel really strong about making these presentations.

Example 3

One of the men started drumming and singing as I walked back into the community and he was one of the last people in my community to do anything spiritual. I spent a lot of time with this man and he would tell me stories and sing songs to me and speak to me in our language. His stories and teachings connected me to what it meant to make a spiritual offering to give thanks.

Example 4

I was taught in every dimension, like in a Medicine Wheel, in every one of these areas: spiritual, mental, physical, and emotional. I was taught how to live and how to be spiritual. I felt balanced in my spirituality and the other important areas of life.

Example 5

In the longhouse we are taught that it's like this person has been born and we only have 3 months to teach them all that you might want to teach that child from zero to five or zero to three years of age. So it is all kind of condensed. So you're teaching is not just from 9:00 to 3:30, it's every day, all day, it happens in such a tight, disciplined way. When you're experiencing it you don't really even understand in how many ways you are connecting with your higher power.

Category 5: Prayer (12 incidents-55% participation rate)

This category involves the spiritually healing act of meditative prayer or concentrating in prayer, usually to the Creator, Great Spirit or God. Prayer is a vehicle through which many of the participants in this category were able to connect to their higher power. One participant related that his prayers originate in the Creator. Prayer was described as being the first action which led to a feeling of being directly connected to the Creator, one outcome of this is to feel as if a burden has been taken away. Prayer is used as a source of deeper spirituality, to communicate one's faith in the Creator.

Prayers are offered to the Great Spirit, Creator, Higher Power, as well as to a Christian God. Prayers are also offered or sent to others in need of prayers. Prayers are also offered to salvage people's souls through the connection with God.

Example 1

I would say that I am a non-practicing Catholic and a traditional First Nations' person. I use both ways of praying: to the Creator and to God. I now understand that both ways of praying, either to God or the Creator, connects me to the higher God.

Example 2

When I was in jail] I found a piece of paper and pencil and I drew a Rosary on there that was what I was using to try and do the prayers. I can hear someone saying that rosary stuff, and I tried to mimic him, I tried to learn and understand

some of the words. I started to pray real hard before my meals and after my meals and I began to feel closer to God.

Example 3

I struggle with things in life and I really pray about them. Connecting to my higher power helps me to deal with those struggles.

Example 4

I pray to be more spiritual and now, instead of getting violent when all else fails, I pray. I will let the creator take care of me, I have faith that my prayers will be answered.

Category 6: Family connection (10 incidents-64% participation rate)

This category reflects the importance of a connection with family members who are supportive and accepting. Family connection ranges from family values, teachings, familial moral support and the passing on of traditional beliefs.

For some participants, family members are understood to be integral to spiritual connection, as they help and support participants to strive to do good deeds for their families and to feel more spiritual. Also, one participant in this category, believed that family members are connected with one another through the Creator's wisdom.

Parents are great source of support and guidance. Parents often decide on spiritual rites of passage for their children. This includes making the decision for a child to be initiated as spirit dancer in the longhouse, which is often spiritual rescue for troubled souls.

Parents were also given credit for sending prayers of support and guidance to a participant when they were in great spiritual desolation. Finally, for one participant in this category, positive parental attitudes toward the Residential Schools helped that participant overcome “warped ideas about The Church” and aided in that person’s connection to spirituality.

Example 1

My kids mean more to me now because I know they’re important to my spiritual connection. This furthers my spiritual connection.

Example 2

I believe that my Aunt, who I later found out is the Grandmother of my adopted children, was connected to me by the creator. So that strengthens my family ties and my spiritual belief.

Example 3

I was born into a very traditional family. Both of my parents are spiritual keepers in their lives and we were brought up with that, all 14 of us. My mother’s spirit keeper was black bear and my father’s spirit keeper was the gray wolf. I had a rich, very rich spiritual family background of all that.

Category 7: Changing thinking (10 incidents- 64% participation rate)

This category encompasses a change of consistent thought patterns. It includes a personal shift in understanding personal issues as well as changes in thinking which reflect modified intergenerational attitudes.

On an individual level, changing thinking includes the realization that one's own life patterns and lifestyle can be changed. For example, one participant was able to make sense of the Residential School experience in order to "do what needs to be done with the Church" and effect positive change for himself. In addition, another participant felt relief when he apologized to someone for a wrong he had done him many years ago, rather than maintaining his inner guilt. Also, one participant's realization and acceptance that the Creator is always present in his life, resulted in overwhelming comfort and peace in knowing she is safe in the strength of the Creator.

Changing thinking also involves the transition from feeling suicidal to renewing one's commitment to live a more positive, healthy life. The outcome of this transition was a feeling of personal empowerment and self-control.

One participant described an attitudinal change from great despair to the mobilization of his inner resources as a result of an HIV+ diagnosis. The outcome of this change of attitude was a positively modified outlook on life and a focus on spirituality.

Change of thinking with respect to an intergenerational perspective, involves the belief that it is acceptable and necessary for the present generation to disclose concepts about First Nations' spirituality. This contrasts what a few participants reported about previous generations who would not allow the disclosure of sacred culturally based spiritual beliefs, concepts and ceremonies to people outside of the First Nations Cultures. Participants in this category described feeling the need to

preserve cultural and spiritual connection and also the responsibility to share these important beliefs with others in order to unite people in a common understanding.

Example 1

There's a certain hopelessness and desolate feeling when you don't have a friend or anyone at all in the world that you can lean on. Now I know I don't have to be alone again. It is such a tremendous comfort to know that I don't have to be alone again because I know that I have the strength of the Creator in my life.

Example 2

I think that our age group, my age group is an age group of change. In order to maintain our cultural and spiritual connection, we are not only having to learn for ourselves, we have to teach those behind us and we have to teach those before us the importance of the change and what is going on in society and life in general.

Example 3

Our ancestors would not allow us to talk about our spiritual beliefs but through lots of social changes I believe the world needs to know more about it. My philosophy is that I stop if I don't share it. I feel that it fulfills my objectives by wanting to unite people, to get people to be in harmony with each other. I connect to the Creator when I share my story.

Category 8: Spiritual beliefs (8 incidents-36 % participation rate)

This category refers to one's own interpretation of the essence of spirituality. Spiritual beliefs encompass a range of issues such as culturally based beliefs about

spirituality as well as unique, individual beliefs about spirituality. For participants in this category, Spiritual beliefs involved an inter-relatedness to all things that have been created by the Creator. For one participant, spiritual beliefs eased emotional and spiritual pain. Outcomes of Spiritual beliefs are emotional, physical, and spiritual salvation. Also, spiritual beliefs are closely connected to cultural values.

Example 1

My belief is that I am part of something greater and I am spiritually connected to my fellow man. I am always trying to walk toward this spiritual connection with others.

Example 2

Sometimes I feel like the Giant is coming towards me and if I don't believe in the Spirit, I will be overcome. Sometimes the flow of tears comes over me. Sometimes I'm ready to give up my spiritual beliefs, and I can't breathe anymore and I am totally involved in pain at those moments. I pray and Mother Earth takes over and the sky opens up and the tears fall. I feel more spiritually connected and I know that the Creator is there and that is what gets me through it.

Example 3

My spiritual beliefs help me to get out of my pain which helps with my spiritual connection to help me to feel better. These thoughts help me in my spiritual connection

Category 9: Supernatural experiences (7 incidents-46% participation rate)

This category denotes those occurrences of supernatural phenomena which have a positive impact on one's own spiritual connection. These phenomena include exorcising spirits by incorporating black magic, communication with an otherwise inanimate object, as well as movement of an immobile object. Outcomes of these incidents involved a renewed sense of spiritual connection with the Creator and the Spirits. Also, these experiences were described as life-affirming and they were interpreted as messages from the Spirits.

Example 1

When the rattle started moving, and the singing started, somehow I felt the wind and someone told me it was the grandfather of the North that came in. Apparently there are fathers in the four directions and this of the grandfather of the north. And at that time when I heard that rattle going, that's when I felt that a little brush of wind. It was just a small little breeze, just for a couple seconds and then I heard the rattle. And all of sudden the rattle started to fly around and everywhere it hit, there was a blue spark that came from there and that rattle was just sailing all over the place... It was just being carried [by the spirits], it didn't touch or hit anyone. I guess it would be that the grand father's are making their presence known to me. The spirits are making their presence known to me...I realized that they were real...I got more involved in the practice of spirituality.

Example 2

I was gathering wood for a sacred offering, a food burning. And I got called in front of the fire. So did my friend. It was like somebody took the world and turned the volume off, I could see but I could not hear. I began to get scared and I knew I should pray, I prayed in my own way. I received a message, it said next time prepare, thank-you, do your homework. And then it was like someone turned the volume up and down. Then I could hear again. This happened in about two minutes. I realized my spiritual connection, that was going to be it.

Example 3

I had seen my uncle, my Elder take some things out of some people with black magic. I realized the spiritual connection in helping people get rid of bad things in themselves.

Category 10: Relationship to/ showing gratitude to the Creator (7 incidents- 27% participation rate)

This category specifically involves one's own personal relationship to the Creator. Participants show gratitude to the Creator through making offerings to the Creator, by attributing their life as a gift from the Creator, or by simply saying thank-you to the Creator. Participants described finding strength in their connection to the Creator by asking for help or relying on the Creator for forgiveness and guidance.

Example 1

For me, believing was a connection to the Great Spirit and to the wonders of the universe. I knew I was connected to the universe and to the Great Spirit.

Example 2

I take trees down and I give thanks to the Creator for these trees. It is the Creator who gives me the trees and the world and I need to be strong and stay connected to Him.

Example 3

Sometimes, I get into spiritual darkness where the Creator comes back and I grab on to him and pull myself up to his light, back to the Creator. I get stronger in my relationship to the Creator

Example 4

I want to continue trying to do good things for my own spiritual connection to the Creator. I owe my life to the Creator

Category 11: Residential School (6 incidents-36% participation rate)

This category involves the experience of attending Residential School. Mostly all of the incidents cited are those which hindered spiritual connection, however one person's experience of Residential School proved to facilitate spiritual connection. The abhorrent abuse and mistreatment of First Nations Peoples' in the Residential Schools resulted in many participants losing their dignity and self-esteem. Outcomes of this travesty include emotional and spiritual devastation.

Example 1

I went to Residential School for a year and I think that devastated me for a period of time. I felt that I was incarcerated for something I didn't do. When they took us away from our community, they told us that we shouldn't be speaking our language, we shouldn't be practising our cultural background that we come from, we should not erect totem poles, we shouldn't put any emphasis on our blankets, our masks, our dances, our song. And these were all the things we wanted to do. Although that is part of our experience, I still know that we are a traditional people, that is what keeps me spiritually connected.

Example 2

I got spiritually connected by going to the Residential School and then deciding to leave it because I was forced to be Catholic. It really didn't apply to me as a person. It was spiritual suicide. Leaving helped me make my way back to the creator.

Example 3

I remember growing up in a Residential School and of the abuses that we had to go through. I did not believe in God or the creator. My spirits were taken from me at that time.

Example 4

My Residential School experience scared me about relating to my spirituality. But they did connect me to something to do with spirituality outside of myself, which was to remember what happens on the river and try to focus on that when I was going through all that school stuff.

Category 12: Helping others (6 incidents-36% participation rate)

This category refers to the altruistic behaviour of helping others or engaging in activities that help other people. Helping others yields a sense of spiritual connection and a sense of purpose. Participants helped others in their spiritual journeys, they volunteered their time and talents to others, and they described counselling people with drug and alcohol problems. Outcomes included, feeling better about one's self and a feeling that they were fulfilling a sense of duty.

Example 1

To help others in their spiritual journey, I hold healing circles, smudging circles, and sharing circles. Helping others helps me feel connected.

Example 2

After about a year of finding out about the virus I started volunteering. It made me think that I should get myself spiritually reconnected again.

Example 3

I began to help people by speaking to them during native counselling sessions, I think it motivated me to help people and I felt stronger with myself and my spirituality.

Category 13: Seeking Help (6 incidents-27% participation rate)

This category involves the act of seeking help from other people or from resources offering help or assistance. This category involves participants seeking

help from organized religions, community members, Elders, and other resources. Outcomes include becoming a member of a Church, quitting drugs and alcohol dependency through the support of an organized program, spiritual healing, and developing a new sense of personal spirituality. Also, one participant got more involved in traditional ceremonies such as fasting and attending Sweat Lodges as a consequence of seeking help from Elders.

Example 1

I told the brothers and sisters that I want help. And I went outside and broke up my cigarettes and I opened up all my alcohol and beer and dumped it out. And I broke up my marijuana. I was healed by asking for help.

Example 2

I asked my Elders to help me in releasing my cravings from my drugs and alcohol when I was inside. I was told that I had to do certain things, like my fast, my prayers and my sweat lodges. These helped me stay spiritually connected.

Example 3

What really helped me was that there was a bible in jail and I read it. I started going to AA. Their [the Elders] help showed me that I could do things the way I wanted.

Category 14: Role Model (5 incidents-36% participation rate)

This category describes the positive impact of exemplary behaviour, attitudes and knowledge of an influential person on participants reporting critical incidents in

this category. Participants reported that they learned a great deal about life and spirituality from their respective role models. Outcomes range from gaining a greater appreciation for the reciprocal relationship with Nature, helping and teaching people reminiscent of the way the participant was taught by a role model, and conveying a sincere gratitude to their role models.

Example 1

My uncle was a role model for me. He was very important to me in my spiritual journey, because I would listen to him and watch him.

Example 2

I had a brother-in-law, who served as an example to me. He was a dedicated volunteer to the Church. Years later, as I was talking about aboriginal issues at the Anglican Cathedral in Toronto, I thought of my brother-in-law, and I felt I was connecting with his spirit.

Example 3

My friend was the most spiritual person I knew at the time. He was a great role model for me. I learned a lot from him. He helped me get on the path of my spiritual journey.

Category 15: Dreams (5 incidents-18% participation rate)

This category involves the experience of having meaningful, sometimes prophetic dreams during sleep, or of having the meaning of these dreams interpreted by someone else. Outcomes for this category involve understanding the

message embedded in the dream and also feeling validated for the importance and accuracy of the dreams. Participant's dreams involved supernatural phenomena such as Grandfather's with the ability to fly and the extrication of "snakes" from one's body.

Example 1

One time I had a dream I was in a big field in this big wheat field. No trees, there were a few clouds and sunshine. And four grandfather's came flying down and they picked me up. They had the regalia on but it was all white and they didn't say a word to me, they didn't say nothing. They just picked me up and started flying. I don't know in what direction we flew. But they just kept on going, I ask them where we were going that they wouldn't answer me. I enjoyed that flight. I remember seeing off in the distance there was a house, a white house and there was a fence around it. It was right in the middle of a wheat field and my grand father's flew straight toward that house and put me behind the fence and they took off again. And they took off in the same direction that we came from. They just left me there. I wanted to go back with them. But I couldn't climb over the fence and I was trying to call them back but... I don't know what happened, but they couldn't or they wouldn't come back. The wheat field was native spirituality, or native culture. Inside that fence, that's for the outside and the outsiders are there. That's where the white man's society is. The grandfather's put me in there, so I have to try and find my way back out into here (pointing to the field), into the native spirituality again. And I never went back to the native culture but every now and then I do touch base with it.

Example 2

I talked to her about my dreams, she kept reassuring me and she would tell me that I was supposed to be where I was. She sent me to talk a counselor who was good with dreams, somebody who could interpret them. It validated my spiritual philosophy that I could communicate through my dreams, in a supernatural way.

Example 3

I was taken to the Sundance Leader so he could explain a dream I had. In my dream, there were many snakes coming out of my body. I could feel them wriggling in my stomach. I also spat them out of my mouth. I could feel them coming up as my body was being held down. The Sundance Leader explained my dream and he confirmed that I was able to communicate with the Spirits. I felt that my spirit was cleansed and that the bad spirits were exorcised.

Category 16: Spiritual practices (5 incidents-9% participation rate)

This category involves specific acts engaged in by a participant to demonstrate a unique spiritual gratitude, or to facilitate spiritual connection. These practices are independent of the First Nations' cultures, they are unique to the participant and involve actions that have personal meaning to the participant. The outcome for all these practices is feeling a sense of spiritual connection to the Creator. Practices also serve as a reminder of one's spirituality.

Example 1

In order to feel closer to the Creator, I practice clearing myself. I feel more connected to the Creator when I can clear myself.

Example 2

In order to get spiritually connected I had to adopt several practices to do things for myself. I felt most spiritual by myself, and it is my personal connection to the Creator

Example 3

I relied on practices to get me out of trouble and to remind me of my spirituality, like touching the earth or hugging a tree. These practices help to spiritually connect me.

Category 17: Self awareness/Self-acceptance (4 incidents-27% participation rate)

This category encapsulates the concept of unconditional self-acceptance as well as self-awareness. This category involves the action of searching for one's true self, or self-discovery. Outcomes include self-acceptance rather than previously feeling ashamed of oneself, and trust in one's self. Spiritual connection results when participants became more aware of themselves. One participant began searching for meaning by gaining exposure to different organized Churches.

Example 1

I was searching for something, trying to find me. I knew there was something better, a connection to my spirituality and I began to look for it by going to different churches for a few years.

Example 2

In the past, before I got connected with myself I wouldn't have given you the time of day. Because I was so far underneath with the hurts. Now I do not have to be ashamed anymore. Now I am connected with myself and I accept myself, and with my spirit, I am not ashamed to talk to other people.

Example 3

I have learned to trust in myself. That is a part of my spiritual connection.

Category 18: Receiving your name (4 incidents-18% participation rate)

This category outlines the spiritual significance of receiving one's name through a naming ceremony. Receiving one's name is very important to one's identity, as it symbolizes the inheritance of all the deeds and people the name stands for. The name carries with it all the good deeds done by others who have, at one time carried the name. It is considered to be an honour to receive a name, especially if the person being named is not a blood relative to the namesake.

Outcomes in this category involved realizing the duty to be as strong as the person who carried the name before the participant. For all participants reporting the spiritual significance of receiving their name, everyone detailed their own

reaffirmed effort to try harder to walk in a good path and to maintain a strong sense of spirituality in order to maintain their worthiness of the name bestowed upon them.

Example 1

My namesake and my name that I got are close and sacred to my heart. I am just a small part of the way he walked. I know that I need to be connected to the Spirit to be as strong as my namesake.

Example 2

My Uncle, as soon as he heard I was born, I was not even 2 hours old and he was already giving me his name, sharing it. He was honoring me, I was being honored to the Creator. It was a spiritual connection.

Category 19: Cultural Preservation/ Reclamation (4 incidents-18% participation rate)

This category outlines the importance of maintaining, preserving and reclaiming one's cultural traditions, ceremonies, and beliefs. The significance of this category arises because participants feel responsible to their people and their culture to re-establish the importance and sacredness of First Nations' traditional ceremony and cultural concepts and beliefs.

Although the action involved in this category is the preservation of one's culture, the outcomes were all in the dimension of spiritual connection. This is another example of how closely connected culture and spirituality are for First Nations' people. Outcomes include appreciating parental attitudes of cultural

preservation, and a feeling of accomplishment in knowing that the importance of spiritually based cultural traditions is currently being recognized. Another outcome spoke to a definite strengthening of one's cultural identity in the struggle to reclaim a fragmented culture. This struggle is understood from an intergenerational perspective, where past, present and future generations of First Nations' people will one day take back their rightful place. Overall, the challenge to maintain one's culture strengthens and deepens spiritual connection.

Example 1

I think about the struggle we have to walk in two worlds. Our generation, those of us who are 35-40 years old, we are the ones who are bringing back the importance of the Longhouse and trying to keep things alive. Just because there is so much that was lost. And for Squamish, we lost a lot, being urban: so close to the city and everything. In my role as a life skills worker in the community, I try and tell people the importance of what our culture is all about and how the traditions are spiritually based. I spend as much time teaching my own people as I do social workers and everybody else. Preserving my culture connects me to the Creator.

Example 2

We are those rainbow people who come back and pick up the pieces and put it all back together. Our culture needs to do this. And I understand that, it is not an ego thing.

Example 3

When my father was 17, his side of the family went underground and kept on practicing spiritual and cultural traditions. It was our way of life, We all knew we would become Spirit Dancers at sometime in our lives, and then we could be closer to the Creator.

Category 20: Sacred Object (3 incidents- 27% participation rate)

This category encompasses the First Nations' traditionally held beliefs regarding the sacredness of particular physical objects such as an Eagle feather, sacred bundle or a rattle. These objects are revered because they symbolize the power of Nature, and the Spirit. These objects are used in traditional ceremonies and rituals in the First Nations' Cultures. The Eagle feather represents the strength and wisdom of the Eagle and the feather will carry prayers directly to the Creator.

Example 1

He gave me a bowl and a candle and he just left it there. He gave me a feather, too. He said that I didn't have to pray, you can do whatever you want, but this is an opportunity for you to pray. This inspired me to pray to the Creator

Example 2

I carry my own sacred bundle, it consists of my ceremonial pipe and my smudges. Because of my spiritual connection I was chosen to carry my bundle for the people.

Example 3

At that time a youth gave me any eagle feather ...Especially for a youth to give it to me. Because they are like the leaders of tomorrow and they have wisdom that older people don't have. And if a youth trusts you, then you're trustworthy. It's not something you give just to give, it's not to be taken lightly. If you drop your feather you have to get someone to clean it. I felt a greater spiritual connection and a greater sense of purpose in my life. The meaning of the eagle is that the eagle flies closest to the sun, he is way up there so I guess an eagle is the grandfather, they are ancient. The eagle feather is something you pray with. I have one eagle feather and that is my connection and I know that the feather will bring my prayers directly to the creator, I know that. The feather was my connection, it was my friend.

Category21: First Nations' Traditional Beliefs (3 incidents-27% participation rate)

This category involves First Nations' traditionally held beliefs which reflect balance and harmony throughout the entire universe. In this category, First Nations' traditional beliefs include the concepts of balance and inter-relatedness as taught in the First Nations' Medicine Wheel, which teaches the interconnected relationship between Nature, humanity and the Creator.

This category involves First Nations' traditions such as communicating in a speaking circle with the aid of an Eagle feather. It does not involve participating in ceremony, but rather, this category focusses on traditionally held beliefs and

concepts. Outcomes document a feeling of validation in following First Nations' traditional beliefs and a stronger relationship with the Creator.

Example 1

My traditional belief is that I am connected to the whole universe through the life that is inside me, which is the center of every circle which to me, is Mother Earth, or our spirits. I say thank you to the Creator for that.

Example 2

I believe in traditional First Nations' values. I now realize that my native way of being spiritually connected is perfectly valid and it is old, it is part of who we are.

Category 22: Establishing Cultural connection and Cultural awareness (3 incidents-27% participation rate)

This category describes the importance of connecting with and increasing one's awareness of the First Nations' cultures and traditions to strengthen and develop one's ethnic identity. This category's focus is specific to connecting with the First Nations' cultures through recreational activities, increasing one's knowledge regarding Aboriginal ways of healing, and strengthening one's own cultural identity through exposure to cultural concepts. This category does not encompass specific First Nations' traditional beliefs.

Example 1

When my adoptive parents used to take me to canoe races where there were other Indians. I wondered, "What am I?" What does it mean to say that I am Indian? All of a sudden, I felt a connection, a spiritual connection.

Example 2

I am going on a journey with my mother... to an Aboriginal Healing Conference in New Zealand" where we will learn about cultural ways of healing. This will help me heal my spirit and connect me to my culture.

Category 23: Speaking traditional language (3 incidents –18% participation rate)

This category involves the significance of learning the language of one's Nation. In and of itself, language is important to communicate with Elders and Spirits who do not understand the English language. Knowledge of Aboriginal languages increases the ability to communicate with one's Elders who do not speak English. Also, language captures the essence of the cultural meaning of teachings and communications.

Language is also inextricably related to the First Nations' cultures because traditional teachings and concepts have been passed on through oral tradition which is largely accomplished through Aboriginal languages. In addition, participants reported a sense of cultural and spiritual connection through speaking their traditional Aboriginal language. One participant described the heart as understanding the language even if the brain could not understand it. Outcomes

include a feeling of competence in speaking one's own language and practicing one's spirituality. Also, participants felt proud to be able to understand and speak their own language.

Example 1

I have learned to speak our traditional language and I can welcome the spirits who are spiritually there and tell them it is OK to come and watch. It has to happen in our own language, because they don't understand English. This helps me communicate with the spirits.

Example 2

It had me wondering for a number of years why was my language whipped out of me. It was whipped out of the majority of my people. But I still maintained my language. I am fortunate that I can still understand my language and practice my spirituality. And that is through the tenacity of my late Mom, and I credit all that to her.

Example 3

My identity is what and how I can indicate who I am in my language, and where I come from: my tribe and the community I was raised in. Although I have been away from my community for 42 years, I am able to converse with my elders in our language and I can understand what my Elders are saying to me. Because I know who I am and where I come from, I feel spiritually connected.

Category 24: Alcoholism and Drug recovery (3 incidents-18% participation rate)

This category documents the impact of recovery from alcoholism and drug addiction on one's sense of spirituality. Participants described these powerful addictions as gripping their spirit and leading them down a path of darkness and pain. Recovery from these addictions instilled a more positive self-image, a restoration of spirituality, and the decision to give one's life up to the Creator.

Example 1

Before I got connected, I would drink and do drugs, I was one of the worst drunks. Since I quit the drugs and alcohol, know who I am as opposed to knowing who I was, it is a lot different.

Example 2

The four parts of a person's life that I talk about in the Medicine Wheel were totally controlled by alcohol and my Medicine Wheel wasn't turning anymore. I didn't have one anymore, that was my total darkness. And until I came back to it, over ten years ago now I could not exist as a balanced person. All of a sudden I gave my spirituality up, I didn't see anything, I didn't feel anything. All I knew was that I had become an alcoholic and there was something else that I was believing in as my total centre, and that was alcohol. It had taken over my holistic self, my spirituality, my physical being.

Example 3

I took back my spirituality when I gave up alcohol. I now fight that, I don't feel like drinking anymore but I will always have those urges and they have been totally wiped out by reaffirming my beliefs. It was my Creator, plus I turned my life over to him so he now drives and I sit and I follow that.

Category 25: Visions (3 incidents-18% participation rate)

This category involves the impact on one's belief system upon recognizing a vision as being a symbol from the Creator or Spirits of affirmation or salvation. A vision usually conveys a message to the person who has seen it. For participants reporting visions, all felt a spiritual connection as result of their visions. For one participant, visions of the Creator and family members were interpreted as signs of salvation and hope at a time of great desperation. Another participant recalled a vision from childhood which nurtured a sense of spiritual connection to nature.

Example 1

I was sitting in a cell after a I had beat up my wife again. And that is when I really, really heard the Creator when he appeared to me in that wall and showed himself. He said he was here all the time. The Creator's face appeared in that wall and he said, you just have to ask for help, and I never ever forgot that... It was so real, the beauty of his face.

Example 2

I missed my parents and then I started to vision them. I would snap out of it and nobody was there, but I could feel the Spirit.

Example 3

I recognized a spiritual connection at ten years old. I had a vision where I could see myself in deerskin at ten years old. I have since found that I had a spiritual connection even then.

Category 26: Establishing social connection (2 incidents- 18% participation rate)

This category involves going outside one's personal, individual realm and approaching other people and establishing a social connection with them. It involves exposure to others and meaningful interaction with others. Outcomes were described as feeling a deeper spiritual connection with people after they have shared something of themselves. Another participant described a social connection to other Native people as resulting in a feeling of a strong spiritual connection.

Example 1

I connect with people when they tell me their stories in a social situation. I learn from them and it helps me in my connection with the Creator.

Example 2

When I was exposed to other Native people, and developed friendships with them, there was this lifeline for me. I felt the spiritual connection, but I didn't know what it was, I felt it... I felt good.

Category 27: Creative Activity (2 incidents-18% participation rate)

This category involves engaging in activities that require creative expression: through artistic impression or creative writing. The creativity involved in this category resulted in one participant's gaining an understanding of life and an awareness of the inter-relatedness of all things through poetry writing. Another participant described a spiritual connection as a result of creating traditional First Nations' artwork

Example 1

I carved this totem pole and the last figure on the very top had a Thunderbird but I wanted the wings to go out to the side right? But I didn't have any wood. Then my uncle says, "Why don't you get that slab of wood down on the beach?" Where I did the pole, if you walk 2 or 3 feet, you will drop into the water, so the beach is right there. And it was there... sure enough the slab of wood came in the morning from the water, it floated in on the beach below. It was 14 feet long and it was almost two feet wide and it was at least 6 inches thick, perfect it was exactly what I needed. I thought it's my grandfather because he used to do the canoes and everything. He knew I needed a piece of wood and out of nowhere I see this log right there ...just

ten feet away from where I am. My Grandfather helped to remind me that I am connected with the spiritual world.

Example 2

I was writing poetry about life and the metaphorical purpose of life. Up until this moment I did not feel connected to the universe, to the creator, to the earth, to the ancestors. I gained an understanding of life. The poetry written on this day was in celebration of the awareness of my connection to all of the universe, the creator and the earth.

Category 28: Philosophy of life (2 incidents-18% participation rate)

This category encompasses the tenets by which a person lives life. It describes individual philosophies of life, which result in connection to the self and to the Spirit because of a receptiveness to experiencing unseen forces. Another participant felt a stronger bond with the Creator by living a life that involves caring for others and sharing one's self with others. Both participants in this category reported that a positive way of living is living a bit closer to the Creator.

Example 1

I walk the good life, I walk a clean life, sharing, caring, I've always been taught by people here to love. It is something that the creator gives to you. It is something that I learn while I am on earth and it's something that the creator gives you.

Example 2

I think that when we are ready for the next step, a teacher is put on our path. By living my life this way, I get more connected to spirituality, connected to seeing myself how I am and I am able to listen to the unseen forces that guide me on my spiritual journey.

Category 29: Joining Organized Religion (2 incidents –9% participation rate)

This category yields information about the significance of joining an organized religion and how it impacts one's spiritual life and other facets of life. Outcomes involve the feeling of being saved by the Creator and helping people in the Church by praying for them and ministering to them.

Example 1

When I became a member of the Church, they got me to lead and I have not stopped leading services since. Now, I am the Minister of the Church and I pray for the people.

Example 2

I told my family... I told my wife one day I would join Church. So I walked in and went to the alter and my aunts and uncles looked at me and said "What do you have to say for yourself?" And they knew, they could read me and they could see a glow... so I went up to the alter to and I rang the bell and I told the brothers and sisters that I want help and I want to join Church tonight. I believe I went into a big bright cloud, [it was like] I was close to heaven and that I was not quite there, I had

to earn my way, my wings. I climbed, it was so bright and clear, that's how He wants you to be.

Validation of the Categories

When developing categories, it is important to ascertain if other people can use the developed categories with confidence. The validity of the categories lies in being able to answer this question: Are the categories sound and are they trustworthy? Although it is impossible to be absolutely certain that the category scheme is trustworthy and sound, it is necessary to ensure that the category scheme is reasonably stable if it is to be used in practice. In order to ensure a user of these categories that they are not incomplete, impractical or inaccurate, the researcher has incorporated several tests to assess an acceptable level of trustworthiness and soundness.

Reliability of Categorizing Incidents

Andersson & Nilsson (1964) report that one way to assess reliability is the extent of agreement of independent judges using the category scheme. Can two different people use the categories in a consistent manner? Flanagan (1954) suggests that a category scheme should surpass a 75 percent agreement. In the current study, a sample of 40 incidents was drawn from a total of 212 incidents. A sample size of 40 was used because it accommodates at least 2 incidents from each category, where possible. For categories encompassing only two incidents, both incidents were used in the sample. Categories with two incidents in total,

include joining an organized religion, philosophy of life, creative activity, establishing social connection.

In the current study, two independent categorizers were utilized. One was an Elder of a BC First Nation and also a retired Judge, the other was a Master's student in Counselling Psychology and a representative of mainstream society. Both judges were provided with a brief description of the categories, as well as a prototypical event for each category, by the researcher and they were encouraged to ask any questions for clarification. They were also shown specific examples of certain incidents and how the researcher categorized them. The 40 incidents that were given to each judge were typed onto 40 separate cards. The judges were instructed to place the incidents in the category thought to be most appropriate. Both judges took approximately 1 1/2 hours to place all 40 incidents in the categories. Table 2 represents the percentage of agreement between the researcher's and the judges' placements of incidents in the category scheme.

The high figures representing the independent judges agreement reveal that these categories can be used by other people to categorize incidents in a consistent, reliable way. Percentage agreement for the first rater was 90%. Four incidents were incorrectly placed in the categories, but after discussion with this rater, it was understood and agreed upon by both rater and researcher that the incidents belonged in the pre-formed categories based on the action involved in each incident. Further examination of the four misplaced incidents revealed that the judge had been focussing on the key words that described the incident. This diminished the analysis of the meaning of the entire incident. In addition, this

inconsistency can be attributed to haste and does not warrant the modification of categories.

Percentage agreement for the second rater was 98%. One incident was placed in another category, and after focussing on the action involved in the incident, the independent rater agreed that it should go in the appropriately designated category.

Table 2. Reliability of Category Schemes

Judges	Percentage agreement
Judge #1	90%
Judge #2	98%
Average agreement	94%

Comprehensiveness of Categories

Andersson & Nilsson (1964) report that an important approach to assessing the comprehensiveness of the category scheme is to ascertain whether the category scheme is reasonably complete. One such test to check for comprehensiveness or completeness in the current study involves withholding approximately 10% of the incidents or 22 incidents in this investigation, until the categories had been formed. Upon completion of category formation, these incidents were analyzed and classified. This tests whether the incidents can be easily placed in the existing category system. If incidents cannot be placed in the categories, then new

categories need to be formed. If the incidents can be placed in the existing categories, this suggests that the category system is comprehensive, considering these 10% of incidents. In the current study, all 22 incidents could be easily placed in the category scheme. Had there been difficulties where incidents did not belong within the category description, it would have been necessary to form new categories and possibly conduct additional interviews.

Participation Rate for Categories

Another method to determine if a category is well-founded is to analyze the level of agreement of participants in the study reporting similar incidents. In order to form a category, the researcher must identify a significant similarity in a group of incidents as they are reported by different people. If only one person or a few persons report a category of event, then it might be dismissed. One person might have distorted an event, for example. On the other hand, when many independent people report the same kind of event, the possibility of distortion is less.

Agreement among independent persons reporting the event is one criterion for the objectivity of the event. Agreement is assessed by the participation rates in each category, which is the number of participants reporting a category of event divided by the total number of participants. (See Table 1) The categories with the highest participation rates are thus those with the highest level of agreement. Participation rates in this study ranged from 9% (joining organized religion) to 82% (Ceremonial activities). Other categories with a participation rate of 50% or higher

include: Establishing a connection with nature, Elder's teachings/Guidance, Prayer, Family connection, and Changing thinking.

In the current study, the participation rate for some of the categories is quite low. Categories with low participation rates are Spiritual practices and joining organized religion, both with 9% participation rate. Upon re-examination of these incidents to see if they could be placed in other categories, it was decided that these categories should be maintained as they describe the events with clarity and expressiveness. Although many participants spoke at length regarding the inter-relatedness of spirituality and culture, they reported that it was sometimes very difficult to abstract out specific incidents of spiritual connection.

Expert Commentary

Expert validation provides another test for soundness in this study. This type of analysis places this research into the context of the field by asking experts to provide their opinion on the topic. Experts are asked to comment on how useful these categories would be to them based on their own findings with their own experience. Expert commentary is an important test for soundness because experts have more specific experience in witnessing these events than would the average person. They can provide collaborative evidence and content validity to the results of any study. In the current study, the researcher asked two First Nations' Mental Health care providers who were considered specialists in the area of helping First Nations' people with spiritual healing to comment on the usefulness of these categories to their professional practice.

The researcher contacted the experts via e-mail and described each of the 29 categories. Then the experts were asked to examine and consider the categories themselves and state whether they had used these categories to facilitate spiritual connection. If they had previously used them they were also asked to comment on their usefulness. The results of the expert interviews spoke to the usefulness and validity of the categories to the experts' professional practices. This analysis of the research findings further strengthens the validity of the categories and category scheme.

Support of Related Literature

Verifying agreement with previous research and informed opinion is another approach to check for the soundness of categories. A category may be considered questionable if it is found to disagree with previous research in the area. In the event of such disagreement, the category would be scrutinized due to its contradiction with prior research. Consequently, if a category agrees with prior research, then there is good reason to be more confident in the soundness of the category. If a category of event is novel and neither confirmed or disconfirmed by previous research, it would exist as a possibility, independent of previous research. It would then be subject to verification or disputation by future research. In order to assess agreement, the categories were compared with previous research and informed opinion. This analysis revealed that 26 of the 29 categories are in agreement with previous research and informed opinion. This finding can increase our confidence that these categories are comprehensive. Because no

documentation of 3 categories; alcoholism and drug recovery, supernatural experiences, philosophy of life, could be retrieved, these stand alone as possibilities to be further confirmed or disconfirmed by future research. Relevant research and informed opinion that support the 26 categories are discussed below.

Ceremonial Activities

Traditional ceremonial activities are paramount to facilitate spiritual connection for First Nations' people. Ceremonial activities and rituals are replete with cultural symbols and they allow for connection to the sacred. The symbols used in ceremony help to separate understanding of them from the ordinary toward a higher, sacred purpose (Hammerschlag, 1988). Each component of a Ceremony is a reminder to people of their relationship to the spirit world (France, 1997).

Ceremonial activities such as the Sweat Lodge, involves a ritual cleansing of the body and soul where people must clear themselves and get into the most appropriate state of mind so they can communicate with their higher power. It is a spiritual renewal for the participants. Traditional Ceremonies facilitate purification. In addition, during pipe-smoking, First Nations' people pray that spiritual awareness of the existing Spirit powers will be with them. (Hungry Wolf, 1986)

Traditional Ceremonies strengthen personal association to cultural values such as spirituality (LaFromboise et al., 1990). Ceremonial activities also reinforce the importance of family and community contact and Ceremony is the process that builds relationship into a place where spirits can come together (Hodgson, 1991).

Elder's teachings/ Guidance

The wisdom of the Elder's teachings is highly honoured and respected among First Nations' people as the bridge linking present experience with both past and future (Kirk, 1986). Elder's teachings and stories are replete with life lessons, guidance and advice. Elders play an integral role in the continuance of tribal community by functioning as parents, educator, spiritual guide and community leader (Garrett & Garrett, 1994). In her book, Wisdom of the Elders. Native traditions on the Northwest Coast, (1986), through several short vignettes, Ruth Kirk conveys that in order to live proper, respectable lives, it is important to listen to one's Elders. Elders' knowledge and teachings involve the all-pervasive spiritual quality of life, which others can learn and grow from.

Establishing a connection with nature

This category is important to First Nations' spiritual connection. Plants and animals are part of the spirit world (Locust, 1988) which supports the concept of inter-relatedness and equality of all things and creatures. Because nature is central to Native American worldview, Native people both respect and accommodate nature and all things in it (Callicott, 1982). In summary, Native people believe that the land is something that is part of each person (France, 1996).

Family connection

Family connection is an important one in the community based First Nations' cultures. An intrinsic sense of self-worth is derived from the familial relationship (Garrett & Garrett, 1994). Parental roles are to promote family values by setting limits and standards for the family. These family values help the children learn about life. Parental decision-making and support in Native cultural and spiritual rites of passage include such decisions as sending one's child to an initiation ceremony to become a Spiritual Dancer. Parents generally decide on the appropriate time for the initiation because the initiation is viewed as being spiritual assistance for people in need of help.

Spiritual beliefs

Spiritual beliefs are based on the harmony arising from one's connection to all parts of the Universe, where everything has a value and a purpose (Garrett & Garrett, 1994). Belief systems of Native Americans do not separate the sacred from the secular aspects of life (Locust, 1988). West (1995) explains that First Nations' spiritual beliefs are a way of life, they are not contained within the structure of an institution whose existence is defined for the purpose of maintaining spirituality. Traditional American Indians believe that mental health is much more spiritual and holistic than western psychology would suggest. (Locust, 1988) Spiritual being calls for people to seek their place in the universe, satisfying the wishes of the Creator and living a good life. Everyone is created with a specific purpose to realize and they should not have the power to interfere or impose on others the best path to

follow (Garrett & Garrett, 1994). Spirituality or holiness is understood as the essence of healing for Native people, and it means to strive for wholeness in spirit and bring it to our bodies, our families, our communities, and our world (France, 1997).

Relationship to the Creator/Gratitude to the Creator

Revering the Creator, Great Spirit or God and ones' relationship to this entity is important to First Nations' spiritual connection. This relationship to God is maintained through stories, prayers and ceremonies (Schultz & Tinker, 1996). The name of the Creator or Great Spirit is seldom spoken (Locust, 1988). This category involves the desire to continually strengthen one's relationship with the Creator by maintaining one's faith and doing what the Creator expects of her/him. For First Nations' people, everything they do is done with the acknowledgment of the goodness of the Creator and of all things created (Schultz & Tinker, 1996). First Nations' people believe that if something is received or taken away it must also be given back (Epes Brown, 1989). Showing gratitude to the Creator may involve making offerings to or asking permission of the Creator in acknowledgment of the tree, plant or animal received or taken from the Earth (Treat, 1996). Sun Bear (cited in McFadden, 1991) a very well known and highly respected Native American man, explains:

The Earth is an intelligent living being. It has natural intelligence in itself, and is able to talk to us, to communicate with us, to guide us in what we do-if we pray and open up to it and come into harmony with it...That's how we keep balance, we

go and ask permission of the Earth... This is what we are supposed to do as keepers and protectors of the Earth-to ask permission.

Residential School

This category includes the losses of self-esteem, culture, language, and spirituality incurred by First Nations' people who experienced Residential School (Haig-Brown, 1988). For the majority of First Nations' people who have experienced Residential School, the impact has been devastating and long-lasting; with many inter-generational effects. Residential Schools were thought to be essential because they were supposed to teach First Nations' people to become civilized and learn the appropriate skills in order to exist in the rapidly changing society that was simultaneously displacing and eliminating these indigenous cultures (Haig-Brown, 1988). One outcome of the Residential Schools was that spirituality was interpreted as having nothing to do with organized religion although the schools were Church-run and government sanctioned.

Seeking Help

Seeking help / support from others is well documented in the literature, Lafromboise et al. (1990) report that when problems arise, an individual needs to be drawn out of isolation and integrated back into the social life of the group. In this manner, dealing with problematic issues becomes more manageable because support from family members, friends, resources and community enables one to feel connected to others. Support Groups such as Alcoholic's Anonymous (AA) or First

Nations' Healing Circles can help people to deal with their own personal issues when they cannot help themselves. For individuals who have given up controlling their behaviour to an addiction or some other inner compulsion, a support group can restore their own personal autonomy. People learn that they are not alone in their suffering (Stewart, 1993). First Nations' individuals may seek help from community members or relatives who can help them to assert their traditional value system and define their problem within the context of their social network (LaFromboise et al. 1990).

Dreams

This category involves important spiritual messages received through dreams. For First Nations' people, dreams are both connected to and a reflection of their spirituality (Carlson, 1995). Native people place great importance on communication with the unconscious. The literature states that people can enter into a deeper connection with the Creator if they try to find the meaning and truth of their dreams (Darou, 1987). As a result, The Creator may send the person more and better dreams. Callicott (1982) states that in dreams, the spirits of things may be directly encountered and could become powerful allies to the dreamer.

Learning from a Role Model

Kirk (1986) reports that an Elder once taught her, "Your best teaching is by example." Role modelling is seen as an important theme in the establishment of a cross cultural counselling framework. Mak (1996) reports that role modelling is

important in cross-cultural counselling because modelling involves observational or vicarious learning. A role model is an example of someone whose behaviour is exemplary. For First Nations' people, being or finding cultural role models provides a great challenge because Native people need to know what they want, have goals, have a well-developed cultural identity, and have balance in the four areas of the Medicine Wheel: physical, intellectual, spiritual and emotional (Point, 1993).

Spiritual practices

Hungry Wolf (1983) encourages spiritual practices or rituals that are allowed to develop naturally. These help to clear one's mind of all but spiritual thoughts. In this category, spiritual practices are unique to the individual and are not directly related to cultural traditions or ceremonies.

Self awareness/Self acceptance

This category involves becoming more aware of oneself and accepting oneself in order to be able to exert more control over one's life and environment. Self-awareness often involves a sense of personal empowerment where people feel a greater confidence with which to take control of their own lives (LaFromboise et al. 1990).

Receiving your name

Receiving one's name is significant in one's spiritual connection because it passes on family history and the attributes of the person holding that name. Name

giving connects a person to family and community and thus to the Creator. At birth, parents might ask a respected person in the community to give their baby a name that is passed on within the family or its relevance might be in relation to significant occurrences at the time of the birth (Hungry Wolf, 1983). Also, a parent or another person might choose a name or event from her/his own past in order to honour the child. A person's name might change according to significant actions, behaviours or events in that person's life.

The significance of receiving one's name is outlined in Seguin (1986b):

In fact, the significant "members" of the lineage are not particular individuals, but the "persons" of the ranked names. Individuals are required to carry the names, but the structure of the lineage is the structure of the names. From this perspective individuals are indeed contained "in" a name.

Cultural Preservation/ Reclamation

The preservation, maintenance and reclamation of the First Nations' collective culture is an important issue because for several generations, the majority culture has attempted to separate First Nations' people from their culture and their traditions. Concerted effort is directed toward recovering and reclaiming the fundamental insights of Native spirituality (Hodgson & Kothare, 1990). Another term for this reclamation is "retraditionalization" (LaFromboise et al. 1990) where cultural beliefs, customs and rituals are considered as a means to overcoming problems and a step toward self-determination.

Obviously, the effect of cultural repression has been devastating to cultural identity, knowledge and pride (Hodgson, 1991). The literature contains accounts of adults who can remember holding secret potlatches (Hodgson, 1991) or watching the boats pull up to the shore and call village members individually to the boat so they could receive their potlatch gifts. This gift-giving was covertly accomplished in the absence of social gatherings, singing and dancing. (Kirk, 1986)

Sacred Object

Sacred objects are generally utilized in assisting in a person's spiritualism. For example, an eagle feather, rattle or sacred bundle may be used in a traditional ceremony to connect people to the Creator. An eagle feather may be considered a sacred object because eagles have very powerful energy and they fly high and close to the Creator (Locust, 1988; Lobo & Talbot, 1997). A sacred object usually symbolizes parts of a person's spiritual journey through life (Bopp et al., 1988).

First Nations' Traditional Beliefs

This category involves the awareness and maintenance of traditional beliefs. Anderson (1993) reports that personal and cultural identities are both important in establishing a culturally sensitive and relevant framework for First Nations' people. Maintaining traditional beliefs for First Nations' cultures is especially important as it facilitates one's connection to culture that involves the expression of spiritual beliefs. Traditional First Nations' beliefs include balance and interconnectedness.

Establishing Cultural connection

This category involves becoming more aware and connected to the First Nations' cultures. This means connecting with other First Nations' people, cultural concepts and appreciating First Nations' cultural values. Lafromboise et al. (1990) state that the role of therapy in traditional American Indian society has been to reaffirm cultural values and to consider the individual in the context of the community.

Hodgson & Kothare (1990) report that the survival of First Nations' identity depends on the awareness of cultural traditions and traditional languages. Consequently, this is inextricably related to the recovery of Native spirituality.

Speaking your own traditional language

For First Nations' people, speaking a traditional First Nations' language is important in the maintenance of culture as well spiritual connection. At present, Native people are actively restoring and preserving their languages (Haig-Brown, 1988). Speaking one's traditional language reinforces the transmission and expression of the culture. In addition, the loss of First Nations' traditional languages is experienced as the loss of traditional longhouse traditions and as a consequence an important dimension of Native spirituality is lost (Hodgson & Kothare, 1990).

Visions

The profound spiritual experience sought by those who follow traditional belief... is the Vision Experience (Hungry Wolf, 1983 p. 11)

Visions are powerful experiences in spiritual connection. Visions may embody a spiritual element of Nature, for example a Vision may appear as a bird, an animal, a stone or a star (Hungry Wolf, 1983). Visions can be experienced at any time, during ceremonial activities such as singing, dancing or pipe-smoking or during almost any kind of experience. Vision may be characterized as a spiritual communication within the bounds of experience of this world or beyond it. Visions reveal more of the Great Spirit or Creator directly to the individual (Treat, 1996).

Establishing Social Connection

Establishing social connection involves going outside of ones' own personal realm and facilitating spiritual connection by getting socially involved (McCormick, 1995). It is important to understand a First Nations' individual in her/his personal as well as social, community context (LaFromboise et al.,1990).

Although First Nations' people are very much connected to community and culture, spiritual connection is a very personal relationship between one's self, and Higher power/ Creator. For example, although ceremonies involve several people at any given time, and although there is social support, the impact of the ceremony on one's spirituality is very personal and independent of the social connection with others participating in the ceremony. This category involves a social connection

such as friendships with others, it does not involve getting help or seeking help from others.

Joining Organized Religion

This category involves the decision to become a part of an organized religion. For example, the literature describes Native-Christians as integrating their beliefs of the Creator and the Christian God rather than accepting only the reality of the existence of two distinct truths in their spiritual journey (Treat, 1996). In light of the fragmentation of Native society, organized Churches may provide First Nations' people with an additional social network within which they can worship. (Hodgson & Kothare, 1990).

Creative Activity

This category involves creativity encompassing poetry writing and artistic expression. Seguin (1986a) states that for First Nations' people, creative and artistic traditions are maintained to create lavish events and surroundings where setting, costume, oral literature, drama, song, and dance all express the profound spirituality that pervades all First Nations' cultures.

Prayer

This category is important in First Nations' spiritual connection because prayer allows a person to communicate directly with the Creator or Great Spirit. Sun Bear (cited in McFadden, 1991) describes prayer as the centering of thought in a

respectful way which gives energy back to the plants, the waters and the animals. Joe Rock Boy, a Dakota traditionalist states that offering prayers is his gift to the Creator. Boy feels that he must be "right" with his Creator in order to pray (Treat, 1996). Prayers can also include praying to animals or plants for sacrificing their worldly bodies for food.

Prayers have been passed down from Elders through oral tradition. For First Nations' people, prayer comes from the heart of the one who prays (Hascall, 1996). The content of Native prayer encompasses the "fullness of heart" of Native Ancestors as well as the individual, village, season, and occasion during which the prayer is offered.

Communal prayer is not a First Nations' custom, often prayer through the Native song of an individual or group of singers is employed (Hascall, 1996). Prayers may be offered through drumming and chanting where the drummers and chanters offer their prayers to the Creator on behalf of the people.

Helping others

This category is documented in McCormick (1995), where helping others is described as any form of helping another person. Helping others or engaging in community service is a traditional value among many First Nations' cultures and is interpreted as a healthy activity. Helping others yields a feeling of personal empowerment (McCormick, 1995). Helping others includes volunteering to guide others in traditional and spiritual ceremonies.

For First Nations' people in this study, the need to help others and connect with their community is important after coming to terms with their own pain. This situation is illustrated in Carlson (1995) where it is understood and accepted that not everyone can go through the healing process alone. People need support, compassion, and help from others who are able and willing to help them heal.

Changing Thinking

This category refers to the cognitive and attitudinal shift involved in understanding issues differently. In her revealing book about the Residential School experience, Furniss (1995) states that for First Nations' people, the first step to spiritual, emotional, and intellectual recovery is becoming aware of the problem. The problem she refers to is the morally devastating manner with which mainstream culture treated First Nations' people. First Nations' people have experienced suicide, alcoholism, low self-esteem as a people, sexual abuse, loss of language and culture, family breakdown, and a myriad of other social problems that can be traced directly back to the treatment of First Nations' people in the Residential Schools (Furniss, 1995).

Furniss encourages First Nations' people to access ways of reversing the damage that has been done. This call is for a change of thinking that includes strengthening of the family bond, reviving traditions and ceremonies, and re-programming of the First Nations' pervasive negative mindset to believe in themselves again. This means that First Nations' people could benefit greatly from mending spirits that were broken by the Government and the Residential Schools

(Carlson, 1995). This spiritual healing involves spiritual, emotional and intellectual strength building as well as finding the strength and courage needed to stop the cycle of low self-esteem, self-hatred, and self-destruction.

Teachings/Guidance

For First Nations' people, legends reveal a deep sense of spiritual connection and connection to the Creator (Carlson, 1995). Legends in the form of guidance and teachings are considered to be lessons by which to live a good life. Guidance comes from community, family, academic education and lifelong learning.

Chapter V: Discussion

Summary of Results

Through interviews with 11 participants, 212 critical incidents were elicited reporting what facilitates spiritual connectedness for First Nations' people of British Columbia. The 212 critical incidents were placed into 29 categories that were found to be reasonably reliable. These categories are: ceremonial activities, Elder's teachings/guidance, establishing a connection with nature, prayer, family connection, changing thinking, spiritual beliefs, supernatural experiences, residential school, helping others, seeking help, dreams, role model, spiritual practices, self awareness/self acceptance, receiving your name, cultural preservation/ reclamation, sacred object, First Nations' traditional beliefs, alcoholism and drug recovery, visions, establishing social connection, creative activity, philosophy of life, joining organized religion, teachings/ guidance, establishing cultural connection/cultural awareness, relationship/gratitude to the Creator, speaking a traditional First Nations' language.

Limitations

A number of factors limit this investigation. The fact that the researcher interviewed First Nations' people living in British Columbia could be described as a limitation, however, it was known from the outset that this was an exploratory investigation. The current study endeavored to provide only an initial set of categories that describe spiritual connection for members of First Nations' living in British Columbia. The current study does not espouse a comprehensive description

of effective and ineffective approaches to spiritual connection for all First Nations' people of British Columbia. Further studies are necessary to assess the generalizability of the categories and to begin to use the categories to develop further theory and practice.

Another limitation of the current study is that the critical incidents were self-reported rather than being obtained through observation. Critical incidents obtained through self-report are limited to those events that participants are able to remember during the interview. It is likely that some incidents were not mentioned because they were forgotten by the participant. However, the second or follow-up interview could be considered a delimitation as participants were asked if they had remembered any other incidents since the initial interview.

Another limiting factor of this investigation is that because spiritual connection for First Nations' people is treated with great respect and confidentiality, participants likely recalled spiritually connecting incidents only in part. As many dimensions of spirituality are meant to be interpreted and understood only by the person who experienced the event, participants most likely did not volunteer this type of information.

One other limitation of the current study is that it sought to record spiritually critical events as experienced by First Nations' people of British Columbia, but because the dimension of First Nations' spirituality is sacred, it is not supposed to be recorded. Thus, the very nature of academic research into this content domain is a limitation in and of itself.

Delimitations

Describing one's own spiritual connection can be a healing experience. The majority of research participants were deeply moved during the course of the initial interview. The second interview confirmed that the process of describing critical events surrounding ones' own spiritual connection is experienced as a confirmation of one's own spiritual connectedness. All the participants told me that after the initial interview, they found themselves thinking more about their own spiritual connection or remembering additional significant events. Several participants commented that engaging in discussion about their spiritual connection was a positive experience and it made them feel stronger in their spirituality and in themselves. Some participants said that just thinking about their spiritual connection and the spiritually significant events, reminded them of their inner strength. They were especially reminiscent of their inner resources as well as spiritual nurturance they were able to access in order to overcome the negative times in their lives. For participants, talking about spiritual connection was a validating experience that reinforced their ever evolving and deepening spiritual connection.

In addition to being a spiritually validating experience for the person describing their personal spiritual connection, it may be very helpful for other First Nations' people who hear these stories. As the researcher for this study, I was profoundly moved by the impact of participants' stories of spirituality. The beauty, humility and grace with which the participants spoke about their strength and courage to attain and maintain spiritual connection inspired me.

Descriptions of mobilizing personal and cultural resources are important in the promotion of First Nations' spiritual connection. Moreover, stories involving personal, family, community and cultural resources are important and relevant to First Nations' people. These stories of balancing one's life in spiritual connection through such activities as; ceremonial activities, Elder's teachings, and connecting with nature are just some of the many effective spiritually healing strategies First Nations' people possess.

I am in wholehearted agreement with McCormick (1995) who states:

It is important for First Nations' and others to hear these stories so that the listener can witness and acknowledge the credibility and effectiveness of these ways of healing. It is particularly important for health professionals to hear these stories from First Nations' clients both for the value derived to the professional and client from the content of the stories and the value derived in the process of telling them.

Implications for Theory

The results of this study both confirm and extend research relating to what helps First Nations' people facilitate spiritual connectedness as described in the review of the literature. The most important implication is that it provides an empirical basis for what has generally been informed opinion by researchers as well as cultural experts. Although academics have emphasized several dimensions thought to be involved with what facilitates spiritual connection for First Nations'

people, there has been a dearth of research undertaken in this area. Dimensions thought to be involved in First Nations' spiritual connection include: knowledge of First Nations' culture, cultural beliefs, traditions, language, and ceremonies, reclaiming the First Nations' culture, interrelatedness, acknowledging the importance of nature, family connection, the importance of the relationship to the Creator, obtaining help from others as well as helping others, spirituality, the importance of dreams, creative activity, learning from role models, self awareness, joining organized religion, changing consistent thought patterns, the experience of Residential School, and adopting spiritual practices. These dimensions were empirically supported in this research by the following categories: ceremonial activities, Elder's teachings/guidance, establishing a connection with nature, prayer, family connection, changing thinking, spiritual beliefs, residential school, helping others, seeking help, dreams, role model, spiritual practices, self awareness/self acceptance, receiving your name, cultural preservation/ reclamation, sacred object, First Nations' traditional beliefs, visions, establishing social connection, creative activity, joining organized religion, teachings/ guidance, cultural connection/cultural awareness, relationship to the Creator, speaking a traditional First Nations' language.

This research has exceeded the 26 existing categories by providing three new categories for the facilitation of spiritual connection. These categories are alcoholism and drug recovery, supernatural experiences, and philosophy of life. All 29 categories thus represent ways to help facilitate spiritual connection for First Nations' people. This study speaks to the general criticism of cross-cultural

counselling research, and particularly that of First Nations' counselling research, because it provides empirical data. Much of the research in these areas is based on speculation with very little empirical data to substantiate research claims (Brislin, Cushner, Cherrie, &Yong,1986; Dauphinais et al.,1981).

A primary concern in cross-cultural research and counselling is that different cultures have a unique way of interpreting life. This calls for a concerted effort on the part of mainstream mental health care providers in order to learn about the basic worldview of the First Nations' client. It should be noted that although worldview is a seemingly universal concept in First Nations' cultures, it is not the same for every individual and it is the individual client's worldview that we must maintain as our focus.

A lack of knowledge of First Nations' beliefs and worldview can lead to incorrect assumptions concerning the presenting problem and the strategy chosen to solve the problem (Brislin et al., 1986). The current study suggests that for First Nations' people, there is value in encouraging and mobilizing the belief systems of participants as well as their personal resources to facilitate spiritual connection.

The findings of this research support the notion that the mainstream approach in offering Mental Health Services to First Nations' people is an incomplete resource for this population. Although this research does not suggest that mainstream approaches to mental health care provision for First Nations' should be dismissed, it does however, recommend the integration of some relevant and sensitive mainstream approaches with First Nations' approaches to spiritual connection. Specifically, First Nations' approaches to spiritual connection would be

effectively incorporated into a healing program if they were understood as the framework within which some mainstream approaches could be applied to assist and support the wholistic First Nations' philosophy of spiritual connection, life, and healing.

Mainstream approaches such as existential counselling and cognitive therapy might be very useful in application with First Nations' culturally sensitive and relevant approaches to spiritual growth. However, mainstream counselling theories taken on their own, like cognitive therapy, behaviour therapy, or a Rogerian approach are only partially useful as they only address one facet of a person's existence. Mainstream approaches to facilitating spiritual connection may be useful and relevant in specific areas within the larger framework of First Nations' spiritual connection. Thus, the current study advocates the restructuring of Mental Health Care Services provided to First Nations' people. Services provided should be culturally endorsed, useful and applied within a relevant framework which has been established within First Nations' cultures. Culturally sensitive mainstream counselling approaches should be incorporated when appropriate. This would ideally be an empowering experience of self-determination for First Nations' people within the realm of First Nations' Mental Health Services.

This research reveals that spiritual connection for First Nations' people is a culturally embedded construct which permeates the balance of the four areas that make up a person: intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and physical. The very essence of spiritual connection gives rise to each of these four areas and is realized in each

of the balance of these four areas. First Nations' spiritual connection is not confined to any one dimension of a person's character.

Mainstream counselling approaches, focussing on one dimension of a person may be considered inadequate. For example, counselling approaches may be feeling-focussed, or the main focus might be changing one's thoughts; these types of mainstream approaches may be experienced by First Nations' people as those that treat only certain parts of the person. They may feel that the counselling process has not understood or valued them as whole, multi-dimensional individuals. The result could be an invalidating experience for the First Nations' client. In addition, First Nations' people generally consider spiritual connection to be a very personal concept, involving one's relationship to their her/his higher power, the Creator and creation. For some First Nations' people, Native spirituality is not to be shared outside of their culture. Thus, mainstream counselling approaches that focus directly on spirituality, independent of family, community and culture, may be very inappropriate.

For mainstream mental health care providers, a major challenge arises in respecting the First Nations' cultural expectation to maintain privacy around spiritual connection and yet understand that spirituality is central to First Nations' people's maintenance of balance in life. Mainstream counselling approaches need to be flexible and open enough to maintain cultural sensitivity toward the concept of Native spirituality and employ culturally sensitive and appropriate metaphors and stories through which to communicate to First Nations' clients. Because mainstream counselling approaches tend to focus directly on the problematic issues, there is

great need to use other approaches which are less direct and less problem-focussed and still culturally sensitive, relevant and helpful.

Another issue for First Nations' clients is expectations of counselling. For example, it is the focus on interconnectedness with one's family, community, culture and environment that is interpreted as helpful by First Nations' clients, while mainstream counselling approaches generally encourage autonomy and individuation as desired outcomes of counselling. For First Nations' people, connection with family, community, culture, nature and spirituality are evidently important to effective healing.

With respect to spirituality, First Nations' beliefs involve equality among all things created by the Creator. So, humans are equal in relation to animals, plants, and stones and humans must strive for harmony, balance, and respect in all relationships. First Nations' people are cognizant of the potential existence of spiritual connection in any and all relationships. In addition, spiritual connection involves the balance between the four dimensions of a person: intellectual, emotional, physical and spiritual.

The all-encompassing interpretation of Native spirituality opposes the Christian rubric that humans have been given dominion over all other living creatures and inanimate objects. Thus, mainstream counselling approaches whose theories originate from many Christian principles, do not speak to the fundamental interconnectedness involved in First Nations' spirituality. First Nations' healing

requires that an individual transcend the self or ego while mainstream counselling approaches strive to strengthen the ego.

Implications for Practice

The results of the current study indicate two integral implications for practice. First, this investigation presents a resource guide of what facilitates spiritual connection for First Nations' people. This resource guide describes categories of spiritual connection, which are presented as the specific events that illustrate how individuals experience spiritual connection. This resource guide of spiritually critical events did not exist before this investigation was carried out and thus practitioners in their practice of facilitating spiritual connection can now use it. This practical resource guide has implications for counselling, counsellor training, program development and community-based initiatives.

Second, the resource guide of spiritual connection presented in this study reveals a myriad of spiritually based resources which currently exist for First Nations' people. This finding has the potential to significantly change First Nations' people's view of Mental Health Care Services offered to them. This study could also potentially change the way mental health care providers representing mainstream culture interpret the nature of services as well as the actual delivery of services to First Nations' people.

Findings from this research could be used by counsellors to develop both culturally sensitive and relevant techniques and specific interventions to help First Nations' clients. Counsellors who are unfamiliar with First Nations' cultures would

be most helpful to their First Nations' clients by referring them to the appropriate mental health resources. Those counsellors possessing more knowledge about their First Nations' clients and their spirituality might make suggestions based on the 29 categories. Some suggestions to their clients might include: listening to Elder's stories, attending First Nations' traditional ceremonies such as a Sweat Lodge or longhouse ceremony, or taking a walk in the forest to appreciate and connect with nature. All 29 categories from this study would provide areas in which counsellors could gain knowledge to help facilitate spiritual connection for their First Nations' clients. Additional applications of these 29 categories could involve sensitizing counsellors to pertinent issues related to First Nations' spiritual connection and assessing counsellor effectiveness in working with First Nations' clients.

Training programs for First Nations' and non-First Nations' counsellors could incorporate these 29 categories of what helps and what hinders First Nations' spiritual connection into their curriculum. It is of great importance that counsellors-in-training come to understand and appreciate the interconnectedness involved in Native spirituality. Trainees can then acquire a greater appreciation for the importance of learning about culturally relevant issues and how to apply them in practice and theory. The incorporation of the categorical map from this investigation might yield learning opportunities for counsellors-in-training to receive instruction in how to assist or encourage clients to attend healing ceremonies, reconnect with culture, traditions, and community, or possibly learn a First Nations' language.

The 29 categories of spiritual connection revealed by this investigation could be the framework for an experiential First Nations' healing program which would use

each of the 29 categories as learning modules to facilitate spiritual connection. Based on individual needs and preferences, the program could provide participants with knowledge, experiential opportunities, and practice of spiritually significant behaviours, ceremonies and traditional customs and beliefs. A specific example of a healing program that could incorporate the 29 categories for the facilitation of spiritual connection is in the area of alcohol and drug dependency rehabilitation. The deleterious effects of drug and alcohol abuse have affected several participants in the current study. Participants revealed information pertaining to the importance of spiritual connection for drug and alcohol recovery. These categories could catalyze the mobilization of spiritual and cultural resources for First Nations' people struggling with dependency issues. The concept of spiritual connection could be the foundation of a culturally sensitive and spiritually healing drug and alcohol rehabilitation program.

This investigation yielded valuable information that can be acted upon at the community level. The 29 categories could be incorporated into First Nations' community-based activities and organizations. Outcomes of this might include encouraging a greater sense of spiritual connection, emphasizing the importance of the Elder's and parental wisdom, or beginning to hold regular traditional ceremonies in the community. Community leaders could encourage community members to engage in various activities such as organized groups or individual activities involved in the 29 categories so that community members maintain their spiritual connection, and in turn a family, community and cultural connection. The implementation of such activities and resources would strengthen the collective

community by establishing common goals for spiritual connection and provide community initiated access to resources. This retraditionalization of cultural resources would be beneficial for First Nations' communities as well as those First Nations' people living in urban centres as a way to connect to spirituality, community and culture.

In addition, for Urban Natives living away from Native Communities, the 29 categories for the facilitation of spiritual connection could be very useful to encourage spiritual and cultural connection. Because the categories involve many spiritually based, cultural activities, Urban Natives can re-connect with Native spirituality in several dimensions. For example, these 29 categories could be incorporated into such activities as Native Healing Circles and Youth Groups held at local Native Friendship Centres.

The 29 categories for spiritual connection are also useful in the Education system, wherein psychoeducational and support groups that are offered to First Nations' youth could incorporate issues of spirituality. Because facilitating First Nations' spiritual connection is multi-faceted, school-age children and adolescents could benefit by strengthening their spiritual and cultural identity. Incorporating groups that mobilize spiritual and cultural resources for First Nations' youth could be a measure taken in the prevention of potential depression, suicidality and drug and alcohol abuse among First Nations' youth.

The findings from the current study also have important implications to family counselling services for First Nations' families. For example, with respect to cross-cultural marriages or committed relationships that involve members of First Nations'

cultures and non-First Nations' cultures, the 29 categories regarding spiritual connection could be very useful. The categories could be incorporated in Couple's counselling in order to understand different worldviews and how they impact spiritual connection for the couple. This could ameliorate empathy and respect for each other, and yield greater understanding of core beliefs for each person. Also, understanding spiritual connection could have a positive impact on child-rearing issues and challenges. Native parents could incorporate the 29 categories in teaching their children the various ways to facilitate spiritual connection. For First Nations' youth, accessing these spiritual resources could result in increased self esteem and self-confidence, as well as encourage a greater sense of cultural pride.

Another implication for counselling First Nations' families is that the 29 categories generated from the current study could be the focus of intergenerational counselling groups for First Nations' families. This could serve to increase the communication and passing on of spiritually significant information from Elders to children.

Finally, these 29 categories could be helpful for Non-Native adoptive parents of Native children as a way for parents and children together, to learn about the importance of the categories in developing a culturally based spiritual connection. Then, the adopted child will have knowledge and appreciation of First Nations' culture and spirituality, about which she or he can take pride in having such a rich cultural and spiritual heritage.

In addition, organized Churches who minister to First Nations' members might be able to incorporate these 29 categories into their resources for spiritual

connection, as a way of respecting and honouring the innumerable First Nations' resources within the structure of the religion being practiced. Also, for those Native Christians who strive for balance between Christian beliefs and Native spiritual expression and culture, the findings from the current study could be integrated into their Christian worship.

Implications for Further Research

Although First Nations' spiritual connection often occurs in the presence of others during ceremonies or Elder's teachings, it is ultimately a very personal journey involving the relationship to one's higher power, and to the Creator. Further research into what actually happens when someone experiences spiritual connection would be useful for First Nations' people who are seeking spiritual connection and also for people from the mainstream. This would be helpful to more fully understand this construct from a First Nations' perspective. The fact that spiritual connection encompasses the interconnectedness of the plethora of previously mentioned relationships for First Nations' people, the myriad ways in which members of other First Nations' facilitate spiritual connection, needs to be further explored and applied to broader theory to see how it applies to other cultures.

Because this research was largely exploratory, additional research needs to be conducted to see if these 29 categories need to be refined or modified in some way in order to be effectively used in programs. This research could be replicated

by contacting members of single First Nations to see how spirituality is connected to its unique culture.

Future research could incorporate the 29 categories into a questionnaire format and distribute the questionnaire to different First Nations' Bands, other First Nations in British Columbia, and distribute it to other First Nations' all across Canada. Then research literature would be informed about a much larger number of First Nations' people who could determine if these categories are helpful in their spiritual connection. Also, future research might attempt to determine if the facilitation of spiritual connection changes with age, gender, life experience, and geographic location. It would be very interesting to determine if a person's level of acculturation influences what helps and what hinders spiritual connection for First Nations' people. Also, because Elder's teachings figured so prominently in the current study, further research could explore what facilitates spiritual connection for Native Elders. Further research could involve First Nations' people who belong to Native Churches or who are Christians to determine if the facilitation of spiritual connection differs for them than for non-Christian First Nations' people. In addition, research could be conducted to see whether Native Indian Churches find the 29 categories for the facilitation of spiritual connection useful and relevant to their ministries.

Finally, because several participants in the current study referred to overcoming suicidal ideation, alcohol and drug dependency, low self esteem, and depression, further research could be done to assess the impact of spiritual connection on these issues. The 29 categories from the current study could be

incorporated into treatment programs to see if they are considered important themes for First Nations' people who present with these issues.

Summary

This investigation explored the facilitation of spiritual connection for First Nations' people living in the province of British Columbia. The purpose of the investigation was to develop a reasonably comprehensive scheme of categories that would communicate through a First Nations' voice, what helps and what hinders spiritual connection.

The research method involved interviews with First Nations' people who were able to observe and articulate what facilitated their spiritual connection. The Critical Incident Technique (Flanagan, 1954) was used to elicit 212 incidents from 11 participants. Twenty-nine categories emerged from an analysis of the incidents reported. Several procedures were utilized to examine soundness and trustworthiness of the categories. The results indicate that healing can be facilitated in the following ways: knowledge of and participation in ceremonial activities, Elder's teachings/guidance, establishing a connection with nature, prayer, family connection, changing thinking, spiritual beliefs, supernatural experiences, residential school, helping others, seeking help, dreams, role model, spiritual practices, self awareness/self acceptance, receiving your name, cultural preservation/ reclamation, sacred object, First Nations' traditional beliefs, alcoholism and drug recovery, visions, establishing social connection, creative activity, philosophy of life, joining organized religion, teachings/ guidance, establishing cultural connection/cultural

awareness, relationship/gratitude to the Creator, and speaking a traditional First Nations' language.

The findings of this study contribute to the field of counselling psychology by providing a reasonably comprehensive scheme of categories and themes that describe through a First Nations' voice, of what facilitates spiritual connection. This study suggests positive developments in First Nations' spiritual connection that have implications for both research and practice.

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Appendix A

Letter to Research Participants

Researcher Background

Informed Consent

Poster

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Dear Participant:

This research is being conducted as one of the requirements for Ada Christopher for the Master's degree in Counselling Psychology. The research is to determine what helps and what hinders BC First Nations people get spiritually connected. It is my hope that this study will provide an invaluable resource to mental health care providers regarding culturally sensitive and relevant counselling approaches with respect to BC First Nations Cultures.

Participants will be asked the questions, "Think back to a time in your life when you felt a new sense of spiritual connection or a renewed sense of spiritual connection. What helped the process of becoming spiritually connected? What were the events involved in the spiritual connection, what were your behaviours and what was the outcome?"

Procedures

The study consists of two interviews. The first one is a 60 minute interview that is an introduction to the purpose and formalities of the study. During this time, participants will be asked to recall and identify factors that helped the process of spiritual connection. The second interview will be approximately 30 minutes long and will consist of collaborative checking and validating the categories discovered by the researcher. Interviews will be tape-recorded, transcribed and given a code number to ensure confidentiality. Upon completion of this study these cassette tapes will be erased. Your total time commitment will be 90 minutes within a three month period.

Potential benefits

No direct risks or benefits are anticipated from this research. However, through the interview you may become aware of specific processes that have facilitated or hindered your ability to get spiritually connected.

Monetary compensation

Each participant will receive a \$15.00 honorarium for participation in this study.

RESEARCHER'S BACKGROUND

Dear Participant:

My name is Ada Christopher and I am investigating the facilitation of spiritual connection among the First Nations' People of British Columbia. This research is part of my Master's work in Counselling Psychology at the University of British Columbia. It is a study that will begin to establish some criteria regarding spiritual connection in order to provide culturally sensitive and relevant counselling approaches for First Nations' People of British Columbia.

Sincerely,

Ada Christopher

Confidentiality

Any information resulting from this research will be kept strictly confidential. Upon signing the informed consent you will be given a code number to ensure the maintenance of confidentiality. Participants will not be identified by the use of names or initials. Tapes and transcripts will be kept in a locked filing cabinet and secret passwords will be utilized for computer files. Data will be available to members of the thesis committee only.

If you have any questions or concerns at any time during this study, you may contact Dr. Rod McCormick or Ada Christopher at the numbers listed above. You may also telephone Dr. R. D. Spratley, Director, Office of Research Services, at 822-8598 if you have any concerns about your treatment or rights as a research participant. You will be informed of any significant information that may concern you.

I have read the above information and I have had an opportunity to ask questions to help me understand what my participation would involve. I freely consent to participate in the study and acknowledge receipt of a copy of the consent form.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Witness

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study.

Appendix B

Demographic Questionnaire

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE**PARTICIPANT NUMBER: _____**

- 1. Nation:**
- 2. What is your age?**
- 3. Where did you grow up?**
- 4. What is the highest level of education that you have attained?**
- 5. What is your occupation?**
- 6. Where is your home community?**
- 7. Where do you live now?**