

THE ROLE OF CULTURE IN PARENTING:  
SOME OJIBWAY PARENTS' PERSPECTIVES

by

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## The Role of Culture in Parenting

### Abstract

A child welfare court decision to grant the adoption of two Aboriginal children to non-Aboriginal parents despite the extended family's ability to care for the children and the community's leaders desire to repatriate their citizens raises two key issues that will be addressed in this study. The first key issue examines Ojibway parenting and their responses to common family challenges. The Ojibway culture had and continues to have pre-existing parenting and child development knowledge but it is largely unknown to professionals who provide various services to this population, i.e., judges, social workers, and psychologists. The history and context of Aboriginal families in Canada and the influence of culture in parenting is explored in the literature. The historical pattern, when dealing with Aboriginal families in Canada, is to favour ideas or solutions that can be called "European," or "Western" in origin. This means that Aboriginal ideas or solutions to their family or parenting problems are ignored or devalued. The second key issue is that Aboriginal families, First Nations leaders, and Aboriginal service providers have encountered child welfare court decisions, child welfare policies, and social work practice that rely on the premises of attachment theory. The (over) reliance on attachment theory has meant that Aboriginal children have been removed from their parents and/or their communities when alternative solutions exist. For the above reasons, this study explores the role of Ojibway culture on urban Ojibway parents' perspectives utilizing a Talking Circle format. Ojibway participants' words and the meanings attributed to parenting practices are compared to attachment theory's sensitivity and security constructs. Urban Ojibway parents lean towards the Ojibway culture for information on parenting values, practices, perspectives, ceremonies and customs. Relying on Ojibway parenting

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assumptions and practices that are not supported in an urban environment produces a discontinuity from participant's childhoods and parenting assumptions. Thus, the urban context exerts its influence by creating conditions of parenting that previous generations of Ojibway parents in First Nations communities did not have to consider and solve. The implications for Ojibway parenting perspectives and practices and the consideration of using knowledge developed outside of their culture are considered.

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### List of Abbreviations

IWM	Internal Working Model
RCAP	Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples
SSP	Strange Situation Procedure

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

#### **1.1 Introduction: The invisibility of contemporary Aboriginal parenting knowledge**

The Canadian Government has attempted to assimilate Aboriginal Peoples into mainstream Canadian society and culture. One manifestation of assimilation is that knowledge, developed by the West, is used to inform and explain Aboriginal social and psychological conditions (Battiste, 2002). As a result, the knowledge Aboriginal people have developed over generations has been devalued and ignored (Battiste & Henderson, 2005). This is the case with knowledge on parenting, family, and preferred development of childhood. The problem is that theories of parenting do not incorporate Aboriginal knowledge and, thus, fail to describe and explain components and mechanisms of Aboriginal knowledge.

Aboriginal people instead have been expected to fit into theories developed outside of their culture. This is the result of researchers asserting that their findings are universally applicable, even though, in most cases, Aboriginals have not been directly included in the research. This dilemma does not apply only to Aboriginals. Most family, parenting and child development theories are considered universal and therefore applicable to cultures and their contexts with potential adjustments required. Rogoff (2003) describes circumstances where universal theories that claim general statements about human functioning are being uncritically applied onto a culture or community as an imposed-etic. In this situation, the concepts and processes developed outside the culture are not modified or altered to be consistent with the understanding of the people or their context.

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A recent high-profile court case in Ontario considered whether non-Aboriginal foster parents could adopt two Aboriginal children. Of the two highlighted issues it first focused on the use of a psychological theory developed outside the Aboriginal culture to challenge a First Nation's attempt to care for the children in their home community. Second, it highlighted the lack of Aboriginal parenting knowledge of the professionals who work with or make decisions for Aboriginal families. This lack of knowledge is reflected in the court's decision. Justice Ruth Mesbur stated "there is no evidence before me upon which to conclude that native child-rearing practices are unique in any way" (A.[...] (First Nation) v. Children's Aid Society of Toronto, 2004). Justice Mesbur interpreted the First Nation's attempt to repatriate its two community members as a political/cultural motive (A.[...] (First Nation) v. Children's Aid Society of Toronto, 2004), rather than one based on the First Nation's understanding of the children's psychological or parenting needs. Rather than investigate Aboriginal parenting, the court granted the non-Aboriginal foster parents' requests to adopt each of the children. Unfortunately, Justice Mesbur's decision is consistent with previous court decisions (Carasco, 1986), where attachment theory is used to supersede an Aboriginal parent's or First Nation's attempt to repatriate a child/citizen despite the ability to provide similar care for the child.

Attachment theory, often applied to Aboriginal children and families, has not been researched for its appropriateness to Aboriginal world views or current parenting practices. There have been attempts at cross-cultural examination of components of the theory (Rothbaum, Weisz, Pott, Miyake, & Morelli, 2000; van IJzendoorn & Sagi, 1999) but very few with Aboriginal cultures in Canada (Neckoway, Brownlee, & Castellan,

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2007; Neckoway, Brownlee, Jourdain, & Miller, 2003). Two components are of particular concern. One component considered pivotal and rich in the cross-cultural research literature is maternal sensitivity. The second component is the concept of security: the trait that is instilled within the relationship between the caregiver and the child over a prolonged period of time. An examination of these two components of attachment theory will begin to answer some of the questions of the appropriateness of implementing theories developed outside an Aboriginal culture.

### 1.2 Purpose of the Study

This study explores Anishinabe (Ojibway) parenting by looking at parents' perceptions of what children need and what they desire to instill in their children. Understanding Ojibway parenting practices enables those outside their culture to consider whether the application of two components of attachment theory – sensitivity and security – is consistent with Ojibway perspectives. The underlying question is whether this psychological theory should supersede an Aboriginal parent or First Nation community's attempt to provide alternative care for a child/citizen. Ojibway parenting knowledge have to be known in order to assess whether attachment theory can be generalized to Ojibway parents and their children.

The first part of this research will explore personal, cultural, and societal influences on Ojibway parents and what informs their parenting behaviours. Through open-ended questions, participants will have the opportunity to identify influences, such as: the values they hold, the individuals who have influenced their parenting, and their understanding of the role of Ojibway culture in their lives as parents. The interviews will increase knowledge of Ojibway, and possibly Aboriginal, parenting.

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In the second part of this research, participants were asked questions that allow for a comparison between their views and values versus two central components of attachment theory that are often used to assess Aboriginal parenting practices.

Attachment theorists regard sensitivity as the caregiver's response to a child-initiated signal. Since it is not known whether Ojibway parents interpret the concept of sensitivity in the same way as attachment theorists, indirect and descriptive questions will be asked to elicit their views and experiences in this area. These questions will seek a broader understanding of sensitivity, including whether meeting the child's needs depends on a 'signal' being sent by the child first. This broadening of the concept will allow Ojibway parents to comment freely without the constraints of the theory's definition. As well, the questions will assess whether certain 'signals' are ignored in order to change or create new behaviours: for example, teaching a child to go to sleep without the presence of the caregiver, therefore ignoring the child's cries. There are multiple and various ways of expressing 'sensitivity' as a parent. As a result, participants' responses in this area will be identified and then compared to the definition stated by attachment theory.

A second component of attachment theory, security, will also be explored since it is not known whether the concept, as defined by attachment theorists, is part of the Ojibway parenting strategy. In attachment theory, the concept of security plays a significant role because it reflects the culmination of parenting behaviours. According to attachment theorists, when parents consistently meet the child's needs, the child feels secure in the relationship, and this gives an overall sense of optimism towards life. If a child's needs or signals are not met, the result is insecurity and a pessimistic outlook on the future. Broadly interpreting the idea of security, this study will ask Ojibway parents

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about their long-term goals for their child and what traits they desire to instill. It will also explore whether this is based on the parent-child relationship or on other factors. This allows Aboriginal parents to express their strategies without being restricted by attachment theory's definition. Ojibway parents' responses to the questions in the second half of this study will be juxtaposed with the concepts of sensitivity and security from attachment theory.

Based on the issues of the lack of knowledge of Ojibway parenting and whether attachment theory's concepts of sensitivity and security apply to Ojibway parents, this study is guided by the following five questions:

1. *Who and what has influenced Ojibway parents' perspectives on parenting?*
2. *What are examples of Ojibway parenting?*
3. *What is the significance of the ceremony or ritual with your child?*
4. *What are the important needs of a child before he/she is two years old and how do parents meet these needs?*
5. *What do parents do to prepare their child for adulthood?*

Parents will be interviewed in a Talking Circle format. All data will be transcribed and then analyzed according to purposes of this study. Respondents will be Ojibway parents, both mothers and fathers. Some will be relatively new parents, those with children under five years old. Others will be parents to young adults who are at least 18 years old and living at home. This allows a comparison between those who are just starting out with parenting and those who are completing their active parenting. Younger parents will generally have dreams and high expectations for their children, while those

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parenting young adults can reflect on what has worked and what did not turn out as expected.

In this study, 'Aboriginal Peoples' or 'Aboriginals' will be used in general terms to include First Nations, Inuit, Métis and others who trace their ancestry to the original peoples of North America. When it is suitable to mention a specific Band, tribe, or group, then their title, from the source (i.e. government report or research study), will be used. There are several names used for the Ojibway in the literature, including Ojibwe, Ojibwa, Chippewa, Saulteaux, Saulteurs, Mississauga, Anishinawbe (singular), and Anishinabeg (plural). The Ojibway refer to themselves, in their language, as Anishinabeg. Translated to English it means 'The People'. The word Ojibway will be used throughout this paper for the sake of consistency, unless one of the other names is used in the literature or by the participants. Participants' self-definition as Ojibway and their recommendation of others they consider Ojibway to participate in this study will be used as Ojibway participation in this study.

### 1.3 Culture and Parenting

The assumptions and transmission of culture used in this exploratory study follow the common understanding among the Ojibway (Hand, 2003; Overholt, 1982; Warren, 1984). Cultural understandings and practices surrounding parenting are inherited from parents and the cultural community in which they are raised (Rogoff, 2003). Each new generation of parents initially depends upon the parenting practices that have been developed by their culture. These practices have provided solutions to the challenges parents of previous generations have faced. New circumstances face successive generations of parents where some solutions developed historically are not informative to

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the new conditions. This makes parenting a dynamic enterprise where previous information and strategies coexist with the new ones being developed.

Ojibway people have undergone substantial changes in their culture, including their parenting strategies. Little is known in the academic literature, or in the practice community, about the contemporary and cultural nature of Ojibway parenting. It is important to understand the cultural nature of parenting from the Ojibway point of view. How the parents define their actions and meanings. This understanding can be a basis for evaluating whether theories developed from outside the culture are appropriate to Ojibway parents and what modifications may be required when applied to this cultural group.

### 1.4 Overview of Chapters

*Chapter 2* examines the literature, both historical and contemporary, on Ojibway and Aboriginal parenting in Canada and the United States. The Ojibway nations encompass present day Ontario, Manitoba, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan. A considerable portion of the literature on the Ojibway was developed in the first half of the twentieth century, at a time when many families were being consolidated onto reserves, where traditional, cultural knowledge and practices were still common. Substantial changes have occurred in the sixty to seventy years since there was major empirical research conducted on the Ojibway in Canada. Unfortunately, many early research projects did not take into account the Ojibway point of view when interpreting parental behaviours. Interpreting behaviours without regard to the meanings people assign to them creates misunderstandings (Miles, 1994), including assigning psychopathology when there may be none (Brant & Patterson, 1990).

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Descriptions, assertions, and anecdotal evidence of Aboriginal parenting all indicate the importance of family and extended family in Aboriginal cultures throughout Canada (RCAP, 1996). In most cases, Aboriginal families were not limited to the nuclear family but also included extended family, community, clans, and assortments of social relations. Despite the importance of the family institution in Aboriginal cultures in Canada, there are few who research this area. The absence of contemporary empirical research on Aboriginal families, parenting, and explanations of childhood creates the dependence on theories developed outside of Aboriginal cultures. Within Aboriginal cultures, traditional values, ceremonies, and an assortment of cultural teachings are a basis for knowledge and understanding of parenting. In some instances, these understandings inform policy, clinical interventions, and offer general guidance for those working with Aboriginal parents. These bases of knowledge of the Aboriginal family have not been developed in light of individual Aboriginal cultures throughout Canada or the changing contexts and circumstances for many Aboriginal families.

The literature on two components of attachment theory will be examined for cross-cultural applicability. Caregiver sensitivity is considered a pivotal feature of attachment theory because it explains the infant's motivations, it requires parental responses, and there are consequences for the infant. Several cultural groups have raised questions of the sensitivity construct. One of these questions is the linear process of caregiver sensitivity proposed by attachment theorists, a process that does not reflect parenting practices of several cultural groups. In addition, the assignment of proximity seeking and comfort as the sole motivations of the infant is at odds with cultural interpretations of infant behaviours.

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The second component examined from attachment theory is the concept of security. Attachment security is the child's confidence in the caregiver's willingness and ability to meet his or her needs. Security is achieved through a pattern of caregiving, established between child and caregiver. Some cultural groups question the applicability of this construct when there are a number of caregivers for the child and several desirable traits that are emphasized by each cultural group. Can attachment security apply to each caregiver or does it apply to the primary caregiver? Are there traits that are considered more desirable than the security that is achieved between the child and parent? Answers to these and other questions will begin to address some of the concerns raised by Aboriginal groups on the appropriateness of attachment theory. It should be noted that several cultural groups have raised similar concerns.

*Chapter 3* focuses on the research methodology and method used in this study. It discusses how the research question will be answered, including who will be interviewed and how the data will be analyzed. Because the context for data collection uses a traditional Ojibway Talking Circle, there is also discussion of Talking Circles as a cultural practice. Using a process that is a culturally congruent form of communication is expected to facilitate the expression of ideas among participants.

By using a qualitative format where Ojibway participants express their ideas in their own words it is likely that they will provide descriptions of their parenting experiences and perspectives, rather than being forced into constructs predetermined by the researcher. Participants will be asked about parenting and how they were influenced. Participants will also be asked about their children's needs and what future behaviour or attitude they seek to instill in their child. The Talking Circle format encourages

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participants to answer more than once as they are reminded of different facets of their parenting when they hear others speak. The chapter also addresses the purposive, snowball sampling procedure used to recruit participants; qualitative data analysis; issues related to ethical concerns; and some of the limitations of using a Talking Circle method.

*Chapter 4* presents participants' responses. It will be guided by the research questions and draw examples that link their perspectives to their parenting behaviour. Data will be presented according to the five research questions asked in the Talking Circles and the responses from the four discrete groups: fathers with children less than 5 years old, mothers with children less than 5 years old, fathers with children 18 years old and living at home, and mothers of children who are 18 years old and living at home. Coding procedures will use participants' words, phrases or sentences that answer the questions on parenting, and the two components from attachment theory. Categories will be developed to reflect the collection of similar responses to each of the questions within each of the four groups. Participants' responses will be presented 'as is,' with minimal interpretation or analysis.

*Chapter 5* analyzes Ojibway parents' responses regarding the influences that affect their parenting, their understanding of their child's needs, and the long-term outcomes they desire for their children. Participants' responses will be compared and contrasted with what is known about related parenting topics from the literature. The question of theoretical appropriateness can begin to be answered by linking participants' responses to two components of a well-known child development theory. This analysis will reveal parenting categories that have been identified by Ojibway parents. The implication of such an analysis is to understand the influences on Ojibway parenting and

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to assess whether attachment theory is congruent with some of the parenting strategies of the participants. The analysis may shed some light on how social workers develop their clinical or program interventions.

*Chapter 6* summarizes the study and its findings and discusses the implications and consequences of the research. It will look at how the study's results are relevant for human service professionals, such as social workers and psychologists, who need to recognize that theories of helping are not neutral and cannot be uncritically applied to people who do not share the same world view as where the theory originated. The potential exists for misdiagnosis and mistreatment to occur when the professional is working with limited knowledge of the people they are trying to help. The chapter will also consider limitations of this study and suggest areas for additional research.

### 1.5 Summary

Ojibway parenting knowledge and perspectives of child development have remained ignored to those who work with Ojibway families and children. This study will explore Ojibway parents' perspectives and behaviours on parenting. Furthermore, two components of attachment theory, sensitivity and security, will be examined for their consistency with Ojibway parents' perspectives.

A first step in the process of exploring Ojibway parenting knowledge and practices is to look at the literature, to examine historical factors that influenced Aboriginal Peoples and led to relevant generalizations. The review of Ojibway parenting practices, both historic and contemporary, should reveal the current state of knowledge on this topic. Examining sensitivity and security and the objections raised by other cultures will reveal some of the limitations in the applicability of these components.

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Identifying Ojibway parenting perspectives and their child rearing practices can begin to provide information for professionals who make decisions for these families. The sensitivity and security constructs can be examined to the contexts and culture of Ojibway parents.

## CHAPTER 2

**LITERATURE REVIEW****2.1 Introduction**

This study is guided by two primary questions: What are Ojibway parents' perspectives and practices on parenting? Are the concepts of sensitivity and security, as understood by attachment theorists, consistent with Ojibway parents' worldview?

The challenge in examining Ojibway perspectives and practices on parenting is identifying ideas rooted in the culture from those that are being incorporated because of new circumstances not encountered by previous generations. Several writers attribute the loss of traditional Aboriginal parenting knowledge to colonization (Castellano, 2002), or the hegemony of the Euro-Western views of parenting (Hand, 2006), and the deliberate invalidation and eventual destruction of traditional parenting (Lavell-Harvard & Corbiere-Lavell, 2006). In spite of these pressures, many Ojibway families have kept traditional parenting knowledge by passing it on orally or recording them in the literature. Whenever possible, the literature on Ojibway children, parents, family, and related traditional ceremonies will be used. Where there is minimal information specific to the Ojibway then the Canadian Aboriginal and Native American literature on these topics will be used.

In today's information age, the increasingly complex, multi-cultural, and diverse population, the aim for theorists on parenting is to develop ideas that can incorporate as many circumstances as possible. To do this, theories are abstracted to universal human motivations or functions. However, these theories cannot take into account the context or history of the people where it is applied (Gray, Coates, & Yellowfeather, 2010). For this

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reason, the review of the literature will first examine Aboriginal Peoples' history and their parenting context. The second part of the literature review will examine the imposed-etic of attachment theory.

Attachment theory cannot be examined in its entirety because of the several layers of interconnected theories that form its foundation. Instead, two components of attachment theory considered pivotal to parenting and childrearing have been chosen. Attachment theory's components of sensitivity and security are two central features of the caregiver-child relationship. The attachment theory literature will examine caregiver's relationship with their infant: the infant initiates a signal and the caregiver responds. The consequence of a sensitive caregiver is a secure disposition of the child where the world is viewed as safe, predictable, and nurturing. The development of a secure trait and its elements will be explained from an attachment theory perspective and what this means for cultures who have questioned this premise.

### **2.2 Aboriginals inappropriately have Western theories applied to Parenting:**

The culture and personality movement in the early to mid-twentieth century generated a portion of literature examining Ojibway parenting and explanations of child development. This literature was dependent on the interests of anthropologists, psychiatrists, and psychologists, who were bound by their theoretical and disciplinary orientations. The culture and personality movement from the 1920s to the mid-1950s (Boggs, 1958; Caudill, 1949; Landes, 1937a) sought cultural explanations of parenting and its consequences for the child: a personality constructed by the culture.

A central criticism of the culture and personality movement was its oversimplification of the concepts of culture and personality (Levine & Norman, 2001).

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By the 1950s the movement retreated into the respective disciplines of psychology, psychiatry, and anthropology, then specialized in either personality or culture.

Coincidentally, the empirical research literature on Ojibway families and parenting diminished soon after the 1950s. Researchers from the culture and personality movement reflect the general trend of academics studying specific Aboriginal groups or Aboriginal Peoples. They come with predetermined concepts or theories and fail to take into consideration the world view of the participants (White, Maxim, & Beavon, 2003).

In response to those outside the culture promoting their parenting ideas, Aboriginal leaders advocate the return to traditional parenting and child-rearing practices (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2006; "Fathers Involvement Research Alliance," 2008; RCAP, 1996). Knowledge of Ojibway parenting is required to restrain the imposed-etic mentioned by Rogoff (2003), where ideas developed outside the culture are applied uncritically and are inconsistent with the understandings and contexts of the people being helped.

Child welfare courts are one of the most visible and contentious domains where Aboriginal Peoples' perspectives on families and children confront Western-based knowledge. Justice Mesbur acknowledged that she did not have an understanding of Aboriginal families (*A.[...] (First Nation) v. Children's Aid Society of Toronto*, 2004), yet believed that the bonding of the children to their foster parents was a better indicator of their future than releasing them to their home community with extended family. This type of child welfare court decision is reflective of the historical experience of Aboriginal Peoples, with courts "choosing cultural ignorance rather than Indian empowerment" (Zylberberg 1991, p. 103). An Aboriginal child welfare agency in northern Manitoba,

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familiar with the above court decisions, expressed its desire to “return to Aboriginal community values and not be restricted to the values of Canadian law” (Awasis, 1997, p. xii). The promise of using knowledge, values, and practices reflective of Aboriginal Peoples is the difference between appropriateness and consistency versus the experience of continued colonization and cultural hegemony (Duran & Duran, 1995; Battiste, 2002; Castellano, 2002).

### 2.3 Historical Context of the Problem

In the early 1900s, Aboriginal People were involved in the latter stages of the numbered treaties with the federal government. The Department of Indian Affairs was still in its infancy, created in 1876 to manage the affairs between the federal government and Indian people. The focus of the Indian Affairs Department in this era was containment of Indian people onto reserves for the dual purpose of dispersing lands to arriving European immigrants (Titley, 1996) and resource development. It was also during this period that several cultural ceremonies were outlawed through amendments to the Indian Act (La Violette, 1961). For academics, this produced an urgency to study a ‘dying race.’ As a result, many Aboriginal groups were studied during the late 1800s to the mid 1950s (Francis, 1992; Jennes, 1935; Urry, 1993). The information gleaned from Aboriginal cultures during this era was treated as out-dated and not relevant for contemporary, mainly European, society that in contrast was seen as progressive and dynamic. There was no attempt to synthesize the knowledge gained from the diverse Aboriginal cultures with existing European knowledge.

Politically, Aboriginal Peoples’ relations with the Canadian government and social institutions were dominated by assimilation policies (Shewell, 2004). Assimilation

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meant Aboriginals were required to absorb European knowledge, values, traditions, and languages (French or English), to the point that they were to replace every aspect of being Aboriginal. The motivations for assimilation policies were fuelled by a convergence of: religious ideals of missionization (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2008; Deloria Jr., 1997), the idea of racial superiority based on the interpretation of evolutionary theory (Berger, 1991), and the government's desired acquisition of vast resources of the country (Wright, 1992). Whatever the motivation, the result was the same – Aboriginal perspectives were not legitimate. The policies of the federal government and the collective attitude of the Canadian public over this period of time had a deleterious effect on Aboriginal People by communicating a second-class status based on race. Events happening outside of the Canadian border were about to change this low point in Aboriginal and Canadian relations.

A transition occurred in the 1960s, which was influenced by the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, where political conditions gave rise to a pan-Indian identity/movement in Canada (Fleras, 1999; Alfred, 1999). The National Indian Brotherhood (NIB), a precursor to the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) and the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples (CAP), was the political organization leading the charge against paternalistic government policies and the racism that existed in Canada. The NIB identified the political, social, and economic conditions of Aboriginal Peoples to Canadians and the rest of the world. Political, social or economic conditions that were written about in one part of the country were assumed to exist, more or less equally, with Aboriginal groups in other parts of the country. The representations that were being made by national Aboriginal political organizations were empowering because of the

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recognition of common Aboriginal experiences and struggles against paternalism, marginalization, and discrimination throughout Canada. The solutions proposed affirmed the autonomy, history, knowledge, and territory of Aboriginal Peoples throughout Canada.

Keeping in mind the historical context, the literature on Aboriginals, including the Ojibway, must be read cautiously, taking into account colonizing ideologies (Smith, 1999; Flanagan, 2000; Cardinal, 1969) and some of the paradoxical, idyllic descriptions of Aboriginal life for overseas readers (Keller, 1984; Smith, 1982; Dickson, 1976; Carter, 1976). There are limited 'insider' accounts (Johnston, 1976; Eastman 1980; Brown, 1953) from those who understood the context of Aboriginal Peoples and wrote affirming, holistic accounts of their lives and cultures. The literature review that refers to Ojibway families and their culture will focus on how they preferred to be remembered historically and their contemporary conditions. The following section describes the living conditions of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada and the environmental and cultural influences on families.

### **2.4 Descriptions of Ojibway & Aboriginal Families**

Aboriginal cultures arrange their family systems specific to their geographic contexts and social networks (RCAP, 1996). Although it is widely recognized that there are differences between and within each Aboriginal culture in terms of parenting and goals of development, there are, nevertheless, some consistently reported regularities, based upon observations and shared experiences (Brown & Brightman, 1988; Dhooper & Moore, 2001; Mihesuah, 2003).

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Traditionally, among the Aboriginal cultures in Canada, the roles of parents, families, extended families and kinship systems were relatively stable for hundreds of years (Black-Rogers, 1967; Hallowell, 1946). Each person had an expected role and contribution to the functioning of the community according to the context, i.e. agrarian, hunting/gathering, or primarily fishing. Failure to learn and practice the lessons of survival could bring dire consequences to the whole family. Therefore, adults were role models for the children and mentored them into required roles for the community.

Rapid changes brought about through displacement from territory, loss of traditional lifestyles, and government interventions affected families and the roles played by individuals (Preston, 2002). Aboriginal families throughout Canada experienced disruption that negatively affected their ability to perform simple acts of parenting. For example, competition with settlers and restrictions placed by governments for land, fish, and animals made it difficult to provide the basic necessities of life. The resulting change from a nomadic to a sedentary lifestyle eliminated many of the traditional roles expected of adults in the community.

The next section will examine the main components of Ojibway families, that is, children, parents and extended families. Ojibway families relied on cultural ceremonies and teachings on the responsibilities of parents and shaped priorities with their child's development. These cultural teachings and ceremonies will be examined in light of their roles in influencing Ojibway parents and their perspectives of their children.

### **2.4.1 Children**

Cultures collectively develop their understandings and explanations of children's development, which they pass on to successive generations of parents. These

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understandings and explanations inform parents about their child's needs and responses that will meet those needs. Cultures evolve and are affected by the environment and interactions of people from other cultures through the exchange of ideas. This phenomenon has led to the tendency of those seeking explanations of childhood to seek universal features among children, regardless of specific cultural influences. The search for universals among children tend to focus on biological, psychological, and physical aspects of children. Universals in parenting can obscure the boundary between commonalities and unique parenting perspectives and practices. Context, culture, and other significant factors affect a universal theory's ability to describe, explain, and predict in a particular situation or with a particular child (Stairs & Bernhard, 2002). The excesses of relying on universalizing theories, such as child development, have led some to conclude, "Rather than try to reveal the eternal child, the goal is to discover the historical child" (Vygotsky, 1987, cited by Rogoff, 2003, p. 10). The use of the word 'historical' is meant to convey the contemporary child and not one that is abstracted beyond the immediate context. Aboriginal children need to be understood from their past as well as their present conditions.

Aboriginal children have had a qualitatively different experience than Canadian children in general. Several generations have endured the legacy of the residential school era, where children were separated from their parents for prolonged periods of time. Over time, these children became parents, who were products of these institutions (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2008), and did not have the traditional ceremonies or teachings to refer to as previous generations. The systemic governmental effort to assimilate Aboriginal People into the Canadian public meant important beliefs and practices around

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parenting were devalued and/or disparaged. The policy of assimilation also meant an assault on the very identity of the Aboriginal person, to the point where some despised being in his or her own body and were ashamed of their Aboriginal heritage. Theories of child development were applied without consideration of this historical context and the devastating results of assimilation policies.

The literature often characterizes Aboriginal infants, including the Ojibway, as transitioning from the spirit realm to inhabit a physical body; they are gifts from the Creator (Goodluck, 1980; RCAP, 1996). There are, therefore, obligations and responsibilities on the parents and community to provide an environment to entice the 'spirit' to stay within the infant and grow into adulthood.

One contemporary Aboriginal writer (Anderson, 2006), describes several Aboriginal cultural practices of this belief that children come from the Creator. She describes the Ojibway (Anishnawbe) practice of keeping infants away from negative energy for the first forty days of life. The concern is that if the infant is made aware of negativity in this world he or she may decide to return to the spirit world. Another expression of a spiritual understanding of infants is seen in the Cree practice where, "Some Cree tie a black string around the infant's wrist to ward off malevolent spirits, or set a small stick beside the sleeping infant so they can defend themselves" (Anderson, 2006, p. 21). There are other parenting practices within Aboriginal cultures that are spiritually informed.

A related theme to the spiritually-based view is the common Aboriginal understanding that the destiny of individuals is influenced through rituals and ceremonies beginning in infancy (Eastman, 1980). Angell (1997) described the belief that children

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have a destiny and parents participate in the process through their understanding of “the essence of human existence as an unprocessed life script and story that unfolds and is refined as plot lines are detected, themes selected and meaning interpreted” (p. 190). The consequence for Aboriginal families is that children are allowed to make many of their own decisions because they are considered a person with destiny and free to explore and influence their own environment (McPherson & Rabb, 2001). Parents create or expose their children to a nurturing environment, which enables children to develop at their own pace and discover their unique personalities. Once the contextual environment has been addressed, parents can then take a long-term view as their child’s destiny unfolds (Bopp, Bopp, Brown, & Lane Jr., 1984; Goulet, Bell, Tribble, Paul, & Ariella, 1998). The belief that the child’s destiny has been decided is reflected in Aboriginal parents’ preferring non-verbal teaching and learning styles where they monitor their children’s behaviours rather than try to shape them (Letourneau, Hungler, & Fisher, 2005; MacDonald & Boffman, 1995).

“Aboriginal children, regarded as the very future of their societies, were considered integral members of the family who learned by listening, watching, and carrying out tasks suited to their age, sex, and social standing” (Fournier & Crey, 1997, p. 52). Fournier and Crey repeat a common assertion made among Aboriginals (Aboriginal Head Start, 2006; Report of the Aboriginal Committee, 1992; Report of the First Nation's Child and Family Task Force, 1993): but this claim is seldom explored for its continued presence. The traditional educational system of obligations and responsibilities of Ojibway parents and community towards infants and children was fairly straightforward because of the small (15-20 people), subsistent, nomadic groupings of families and their

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relative isolation from other cultures. These groupings of families have been altered by the consolidation of Aboriginal People onto lands set aside as reserves. The geographical change has meant that families are less likely to go out onto the land because of several challenges like mobility, sedentary life, and competition for scarce lands for hunting and trapping near the settlements. This, in turn, affects the mentoring of infants and children on land-based living and its associated teachings (Ohmagari & Berkes, 1997). For many contemporary Aboriginal families, teaching their children about the land occurs later in life, if at all. What is not clear from the literature is the transition some Ojibway parents make in teaching and mentoring their children from land-based living to acquiring knowledge and marketable skills for the wage economy. This situation raises an obvious question: Do traditional teachings of infants and children, and the parenting practices that result from them, prepare these children to live in different contexts other than a land-based life?

Ball & Pence (2001) used a generative curriculum to include Cree and Dene elders in the cultural understanding of child development in an early childhood education course. Their report focused on the curriculum and the course developed between seven northern Saskatchewan Cree and Dene communities with the University of Victoria and did not include the child development information that was shared by the Cree and Dene elders. From this exercise, it is clear that parenting and child development knowledge exists in Aboriginal communities. An Aboriginal perspective of children has to be examined through those primarily responsible for them, the parents and grandparents. In the next section, the literature on Ojibway/Aboriginal parents will be reviewed.

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### 2.4.2 Parents

In an increasingly complex, interconnected world where cultural boundaries overlap, parents nevertheless implicitly refer to and apply their culture's customs and knowledge of parenting practices (Harkness & Super, 2006). This preference does not mean that parents from one culture are homogeneous; rather, they use their culture as a mirror to consider other cultures' knowledge and practices of parenting. Aboriginal Peoples in Canada reflect, by their experiences, intra-cultural and inter-cultural differences in their parenting based on the multiple influences they are exposed to, i.e., the union of parents from other cultural groups, the effects of assimilation policies, and the choices of parents to raise their children according to their priorities that may be separate from their culture's priorities. Largely, the literature on Ojibway and Aboriginal parenting reflects historical and traditional practices as representative of a cultural foundation (Densmore, 1970; Hilger, 1951; Jennes, 1935).

When compared to Canadian mainstream parenting practices, Aboriginal values and parenting practices are often interpreted as passive, permissive, and lacking control of children's behaviour (Hamilton & Sinclair, 1991). Hallowell (1955) observed the practice of emotional restraint in many Ojibway families during his ethnographic studies among the Ojibway on the east side of Lake Winnipeg. Kelso and Attneave (1981), believe that, what has become an accepted traditional parenting practice, emotional restraint was borne out of the demands of a nomadic life. Although the nomadic life has been replaced with a sedentary lifestyle, the parenting behaviour has persisted. Dr. Claire Brant (1990), a Mohawk psychiatrist, observed in his experiences with Aboriginal families that the practice of inhibiting aggression was a prevalent parenting strategy.

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Brant (1990) observed the tendency of visiting clinical professionals to misinterpret emotional restraint as psychopathology and/or conflict suppression because they were unaware of the cultural values that have shaped this behaviour.

Hilger (1951) chronicles Ojibway cultural teachings and practices surrounding parenthood, primarily the mother, and several beliefs related to the infant, prenatal and postnatal. Hilger (1951) describes methods on determining the gender of the baby, eating regimen for expectant mothers, ceremonies for the newborn, the use of the cradleboard, feeding on demand, and so on. Mothers taught daughters the uses of animal skins and furs, cooking and preserving meat and the care for children (Hand, 2006; Swinomish Tribal Mental Health Project, 1991). Care for infants and toddlers would be shared with older siblings or grandparents (Red Horse, Lewis, Feit, & Decker, 1978). What is also apparent from historical accounts are the reliance on dreams, namesakes, seeking guidance from the spirit world, and dependence on the natural world for survival. Contemporary literature on Ojibway parenting integrates some cultural teachings with psychology or anthropology, and parents have minimal dependence on the natural world for subsistence (Brant & Patterson, 1990; Lavell-Harvard & Corbiere-Lavell, 2006).

Historically, Ojibway fathers were modestly involved in the first years of a child's life. Fathers were present in the home but the actual responsibilities of feeding, playing with, changing diapers of the baby, and other daily caregiving routines were rarely expected (Coltrane, 2004; Hilger, 1951). For example, fathers in hunting communities waited until their sons were old enough to track animals, set traps, and build temporary shelters. Angell (1997) describes Aboriginal traditional activities of hunting, fishing, and trapping as primarily solitary pursuits for the male. As a result, the emotional depth and

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security expected to arise from interpersonal relationships are not realized in any great sense. Psychological security is linked to self-reliance operating in conjunction with one's beliefs, values, and needs. Children raised in a subsistence context would be socialized to pursue self-reliance through participation in traditional activities and reap the accompanying benefit of psychological security.

Recent studies have examined contemporary issues with Aboriginal fathers in British Columbia and the impact of colonialism and the social problems it creates (Ball & George, 2004; Manahan & Ball, 2007). Participants in the study expressed their desire to change the negative impacts of racism and strive to become better fathers. Fatherhood in the Aboriginal community reflects both mainstream and sub-cultural contexts (Lamb, 2004).

Scholarship on fatherhood, mostly from the United States, mushroomed in the 1990s to include conceptual, theoretical, demographic, cultural, and social policy issues (Marsiglio, Amato, Day, & Lamb, 2000). Contemporary literature is just beginning to focus on Aboriginal fatherhood. This gap is being addressed by the recent creation of the Fathers Involvement Research Alliance ("Fathers Involvement Research Alliance," 2008).

External conditions of "rapid cultural change, socially depressed conditions, and de-culturation affected independent, self-reliant traits to confusion of roles and social definitions" (James, 1954, p. 285). Boggs (1958) observed Ojibway parent-child interactions in nine households over a thirteen month period for approximately three hundred and ninety hours during 1951-52. Traditional and historic patterns, roles, and responsibilities were becoming obsolete while the Ojibway were relegated to the margins

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of mainstream culture. In this context, parent-child interactions were negatively affected, with lack of emotional commitment to children, parental role confusion, and an overall sense of hopelessness (Boggs, 1958).

Perhaps the most devastating impact on Aboriginal parenting to date has been the residential school era where four to five generations of children were removed from families to be educated by church-operated and federally-financed schools (ChrisJohn, Young, & Maraun, 1997; Fournier & Crey, 1997). One consequence of having been raised in residential schools has been the change from traditional, nurturing roles of parenting to being disoriented about parenting (RCAP, 1996). Residential school experiences of regimentation, lack of emotional closeness, and negation of culture and language dominated many children's experiences from the age of five until they were eighteen (Schissel, 2003). Children raised in residential schools, when they became adults and started their own families, did not benefit from having their parents as role models and, as a result, did not learn appropriate parenting skills (Johnston, 1988; Knockwood, 2001). This made the challenging task of parenting that much more difficult. Many parents found themselves replicating their negative childhood experiences, of residential school, onto their children, such as harsh, punitive discipline, and were unable to express nurturing emotions with their children (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2008).

Testimonies at the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) reveal that once the residential school era was over, the child welfare era began. Large numbers of Aboriginal children became involved with children's aid societies due to neglect and other protection concerns (Timpson, 1995). In addition, the migration of approximately fifty percent of the Aboriginal population to urban centres forced the re-examination of

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traditional roles and functions of parents. Two Aboriginal writers/mothers have responded to the increasingly diverse living conditions and experiences of Aboriginal mothers by stating, "There is no universal, or essential experience of Aboriginality, much less Aboriginal motherhood" (Lavell-Harvard & Corbiere-Lavell, 2006, p. 2). This understanding makes generalizations of Aboriginal parenthood a cautious undertaking because of the varied experiences and priorities of parents.

Aboriginal cultures throughout Canada are trying to heal from the negative impacts of colonization, residential schools, and child welfare by re-examining their cultural identity. One of the top priorities towards developing a strong nation is to develop healthy parenting skills (Pintarics & Sveinunggard, 2005).

The task of eliminating negative parenting roles, modifying traditional roles, or adopting new ones has been different for each Aboriginal culture because of their unique history with colonization, residential schools, and cultural priorities. One response has been to revive historical roles through the incorporation of kinship or clan systems (Neckoway, et al., 2003). These systems draw upon traditional teachings, specified roles and a social network of individuals to help in parenting.

Other Aboriginal groups or individuals try to walk both worlds by incorporating ideas of parenting from outside the culture with traditional notions (Ball & Pence, 2001; Lavell-Harvard & Corbiere-Lavell, 2006). There is an acknowledgement of some commonality between cultures where ideas on parenting can be shared and borrowed. Some Aboriginal parents try to adopt new parenting roles in light of changed context from traditional patterns to ones that fit the urban setting (Weaver & White, 1997). There is recognition that traditional parenting roles occur within a context and, without that

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context to support those roles, Aboriginal parents have to adapt. This challenge usually occurs when families move from a relatively homogeneous community to a larger urban centre where the Aboriginal population is fairly small (Weaver, 2001).

In Aboriginal communities, parenting is rarely an isolated task because of the presence of family, extended family and friends. The role of family and extended family has changed from living off the land and travelling with the seasons to a sedentary life based in one community with several groupings of families. The mobility of Aboriginal People into urban centres has reduced extended family involvement in parenting and passing information on child rearing. This has changed the historical roles and reach of the social network of family in influencing parents and children. Aboriginal lone parent families are more common in cities than in rural areas or on reserves (Clatworthy & Stevens, 1987) and are particularly challenged in the urban environment because of the absence of the supportive family network. Single parent families within the Registered Indian population, during the 1981-1996 time period, was approximately thirty-eight percent in urban areas. In contrast, single parent families among all Aboriginals were twenty-nine percent. In comparison, eighteen percent of all other Canadian families are single parent (Hull, 2001). The utilization of the extended family network by all family types is not known in urban centres nor the kind of support the extended family can give over long distances.

#### **2.4.3 Extended Family**

The extended family has been identified as the pivotal influence in Aboriginal societies (RCAP, 1996). The role and importance of the extended family system has been widely reported in the literature (Castellano, 2002; RCAP, 1996; Report of the First

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Nation's Child and Family Task Force, 1993). Extended family does mean lineage and bloodlines are important, but it also has the wider view where clans, kin and totems can include elders, leaders, and communities (Hallowell, 1955; Red Horse, 1980b). When the extended family functions at its best all members share a collective responsibility for the caring and nurturing of the child (McShane & Hastings, 2004) and keep a watchful eye on young children in the community (Lame Deer & Erdoes, 1994). The extended family socializes children into cultural expectations and guides them throughout their formative years. Landes (1969) describes one example of how Ojibway extended families continually expand by taking children in when they lose a parent: "When a child is taken into another domestic family, he is not regarded as adopted because the child maintains its place in the bilateral group of kindred" (p. 16).

Eastman (1980) describes the layers of assistance the new mother can access within her community and surroundings. These include her mother, grandmother, the accepted rules from her people, and lessons from observing nature. The cultural, social and spiritual orientation of Aboriginal families does not put pressure on the sole relationship between mother and infant (Report of the Aboriginal Committee, 1992; Weaver & White, 1997). The child, who lives in this extended family network would have multi-layered relationships rather than a dyadic one (Brendtro & Brokenleg, 1993; Gfellner, 1990). The common feature of the 'nuclear' family of mother, father, and children is considered a household within the larger extended family (Red Horse, 1980a). Those outside the culture who fail to understand the extended family system can interpret this type of parenting as lack of bonding between biological parents and children (Stremlau, 2005).

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Another facet of the network of extended family relationships occurs through customary adoption by grandparents, which is a time-honoured practice among most Aboriginal cultures (Awasis Agency of Northern Manitoba, 1997). Until the 1950s few First Nation children were being adopted through the formal legal system (Borg, 2001). Literature indicates that there were several reasons for this. First, legal adoption was not observed by First Nations as it was foreign to their cultural practices. Second, many informal and custom adoptions were taking place by relatives or friends (Borg, 2001). Statistics from the Department of Indian affairs reveal that a total of 11, 132 status Indian children were adopted between the years of 1960 and 1990 (Crichlow, 2002). Crichlow indicates that the actual numbers are probably much higher because the Department of Indian affairs only recorded First Nations children that were of registered status. Of these children who were adopted, approximately seventy percent were adopted into non-native homes. Many of these children were adopted outside of Canada. It is not known why the extended family were not used to take in the children who were adopted outside the country from the 1960s to the 1990s. Aboriginal children adopted by customary means did not mention any stigma associated with their adoption to other family members, nor identity struggles common among those adopted outside the culture (Locust, 2000). The extent of customary adoption and the continuing maintenance roles of grandparents and other types of extended family are not well known among the Ojibway.

The reasons for grandparent involvement, in Aboriginal communities, are similar to those in mainstream culture, i.e. death of a parent, alcohol abuse or violence in the child's birth family, or the grandparent's availability while the parents work (Jendrek, 1994). Thus, grandparents take on several roles, such as caregivers, financial aid, safety

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net, and a second chance for their own parenting (Hayslip & Kaminski, 2005). Hayslip and Kaminski (2005), in their literature review of grandparents, do not address some of the roles Ojibway grandparents play, i.e. passing down cultural teachings and the Ojibway language, teaching skills for living in the bush, and communicating traditional values. In essence, what the grandparents are doing is transmitting Ojibway culture to another generation.

Bowers and Myers, (1999) compared grandparents who were rearing grandchildren by choice or tradition to those who intervene because of family crisis. Grandparents who were unprepared to rear their grandchildren faced many obstacles, such as their unexpected role, financial hardships, and some psychological struggles (Letiecq, Bailey, & Kurtz, 2008). Whereas, those who grandparent because of tradition fared better than their counterparts. Many children who were raised by their grandparents had fond memories of them and the role they played or continue to play (Poehlmann et al., 2009). Lumpkin (2008) found that some children who were raised by grandparents had more behavioural and psychological problems, most likely associated with the circumstances of their coming into the care of their grandparents, rather than a reflection on their grandparents.

The extended family system within Aboriginal cultures has been strained by the out-migration of approximately fifty percent of the members of First Nation communities to major urban centers in Canada (Alderson-Gill, 2005; Statistics Canada, 2008a). Many youth and families relocate to pursue education, employment, housing, and opportunities for their children, or medical services not available in their communities (Statistics Canada, 2008). Because of leaving the extended- family system, many youth and young

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families have a difficult time adjusting to their new urban surroundings. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) identified the transition from a family-centred perspective to an individualistic, urbanized, and somewhat alienating context as a source of difficulty. Because of the inherent tension, many chose to return home because of the isolation and homesickness they experience (Yellow Horse Brave Heart, 2001). Those who stay in urban centres are much more likely to experience poverty and ill health, as well as addictions and substandard housing, than other ethnic groups (Newhouse & Peters, 2003).

On a positive note, some youth and families are able to establish new relationships and create support structures that act as an extended family in an urban setting. Another source of support is the revitalization of traditional teachings and practices within the urban setting.

Some of these teachings, values, and ceremonies identify and prioritize infant's needs and what is expected of parents. The details of who implements the specific obligations and responsibilities that exist between parents, families, and their community are embedded within the teaching, values, and/or ceremony (Bopp, et al., 1984).

### **2.5 Cultural Teachings and Ceremonies as Relevant to Families and Parenting**

Childhood ceremonies that were historically practiced in most Aboriginal cultures were banned by the federal government in the early part of the twentieth century but are experiencing a renaissance with many Aboriginal parents. Aboriginal cultures vary in their teachings on the timing of the first influences on a person's life. Some teachings predict or discern a destiny beginning at pregnancy up to the first days of life (Beck, Walters, & Francisco, 1995). For example, one Mohawk midwife describes the process of

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discerning the baby's life path during the birthing process (Anderson, 2006). A midwife discerning and interpreting the appropriate 'signs' during childbirth prescribes characteristics and/or destiny to the child. The identified characteristics can be developed throughout childhood by the common teaching tool of the Medicine Wheel. The Medicine Wheel describes desired behaviours and explains internal processes from infancy to old age (Swinomish Tribal Mental Health Project, 1991).

#### 2.5.1 Medicine Wheel

The Medicine Wheel is a symbolic teaching tool. Hart (2002) uses the Medicine Wheel as a tool that gives information on developmental tasks to be accomplished by a person throughout his or her life, beginning with infancy/childhood. The Medicine Wheel arranges interrelating concepts into groups of four. These groups, for example, include the four directions, the four stages of life, the four aspects of personhood, the four races of people and the four primary elements. Each direction, stage of life, and aspect of personhood has developmental tasks appropriate for the person in the present. The goal is to achieve wholeness and balance in life, which is a lifelong task, periodically and momentarily achieved.

A Medicine Wheel explanation of childhood would begin in the eastern direction, which is the place for all beginnings: of birth, a symbol for renewal, innocence, and spontaneity. Bopp et al (1984) provide a list of thirty three qualities/values attributed to the East (p. 72). Parents using the Medicine Wheel perspective would be informed of this array of personal qualities and values, which reveals a combination of inherent qualities of the child as well as those that need to be developed. It is the parents' responsibility to implement the Medicine Wheel perspective, which depends upon the qualities or values

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their child needs to develop. For example, the value of ‘uncritical acceptance of others’ may not be displayed in the child’s life and the parents may arrange social occasions where their child is able to meet and play with a variety of children in order to develop this quality. Since there is no possibility of exhausting the development of these qualities or values in a person’s life, there is a continual return to the eastern direction. What is learned in the east must be balanced with the qualities and values associated with the other three directions. The direction of the south is the place of summer: fullness, youth, physical strength, and vigour. Inherent in the development of the south is the discipline required in the newfound abilities. Therefore, the east and the south must be balanced with the other two directions. The west is a place of testing. It is also a place of prayer and meditation. It is the blending of the idealism and goals of youth with the spiritual understanding of the west. The north is the dwelling place of true wisdom; it is a place to think, to synthesize and to interpret hidden meanings. The North is a place of completion and fulfilment, where the gifts from the other directions reach their highest point (Bopp, et al., 1984). In the Medicine Wheel perspective, individuals are whole when they incorporate the teachings of the four directions in their life (Graveline, 1998).

#### 2.5.2 Values

Bedard (2006) gives an overview of the values and Ojibway teachings related to Anishnawbe (Ojibway) womanhood and motherhood. Bedard’s narrative is contrasted against attachment theory’s specific properties, processes, and models informing one aspect of the caregiving situation. Bedard’s (2006) account incorporates history, culture, spirituality, extended family, and nationhood. Based on the Anishnaabe perspective of motherhood (Bedard, 2006), the comprehensive perspective is used to inform the purpose

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of motherhood, while attachment theory relies on the micro perspective to inform a particular aspect of child rearing.

Brant (1990), a Mohawk psychiatrist, refers to child-rearing values and beliefs of Aboriginal cultures, including the Ojibway, to explain behaviours of Aboriginal parents and children. He believed that these were adaptive to the contexts in which Aboriginal Peoples originally lived: that is, small groupings of families, numbering fifteen to twenty individuals, spending six to eight months in close proximity because of living off the land. These living arrangements emphasized values and relationship characteristics that ensured the survival and productivity of the group. Despite the passage of time and the changed context in which they originated, these values have been slow to change and continue to play a role in social relationships and parenting.

Brant (1990) identified several ethics of traditional child rearing that were significant for the existence of the family. The ethic of non-interference, sometimes called the value of non-interference, has gained widespread acceptance among social scientists (Collier, 1973; Muller, 1975; Portman, 2001; Sue, 2003; Wax & Thomas, 1961) as representing American Indian and/or Canadian Aboriginal reality. Non-interference has a high degree of respect for individual independence, which leads Aboriginals to resist giving instructions, coercing, or even persuading another person to do something uninvited. This is reflected in child rearing by having children learn by modelling and by natural consequences, and for parents to appear permissive to outsiders, rather than in control of their child's behaviour. A common experience where this ethic is played out among many Ojibway families is letting the child decide, for example, whether they want to go to school or whether they want to go to the dentist. To outsiders, it is

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incomprehensible to allow a child to possess such decision making-power. According to the ethic of non-interference, these types of occurrences reflect the application of the value of non-interference (Ross, 1992).

Dr. Brant (1990) also observed the practice of emotional restraint among family members. Dr. Brant attributed this practice to the context of isolated settings where anger must not be shown because displays of vexation could jeopardize the voluntary cooperation essential to the survival of closely-knit groups. The restraint on the direct expression of the emotion of anger meant that parents rarely, if ever, expressed this emotion towards their children (Hay, 1973). Parents had to use other means to express their reaction to an anger-producing situation.

Other child-rearing values mentioned by Brant (1990) are the values of excellence and gratitude. These are demonstrated through the nonverbal expression of praise and the withholding of expressions of gratitude because of the pre-existing expectations of high standards of behaviour. Praise and expressions of gratitude are reserved for exceptional accomplishments. One of the implications of this value is that children are reluctant to try something they feel they will not do well at. The common parental teaching method is based on modelling rather than shaping. This is expressed primarily through the child observing until they are ready to put into practice what they have learned. This preferred method replaces discussions or presentations.

Possibly one of the most frustrating expressions of a value that confronted Dr. Brant was the conservation-withdrawal reaction of psychic and physical resources as an adaptive reaction to stress. Children withdrew into themselves, became uncommunicative and basically tried to be 'invisible' to the person or situation that was producing the

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stress, much like a grouse that depends on its camouflage to hide from its predators.

When parents and children were in natural, subsistence settings, this reaction to a common stressor, usually danger, worked because of the life and death situations that confronted them. Parents who continue to emphasize the conservation-withdrawal reaction to stress may not prepare their children for the expected stressors of school and other common stressors of daily activities in Canadian society. The prevalence of these child rearing values have to be examined among the Ojibway to see if they need to be replaced with other values to enable parents and children to thrive in an other-than subsistent context.

Brant went beyond the values and beliefs cited above and incorporated psychodynamic theory in explaining developmental tasks that needed to be accomplished by the Aboriginal child in order to successfully negotiate the encroachment of Europeans and the dominance and imposition that occurred. Brant and Patterson (1990) agree with Erikson's (1963) assessment that people who cling "to historical values and beliefs when there are no corresponding cultural supports, rites and rituals are doomed for failure" (p. 117). Brant & Patterson (1990) do not attribute the dominance and imposition of Europeans as the source for mental health problems experienced by Aboriginal children and families, whereas other literature often does (RCAP, 1996; Report of the Aboriginal Committee, 1992; Report of the First Nation's Child and Family Task Force, 1993). Brant's attempt at using psychodynamic theory to explain internal processes of the child has not taken root in the wider Aboriginal discourse. At the moment, there is a patchwork of ideas on the blending of Aboriginal world views and European world views in relation to parenting or explanations of childhood. One possible reason for the lack of worldview

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synthesis could be the juxtaposition of a spiritually-based world view from a scientific, mechanistic world view. These worldviews do not have to be mutually exclusive but effort is required to investigate their compatibility. The Ojibway practice of a Naming Ceremony appears to conflict with scientific, biological explanations of child development. This ceremony has not been considered alongside contemporary child development theories for contributing to the knowledge of children's development or parenting practices.

#### 2.5.3 Naming Ceremony

Several Aboriginal parenting practices incorporate traditional ceremonies that take place soon after birth and up to two years old. Beck, Walters, and Francisco (1995) provide detailed practices of various Aboriginal tribes that have ceremonies for infants and toddlers. Ceremonies for infants helped in setting the direction for their lives through the assignment of a namesake, a prophecy indicating a future condition or role, or the confirmation of membership into the community (Landes, 1969). These early ceremonies were oblivious to the consciousness of the infants; therefore it was the responsibility of the parents, extended family and community to remind the person throughout their lives of these early events (Landes, 1937a). The Naming Ceremony has enjoyed a renaissance as more Ojibway parents explore the role of this ceremony in their parenting and reclaim some of their cultural practices.

Johnston (1982) describes the Naming Ceremony for the Ojibway infant and the role of the parents. Parents ask a respected elder for the honour of giving their child a name. The elder petitions the Creator for a name and does not perform the ceremony until one is received, which may take days or months. When the name is conferred onto

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the infant, an identity is received and the person can take his or her place as a member of the community. References to the future role or condition of the child are made with miniature 'guns' or 'bows and arrows' and other objects that are hung over the infant's cradle board (Densmore, 1970). The infant's older siblings, parents, and grandparents refer to these throughout the first years of life, constantly reminding throughout the early years as a means of fulfilling the requirements of their name, until they incorporate the message as their own. Landes (1969) also mentions the introduction of one-day fasts for children beginning at eight years old where they are to receive their visions and/or dreams related to their names. Some of the names given to children are patrons from the spirit world, who the child can petition for guidance and help and who are acknowledged by the community (Landes, 1969). Parents socialized their children to participate in the chores of daily life but also isolated their child for periods of time to receive their vision/dreams.

Another use of conferring personal names is reflected in the story of Abraham Okpik (2005), who was named after his uncle. People responded to Okpik with respect because of his uncle's stature and accomplishments. There was an expectation he would carry on his uncle's honour. Naming a child after someone who was held in high regard was also a common practice among the Ojibway. Densmore (1970) identifies six types of names an infant can receive, including, that of a relative held in high regard. In daily life, Ojibway children were known by one or two primary names, while the other names were known by family members and extended family.

Unfortunately for Aboriginal cultures, most traditional childhood ceremonies were outlawed by the Canadian government in the early 1900s (RCAP, 1996). Childhood

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ceremonies were replaced with Christian ceremonies like baptism and baby dedications. For many Aboriginal cultures, traditional childhood ceremonies have dwindled in practice as the knowledge disappears with the elders who knew the teachings associated with them. Despite the widespread absence of many of the traditional ceremonies performed for infants and children, the spiritual values associated with such practices have remained in the consciousness of Aboriginal Peoples. As stated earlier, the belief among many Aboriginal parents that children are gifts from the Creator or come from the spirit world is still widely held despite the attempt to eradicate these beliefs. These beliefs are reported in the literature: many, ironically, through government reports (Report of the Aboriginal Committee, 1992; Report of the First Nation's Child and Family Task Force, 1993). These reports confirm the existence of certain Aboriginal beliefs about children, but they have not been compared and contrasted with contemporary theories of child development.

## **2.6 Attachment Theory: Sensitivity**

### **2.6.1 Overview of the sensitivity construct**

The legal decision made by Justice Wilson (Carasco, 1986) and continued by Justice Mesbur (A.[...] (First Nation) v. Children's Aid Society of Toronto, 2004) commented on the diminishing role of Aboriginal culture in the children's lives, while believing the assurances of attachment theory's premises rather than the parents' and/or First Nations' understandings of the children's needs.

Attachment theory has been used to influence the adoption of Ojibway/Aboriginal children who have been in long-term foster care, despite Aboriginal leaders and communities advocating the return of the children and their ability to care for the children. A brief look into the compelling arguments justifying the permanent removal of

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Aboriginal children from their families/communities using attachment theory will be examined. Two components of attachment theory, sensitivity and security, will be examined in the literature and later compared with Ojibway participants' understandings of these topics.

The literature on two components of attachment theory will be examined for their cross-cultural compatibility. The concept of sensitivity is a central feature of attachment theory and its validity has been debated across cultures (Coleman & Watson, 2000). According to attachment theorists, a consequence to caregiver sensitivity is the child's sense of security. The achievement of security in the child and caregiver relationship is considered a basis for exploration, autonomy, and positive mental health (Bowlby, 1988). Although there are many concepts encompassing attachment theory, only sensitivity and security will be examined here, and their congruity with Ojibway parents' perspectives will be explored later in Chapter 5, Data Analysis.

Attachment theory is just one example of an imposed-etic (Rogoff, 2003) that has been uncritically applied to Aboriginal Peoples. Concerns about the sensitivity concept have come from those who argue that it is laden with hidden psychological processes (Kagan, 1998). For example, Ainsworth et al (1978) describe the four processes of sensitivity which will be discussed in more detail below; Bretherton (1985) describes the importance of the mother-infant dyad and their development of synchrony; Ainsworth and Marvin (1996) discuss the primacy of patterned behaviour rather than individual discrete behaviour; Crittenden and Claussen (2000) recommend expanding sensitivity's infant motivations. The conceptual scaffolding of the 'sensitivity' concept is unknown to most parents, including Ojibway parents. Yet, if asked if they were sensitive to their

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children, they would probably affirm that they were. However, they would not be aware of the layers of theoretical explanations and behavioural criteria that are incorporated in this concept.

Attachment theory has developed over fifty years and consists of several interlocking theories from many disciplines (Bretherton, 1985). There have been attempts at cross-cultural examinations of components of the theory (van IJzendoorn & Sagi, 1999) but very few with Aboriginal cultures in Canada. Sroufe, Egeland, Carlson, and Collins (2005) regard sensitivity as the pivotal concept to understanding caregiver and child relationships.

Although mothers are still the primary caregivers of infants and children globally, the term 'maternal sensitivity' will be used interchangeably with 'caregiver' to recognize other individuals involved in meeting the needs of children. The caregiver's response to the infant's signal for proximity and comfort is a central feature of sensitivity, which is based on an evolutionary requirement for survival (Bowlby, 1969).

Ainsworth et al. (1978) established four dimensions for assessing maternal behaviour in early infant-mother interactions: sensitivity, acceptance, cooperation, and accessibility. It was Ainsworth's development and operationalization of the sensitivity construct that has been most associated with attachment theory and parenting. Sensitivity incorporates the mother's awareness of the infant's signal, her response to the signal, and the appropriateness and timing of her response. These components occur in a sequence; therefore, an infant-initiated signal is critical to begin the process. An infant's signal can vary from the very subtle to those that indicate distress (Ainsworth et al., 1978).

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Similarly, there is a range in the mother's awareness of her child's signal, from awareness of subtle cues to unawareness or ignorance of the child's signals. Maternal sensitivity, therefore, has a range in which to operate. Behaviours outside this range were viewed as problematic or characterized as insensitive mothering. For example, a high threshold of awareness with an inaccurate response reflects insensitivity when an infant is hungry and the mother responds by playing with them. Similarly, a mother can be aware of the infant's signal, correctly interpret the need, but respond much later so that the infant no longer associates his need being met with the signal sent earlier. The mother who anticipates her infant's needs before the infant has sent the signal was not included in the construct of sensitivity by attachment researchers (Rothbaum, Weisz, Pott, Miyake, & Morelli, 2001). The excessive involvement or over-protection of the mother with her infant was found to be as insensitive and detrimental as ignoring its cry (Belsky, Rovine, & Taylor, 1984). Therefore, the appropriateness and promptness of the mother's response to her infant's needs of proximity seeking and comfort are the hallmarks of sensitivity (Waters, Corcoran, & Anafarta, 2005). Given the understanding of sensitivity developed by Ainsworth et al. (1978), some argue that mothers are unfairly saddled with the responsibility of meeting the infant's attachment needs and subsequently blamed if the child exhibits insecure behaviour (Green, 2006; D. Jackson & Mannix, 2004).

Mothers who scored high on sensitivity also showed more acceptance, cooperation, and accessibility in their interactions with their infants (Meins, Ferneyhough, Fradley, & Tuckey, 2001). Thus, according to Sroufe and Sampson (2000), maternal sensitivity is regarded as a "collective variable" (p. 322) that is able to incorporate several components of parenting under one construct. These collected

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variables subsumed under sensitivity have been discussed extensively by Nicholls and Kirkland (1996) and by Crittenden and Claussen (2000).

Maternal sensitivity implies a dyadic relationship; therefore, maternal characteristics of sensitivity cannot be observed independent of the actual caregiving situation. Maternal caregiving also includes the development of synchrony, where, over time, the mother and child respond to one another's cues. Consequently, it is the developed pattern of sensitivity that is important, not the isolated, individual behaviour of the parent at one moment. Therefore, the manifestation of sensitivity is constrained to a relationship with a particular child and a particular caregiver over a prolonged period. Ainsworth, Bell, and Stayton (1974) emphasize that it is the pattern of behaviour that the infant/child experiences that leads to expectations and conclusions about the ability and willingness of its caregiver to meet its needs. If there were other children in the family, the mother's sensitivity would change with each child because they would presumably have different needs according to their age and developmental stage, and their synchrony would be different.

#### **2.6.2 The role of context in caregiver sensitivity**

Parenting does not occur in a neutral environment; therefore, context plays an important role in maternal sensitivity (P. Crittenden, 1981; Rogoff, 2003). Attachment theory had originally invested in the idea of the mother-infant dyad to establish its explanations of sensitive parenting and infant/child reactions (Ainsworth & Marvin, 1994). Cultural groups raised questions about the application of attachment theory to their living situations, one of which include multiple caregivers and the foreign notion of a mother as the exclusive caregiver (J. F. Jackson, 1993). The multiple-caregiver condition

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would also apply to many Ojibway families. In a context of multiple caregivers, living in the same household or being involved with the child, the mother can afford to be less vigilant and can have an expectation that someone will be available to attend to the infant's signals and needs (Ahnert, Meischner, & Schmidt, 2000). The implication in terms of attachment theory is that such practices by a mother would be considered insensitive because of the absence of the dyadic and synchronous relationship which is established over a period of time. The consequence for the mother living in an extended family situation is that if the mother-infant relationship were assessed, it is possible that the infant would reflect an insecure anxious-avoidant pattern, when in fact the infant's behaviour might be consistent with his or her social context.

Many attachment researchers now acknowledge multiple caregiving societies but insist that when the infant/child is distressed they will seek out the mother, thus attesting to the primacy of a single caregiver (Sroufe & Sampson, 2000). This answer does not adequately respond to alternate caregiving arrangements where other persons are best suited to meet a child's proximity seeking behaviour and distress because the mother is unavailable due to employment or other reasons. Other researchers on attachment theory, such as Waters, (2005) conclude that, after reviewing several studies on multiple caregivers, the issue of a single caregiver is not a requirement for attachment theory or the positive development for the infant/child. The issue of multiple caregivers has not reached a consensus among attachment researchers. Some insist on a primary caregiver, while others allow the distribution of infant attachment to several caregivers.

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### **2.6.3 The Strange Situation Procedure**

Mary Ainsworth et al. (1978) devised the Strange Situation Procedure (SSP) to test and observe individual differences in infant attachment behaviour. During the SSP, which optimally occurred with infants between twelve to twenty-four months of age, mothers and babies were viewed in an unfamiliar but pleasant environment that invited exploration and play. Through a series of brief, episodic encounters, infant behaviour was closely observed under varied conditions of stress: the mother and infant are in the room; a stranger enters the room; the mother leaves the infant in the room with the stranger present; and the mother returns to the room and the stranger leaves. It is the baby's reaction to the mother's return that is indicative of the type of attachment the infant has developed with the mother, based on her history of being sensitive or insensitive to her infant's needs. The SSP may reflect a type of insecure attachment between mother and child, but in a context of multiple caregivers it may not be important if the child's secure attachment needs are met through another person. In addition to the multiple caregiver context research is scarce on the role of attachment theory on parents and children who are systematically discriminated, such as the experience of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada. Some parents responded to discrimination with shame of their Aboriginal heritage. It is not known how the parenting patterns developed in response to discrimination would affect the mother-child relationship and its assessment in the strange situation procedure.

### **2.6.4 Cultural Questions on the Sensitivity Construct**

The difference between periodic insensitive versus patterned sensitive parenting behaviours was serendipitously studied in Bielefeld, Germany (Grossmann, Grossmann, Spangler, Seuss, & Unzner, 1985). This study became the prime example of

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differentiating between occasional insensitive caregiver behaviours and patterned sensitive caregiver behaviours.

Parents in Biefeld stopped responding to child-initiated signals to be picked up when the child was twelve months old. The child, up to that point, could depend on their mothers' response; however, the common practice changed overnight at twelve months. This practice contradicted attachment theory's premise of the importance of responding to a child-initiated signal. Ainsworth's response, when questioned on this practice, was that as long as parents are consistent, or maintain a sensitive pattern, at other times and in other areas in the child's life, then, being inconsistent once in awhile should not have a long-term detrimental effect on attachment (Ainsworth & Marvin, 1994). Ainsworth's response raises more questions on what sensitivity means if parents can be simultaneously inconsistent in some areas and consistent in others. First, the issue of assessing parents cannot be based on one-time observation by clinicians. Second, Ainsworth's response implies that there are multiple, intersecting patterns occurring simultaneously where eliminating one parenting pattern and establishing another does not invalidate the general thrust of child rearing. Trial and error parenting is the norm when it comes to understanding and responding to the needs of each child. However, there is an expectation that basic needs of the child will be met while the parent comes to understand the changing nature of the child's needs during their development. In other words, there is a flexibility to parenting and the child's development that is not always considered when applying attachment theory.

Other writers question the limits of the sensitivity construct by attachment theorists. Crittenden and Claussen (2000) highlight that sensitivity, as defined by

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attachment theorists, is limited to the response to two infant motivations: proximity seeking and comfort. This definition of sensitivity does not address other needs or motivations of the child or other types of sensitive behaviours of caregivers outside the awareness of the infant/child. For example, an infant/toddler who does not want to put on a snowsuit when their parents are dressing him/her does not understand the parent is acting sensitively because of the cold winter air and health concerns. A static definition of sensitivity to proximity seeking and comfort is limited in this regard and possibly to the first few months of the infant because the definition cannot adapt to the changing conditions and contexts of children. A child's needs change over time, so do the dangers they are exposed to and the differential socialization goals of parents and cultures in which they are embedded.

Fonagy, Steele, Steele, Higgitt, and Target (1994) and Meins (1997) have taken the position that responsiveness to the child's physical and emotional needs should be clearly distinguished from the mother's capacity or willingness to engage with her infant at a mental level. Using new theoretical constructs, Fonagy et al. (1994) and Meins (1997) have put forward the idea that maternal behaviours that attend to the infant's mental state, rather than responding solely to their physical and emotional needs, will be more useful than a generalized construct of maternal sensitivity in predicting the security of the attachment relationship. To this end, Meins (1997) coined the term 'maternal mind-mindedness' to describe the mother's tendency to treat her infant as an individual with a mind, rather than merely as a creature with physical/emotional needs, expressed through proximity seeking and comfort, that must be satisfied.

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The concept of mind-mindedness clearly captures the tone of Ainsworth et al.'s (1978) scales of sensitive and insensitive mothering. That is, the mind-minded mother is sensitive to the child's development and is willing to refocus her attention in response to cues from the infant (Meins, et al., 2001). This suggestion moves away from the primacy of the physical and emotional needs of the infant, which were needs based on protection and comfort (biological, evolutionary, and universal), whereas mind-mindedness opens the door to subjective and cultural interpretations of the mental state of the infant. It is not known from the literature whether mind-mindedness is similar to Aboriginal parents acting on their belief of their child coming from the spirit world; that is, whether the spiritual state of the child can be interchanged with the mental state of the child in Meins' (2001) understanding of maternal mind-mindedness. If Aboriginal caregivers act on the spiritual state of the child, do they simultaneously meet the infant's physical and emotional needs as required with the sensitivity construct?

Advocates for maternal sensitivity hold to the idea that the sensitivity construct is pivotal to understanding the development of secure attachment in infancy (Sroufe, et al., 2005), while those who question attachment theory's construct of sensitivity regard it as too "general and coarse grained" (Meins, et al., 2001, p. 637). De Wolff and Van IJzendoorn (1997) concluded in their meta-analysis that "sensitivity cannot be considered to be the exclusive and most important factor in the development of attachment" (p. 585). Caregiver sensitivity is important, but it may be limited to only a few infant motivations and to only the first few months of life. When culture, context, child, and caregiver are included in the assessment of sensitivity, the ability to interpret parental behaviours rests with those clinicians who know how to integrate these features to form an assessment of

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well-being for the infant. An expanded interpretation of caregiver sensitivity could be helpful to the lived experiences of Ojibway families. Ojibway and other Aboriginal groups can and should demand inclusion in a construct of sensitivity that includes their understandings of infants and their goals of child rearing. Attachment theorists should be aware and responsive to the timely application of this theory given the history Aboriginal parents and children have encountered in Canada.

According to attachment theorists, the consequence of sensitivity is security (Bowlby, 1988; Sroufe, et al., 2005), which is the infant's use of the caregiver as a secure base from which to explore his or her surroundings, seeking out of the caregiver for comfort and beginning to develop positive mental health. Security, therefore, is linked to several desirable traits in infancy and throughout the development of the person. The following section will examine the components of security and the questions that have been raised in the literature about this trait. An understanding of attachment security is necessary to examine the Ojibway goal of instilling desirable traits in their children to be reflected in adulthood.

## **2.7 Attachment Theory: Security**

### **2.7.1 Introduction to Attachment Security**

The concept of security plays a significant role in attachment theory because it reflects the culmination of sensitive parenting between a caregiver and child (Bowlby, 1973; Ainsworth & Marvin, 1994; Sroufe, et al, 2005). Sensitive parenting is described as the caregiver's attunement to the child's mental and emotional states. The principal tool used to gauge the type of secure or insecure attachment a child has with a specific caregiver is the strange situation procedure (SSP). From the SSP, a clinician refers to one of the four typologies used to categorize an infant's secure or insecure attachment with

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the caregiver. The internal working model (IWM) explains the infant's or child's ability to keep track of the caregiver's sensitive or insensitive behaviours over time. The development of a secure trait, as outlined above, is called into question by cultural groups whose parenting experiences do not conform to the processes described by attachment theory.

The description of security has not changed much since Ainsworth, Bell, and Stayton (1974) described it as the mother being "capable of perceiving things from [the child's] point of view" and regarding her child "as a separate person; she also respects his activity in-progress and thus avoids interrupting him" (p. 43). The mother's observation of her child's behavior and ability to make accurate inferences of her child's mental state is the characteristic of sensitivity, which leads to the development of the secure trait. The mother's ability to interpret the child's mental state goes beyond the infant-initiated signal with the core motivations of proximity seeking and comfort. In contrast, mothers of insecurely attached children misinterpret their child's cues and respond inappropriately to the child; for example, they try to play with them when the child is hungry. Mothers of insecure children differ, from mothers of secure children, by their inappropriate responses to their children's needs. The primary difference between the mothers is their ability or willingness to assess the reasons their child is behaving in a particular way.

Children, whose mothers are sensitive and responsive, are expected to develop secure attachments. The secure trait is initially expressed in the confidence the child has in the mother's emotional availability and responsiveness, and later develops a positive and trusting orientation towards others, themselves, and the world more generally (Lewis, 2005). In contrast, children whose mothers are insensitive and unresponsive are expected

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to develop insecure attachments. The insecurity is reflected in the child's lack of confidence in the mother's availability to respond to its needs. In addition, insecure children are susceptible to developing a negative and mistrusting orientation toward others, themselves and the world (Belsky & Fearon, 2002a). Secure attachment does not begin as an independent trait of the infant, rather it is developed with a particular caregiver who is sensitive and responsive (Sroufe & Sampson, 2000). The secure trait, therefore, develops over time with a particular caregiver. Ainsworth and Marvin (1994) distinguish secure attachment from attachment by the type of relationship between a mother and child. The mere presence of a mother or caregiver can produce attachment, whereas secure attachment requires sensitive parenting.

#### 2.7.2 Attachment Typologies

Attachment typologies have remained relatively stable in their definitions since Ainsworth (1978) created the original Type A, B, and C. However, Main and Solomon (1986) added a fourth type, Type D, disorganized for those who did not fit within the original three typologies. Patricia Crittenden expanded Type A, B, and C typologies into subtypes (Landi, 2009), for more accurate descriptions of attachment behaviours. The tendency has been to accept the four attachment types developed from the strange situation procedure. Solomon and George (1999) have restated Ainsworth et al's (1978) typologies as:

Type A infants (Insecure, Anxious-Avoidant) were observed to be seemingly confident and independent. They displayed a relative lack of distress when separated from their mother and avoided their mother upon her return to the room. These infants would explore the new environment without seeming to rely on their mothers as a base,

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and they did not engage in repeated checking on their mother's presence, such as the infants labeled secure often would.

Type B infants (Secure) displayed an optimal level of exploration and caregiver affiliation during the pre-separation phase of the procedure and mild to moderate wariness when the mother left the room; and they were easily comforted upon the mother's return. It was noted that this group of infants protested or cried when separated from their mothers, but, when their mother returned, secure infants tended to greet her with pleasure.

Type C infants (Insecure, Anxious-Resistant or Ambivalent) showed little interest in exploring their environment. They became highly distressed when left alone or when in the presence of an unfamiliar adult and could not be easily comforted by their mothers. Infants classified as ambivalent were mostly clingy from the beginning of the procedure and seemed fearful about exploring the room on their own. These infants showed a high level of agitation and became very tearful when separated from their caregiver. When the mother returned to the room, ambivalent infants sought contact with their mother but also arched away appearing to be angry and resisted efforts at being soothed (Solomon & George, 1999).

A Type D (Disorganized/Disoriented) category was suggested by Main and Solomon (1986) to describe another group of infants who seemed to lack any coherence in their responses to the strange situation. These children were later found to be in abusive or traumatizing mother-infant relationships that caused a mixture of fearful and uncertain reactions that appeared disorganized and inconsistent (Bretherton, 1985; Main & Solomon, 1990; Solomon & George, 1999).

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There has been adult attachment interviews conducted with American Indian families to determine type of attachments (Christensen & Manson, 2001), but not with Aboriginal or American Indian infants or children using the strange situation procedure.

### 2.7.3 Internal Working Model

The development of a secure trait in a child is said to be possible through the child's ability to link a caregiver's sensitive behavior in the past to the present (Kagan, 1998). It is believed that experiences are stored and evaluated in the infant's memory through the internal working model (Bowlby 1973).

The internal working model is a set of internalized beliefs about what to expect of relationships, these beliefs can be positive or negative. The internal working model is regarded as stable and resistant to change (Cassidy & Shaver, 1999; Steinhauer, 1993). Bowlby's (1973) premise is that secure attachment provides a base for healthy functioning in future relationships, whereas insecure attachments could impede an individual's ability to form satisfactory relationships later in life and potentially lead to a variety of behavioural and emotional difficulties. Research has tended to confirm the association between secure or insecure attachment types and behaviours during infancy and early childhood, such as play and exploration, autonomy and competence and peer relationships and psychopathology (Coleman & Watson, 2000; Sroufe, Fox, & Pancake, 1983).

The concept of the internal working model being able to record and store early experiences and produce secure or insecure attachments has several implications. The child can be assessed using the strange situation procedure to determine whether they have a secure or insecure attachment with a particular caregiver. The assessment is the

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sum total of the caregiver's behaviours towards the child, that is, whether they were sensitive or insensitive. The internal working model promotes the notion that the infant or child is accurately interpreting the caregiver's behaviours. The question that arises is, what if the parenting does not follow attachment theory's ideal pattern, not because the mother or caregiver is insensitive, but because the cultural context in which the child is raised promotes parenting practices that are contrary, or, at least, not consistent with the attachment theory ideal (Neckoway, et al., 2007)?

Several researchers have observed that attachment theory makes assumptions based on Western ideologies, regarding ideal, dyadic relationships and preferred developmental outcomes based solely on the mother-infant bond (Harwood, Miller, & Irizarry, 1995; McShane & Hastings, 2004; Rothbaum, Weisz, Pott, Miyake, & Morelli, 2000). For instance, in many cultures mothers are not expected to be the child's sole caregiver (Ahnert, Lamb, & Seltenheim, 2000; Bornstein et al., 1992; Honig, 1989), nor do all cultures interpret the child's needs in the same way (Brant & Patterson, 1990; A. Sagi, 1990), or have the same reactions to emotional expression, such as the meaning of an infant's cry (Bretherton & Waters, 1985; Harwood, Miller, & Irizarry, 1995). Parenting patterns across cultures raises the question whether attachment theory, or the concept of security is universally applicable (van IJzendoorn, 1990)? Some studies have examined the pattern of attachment security using the strange situation procedure with parents and children from cultures where parenting practices differ from the normative sample from Western countries.

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### **2.7.4 Cross cultural studies on attachment security:**

#### **a. Japan**

An important process towards sensitive parenting is the parent's response to an infant or child-initiated signal. The established process of sensitive parenting, developed by attachment theorists, was not expressed the same way with Japanese parents. Cultural expectations of Japanese mothers consisted in high levels of emotional closeness with their child and anticipating their child's needs rather than wait for a signal from the child (Rothbaum, et al., 2000). Other researchers found that the Japanese mother is encouraged to view the child as an extension of herself (Bornstein, et al., 1992), with close physical contact between the dyad, whereas American mothers "prefer more distal modes of interaction with their baby" (Vereijken, Riksen-Walraven, & Kondo-Ikemura, 1997, p. 36). Furthermore, the goal in Japanese parenting is to promote interdependence, while in Western culture the aim is to promote independence of the child (Rothbaum, et al., 2000). Thus, Japanese parenting perspectives and practices contrasts with what attachment theorists have described as sensitive responding and the long-term goal of parenting (Ainsworth, et al., 1974). Japanese mothers, according to the perspective of attachment theory, could be labeled overly sensitive (Gibson, Ungerer, McMahon, Leslie, & Saunders, 2000). A Japanese parent who follows cultural parenting practices, as outlined above, and is assessed by the strange situation procedure could result in insecurely attached infants, specifically anxious-resistant infants (Type C). This raises the question of the interplay of cultural parenting practices and specific assessment tools developed external to the culture.

Takahashi (1986) conducted a study of Japanese mothers and their infants using the strange situation procedure. Takahashi reported that sixty-eight percent of the infants

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had a secure attachment with their mother while thirty-two percent had an anxious-resistant attachment (Type C). However, when she decided to classify the infants based on the first five, of the eight, episodes in the strange situation procedure because the infants were inconsolable, the results were drastically altered. She found that eighty-three percent of infants were classified as secure and seventeen percent had anxious-resistant attachment. Adjustments to the assessment process produced different outcomes, which favoured Japanese parents understanding of their roles.

Attachment research with Japanese parents remains inconclusive because of the varied perspectives of the researchers involved. Those who take cultural considerations into account produce different outcomes than those who apply the assessment tool of attachment theory without regard to the culture or context.

#### **b. Germany**

Ahnert and colleagues (Ahnert & Lamb, 2000, 2001; Ahnert, Lamb, et al., 2000) have conducted a series of studies with German infants and parents that offer a unique opportunity to study cultural differences. These researchers were able to study parent-child relationships before, during, and after the reunification of East and West Germany. East Germany was known for its rigid child rearing practices and valued child independence at an early age (Uhlendorff, 2004), which included children's introduction to socially-run daycare facilities. West Germany, in contrast, fostered a more nurturing and sensitive role on the part of mothers, with maternity leave from work for up to three years. Yet when the pattern of attachment security between East and West German infants was compared, the rates of secure attachment were virtually identical at forty-nine percent and fifty percent respectively (Ahnert & Lamb, 2001).

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Another result of interest was the high rate of infants identified within the avoidant category from East Germany during all three time periods (before, during and after reunification), whereas the West German infants assessed before and after reunification showed a higher than average classification in the disorganized category of attachment. The results from the studies of post reunified Germans suggest that the culture is associated with a higher than average level of infants classified with avoidant attachment (Ahnert & Lamb, 2001). Given that anxious avoidant attachment has typically been regarded as a rare form of attachment (True, Pisani, & Oumar, 2001) and that German culture would appear to emphasize nurturing parenting with a Western orientation, questions inevitably surface about the reliability of the attachment concept across cultures.

### **c. Israel**

The central focus of attachment theory has been on the dyadic relationship between the infant and the mother or primary caregiver. Since many cultures involve other family members or even community members in significant parenting roles, these cultures offer an opportunity to explore the implications of shared parenting for attachment security. The kibbutzim in Israel are collective farms founded upon socialist principles of an equal sharing of responsibilities and rewards among community members with no individual having greater hierarchal (social or economic) importance. These communities are unique in that they are the only cultural group that has adopted an arrangement where children sleep in a separate location from their parents while being tended at night by non-family members (Van IJzendoorn & Sagi, 1999). The intention of this arrangement was to socialize children for communal life and to create a sense of

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group cohesion and, thus, people who could socially and emotionally function within the community. This would mean that if a secure attachment was formed between mother and child, it would have been secondary to the core goal of the community.

Sagi, van IJzendoorn, Aviezer, Donnell, and Mayseless (1994) conducted a study that compared twenty five family-based sleeping infants with twenty ythree communal-based sleeping infants from a kibbutz. These authors concluded that home-based infants had a higher rate of secure attachment. The distribution of attachment security among the home-based infants was zero-percent avoidant, sixty-percent secure, eight-percent ambivalent, and thirty-two percent disorganized, whereas among the communal infants it was zero-percent avoidant, twenty-six percent secure, thirty-percent ambivalent, and forty-four percent disorganized. Furthermore, the average rate of disorganized attachment was thirty-seven percent, almost reaching the rate of secure attachment of forty-four percent with the kibbutz. These findings coincide with Sagi et al.'s earlier study in (1985) concluding that "forty-one percent of kibbutz infants were insecurely attached to their mothers" (Oppenheim, 1998, p. 80). Thus, the form of shared parenting adopted by the kibbutzim appeared to be associated with an over-representation of infants classified as anxious resistant (Type C) and an under-representation of infants in the anxious avoidant (Type A) category (van IJzendoorn & Sagi, 1999).

#### **d. Africa**

African cultures such as the Dogon, Efe, and Gusii also rely on multiple caregivers to maintain and ensure child subsistence, although the degree and role of the caregiver is diverse among each culture. The African cultures are known for feeding infants on demand and keeping infants in close proximity. True's (1994) doctoral

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dissertation on the Dogon of Mali showed twenty-three percent of disorganized infants, a sixty-nine percent rate of secure attachment, an absence of the avoidant classification, and eight percent of infants in the anxious ambivalent category (cited by van IJzendoorn & Sagi, 1999). These results were supported by another study conducted by True et al. (2001) with a sample of forty two infants in which they found the attachment distribution to be sixty-seven percent secure, eight percent anxious resistant, twenty-five percent disorganized, and, again, an absence of the anxious avoidant category.

Similarly, Kermoian and Leiderman (1986) studied twenty six Gusii infants ranging from eight to twenty seven months in age and found sixty-one percent of the infants were securely attached. Unfortunately these authors did not identify the type of insecure attachments these infants possessed. Thus, when the strange situation procedure is used to assess attachment security among children in these cultures, the category distribution has similar outcomes, having an over-representation in one of the insecure groups despite the fact that the cultures pride themselves on sensitive parenting and instant responses to infant cues.

The cross-cultural studies cited above reveal some of the challenges of applying this assessment tool globally when family constellations and worldviews differ from attachment theory's premises. For example, studies in Africa and Japan show that cultural influences play a significant role in guiding parents' behaviours and perceptions of their children. Israel kibbutzim socialize their children to communal living where multiple caregivers have a positive effect on the infant. Germany reflects how historical forces and time has an impact that may be greater than what a parent does.

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The constructs of the IWM, typology of attachment security, and the assessment developed by the strange situation procedure remain inconclusive for cross-cultural compatibility. The inconclusiveness of cross-cultural research raises questions regarding whether or not attachment theory is useful when examining internal states of infants.

### 2.8 Chapter Summary

The application of theories developed outside of Aboriginal cultures and applied to Aboriginal Peoples has a long and sordid history linked to assimilation and ideas of European superiority. Notwithstanding the urgency of academics studying Aboriginal Peoples, their findings filter the knowledge acquired as exotic, quaint, or primitive and, therefore not useful in contemporary society. The literature supporting Aboriginal families shows a reliance on cultural traditions, values, and beliefs that inform parenting and childrearing practices despite the Canadian government's attempts at assimilation. In contrast, the literature on parenting and childrearing developed outside Aboriginal cultures relies on a scientific method to arrive at conclusions on the preferred way to parent and raise children. Parenting and child development theories developed outside of Aboriginal cultures do not incorporate the collective struggle Aboriginal People have waged against assimilation. An Aboriginal worldview to parenting incorporates a holistic perspective reflected in the Medicine Wheel where the physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional aspects of the individual work together to achieve balance. The different worldviews and approaches to parenting are usually culturally contained until they intersect in a public institution, like the child welfare court. Many child welfare court decisions involving Aboriginal children and their families have been informed by attachment theory with little or no information on Aboriginal parenting.

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Attachment theory argues that sensitive caregiving leads to securely attached children. Yet in the above cross-cultural studies, where sensitivity to the infant's needs is thought to be high and the caregiving is nurturing, the rate of security is inconsistent with the sensitivity hypothesis. Perhaps the definition of sensitivity by attachment theorists and the assessment by the strange situation procedure does not capture the complexity of child rearing on a global level and is reflective of Western styles and contexts of parenting and child development.

There is a global understanding of security, in the mental health sense, and its necessity in developing a citizenry that is healthy, productive, and able to provide a foundation for the next generation. The routes to obtaining individual psychological security vary among cultures as their familial, contextual, economic, and social circumstances differ. Attachment theory claims that security can be achieved beginning at infancy through the dyadic, synchronous relationship of a primary caregiver (Ahnert, Meischner, et al., 2000). Some cultures do not emphasize individual psychological security; instead, they take a wider view of achieving security that is not exclusively invested in the dyadic relationship. One example from several Aboriginal cultures is the utilization of the Medicine Wheel as an explanatory model for achieving 'balance' (Bopp, et al., 1984), which parallels some of the features and outcomes of security, especially positive mental health. This possible link and basis for comparison needs to be further explored as a potential frame of reference for inter-cultural understanding.

The exploration of the relevance of attachment theory to Ojibway parents' perspectives on parenting is required to determine if there is a similarity on two key concepts. It is possible that Ojibway parents will hold historical, traditional perspectives

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or shift their views to the scientific information on parenting and childrearing because of their urban context and post-secondary educational achievements.

A qualitative study will be used to explore what Ojibway parents rely on to inform their parenting. Qualitative studies do not come with predetermined constructs for participants to comment on; rather, they set up a process where participants' own words and meanings of constructs are explored. A Talking Circle format will be used to elicit participants' views on several themes related to this study. Talking Circles are a familiar form of communication among several Aboriginal groups, including the Ojibway. The next chapter describes the rationale for a qualitative format and the Talking Circle method to address some of the questions on the role of Ojibway culture in parenting and childrearing.

## CHAPTER 3

## METHODOLOGY

**3.1 Introduction**

This study asks: What are Ojibway parenting practices? Are two components of attachment theory consistent with Ojibway worldviews? A qualitative research design is used to allow participants to make use of their words and meanings when describing their perspectives and behaviours. Ojibway parents were recruited in four Talking Circles over a six-week period. Justice Mesbur's question can begin to be answered regarding whether or not there is uniqueness to Ojibway parenting. The question on the durability of the sensitivity and security components of attachment theory when applied in various parenting contexts can begin to be answered.

**3.2 Questions posed to participants**

This study is a 'snapshot' of Ojibway parenting perspectives and their stated practices within an urban environment. Ojibway participants speak from their perspectives and experiences as parents, not necessarily speaking for the Ojibway Community/Nation. Participants use their own words and meanings to describe or explain their perspectives and practices. Questions were asked using a 'funnel design' (Morgan, 1997), beginning with open-ended questions on broad topics and eventually narrowing into specific questions on sensitivity and security. A less structured and broad approach from the initial questions provides a pleasant environment for participants. The research questions will be answered by asking the following questions to the participants.

**Figure 1:** Questions asked in the Talking Circles

1. *Who and what has influenced your perspectives on parenting and childrearing?*
2. *What would be an example of Ojibway parenting?*

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3. *What was the significance of the ceremony or ritual with your child?*
4. *What are some of the more important needs of your child before he or she is two years old and how do/did you go about meeting those needs?*
5. *What are you doing now that will impact your child into adulthood?*

The first question on parenting influences explores the basis on which the participants attribute and gain direction when carrying out their daily tasks. The literature review examined the available portrayals of Ojibway parenting and revealed the historical role of those outside the culture explaining Ojibway parenting. Ojibway parents are rarely used as research subjects to express their parenting perspectives and practices. The first question is open-ended to allow participants the freedom to choose their sources of influence when parenting. Participants were not given a definition of parenting influences; it was left up to them to interpret the meaning through their responses.

The second question is directly related to the role of Ojibway culture in parenting. Participants are asked to identify a parenting practice that reflects the Ojibway culture. It is expected that some answers will reflect what the literature has identified as examples of Ojibway parenting. Ojibway leaders recommend Ojibway parents raise their children traditionally, but it is not clear what this means practically, whether they are referring to traditional values, ways of life in the bush, the retention of language, and so on. Participants reveal their understanding of traditional parenting through their responses to this question.

The third question requires parents to declare the role of a childhood ceremony on the child and on themselves as parents (see Demographic Questionnaire in Appendix 4). The literature identifies the historical role of Ojibway childhood ceremonies and this

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question will examine whether some of these practices are still used or if new ones developed. Parents are asked to identify their perspectives and behaviours influenced by the teachings of childhood ceremonies.

The fourth question is related to parents' understanding of their child's needs and how they respond to those needs. Attachment theory identifies parental sensitivity as a pivotal construct in understanding a child's attachment to its primary caregiver. Debates centre on the sensitivity construct and the core motivation of infants, which is proximity seeking and comfort. The fourth question should shed some light on whether Ojibway parents perceive their child's needs differently than what the attachment literature states.

The fifth question deals with the long-term consequences of parenting and what goals parents have for their children. Attachment literature suggests that a consequence of secure attachment is positive mental health, autonomy, and positive social relations. This question will investigate whether the long term-goals of Ojibway parents are consistent with the attributes identified by attachment theorists.

### 3.3 Research Design

A qualitative research design was used because of its open-ended nature and production of descriptive information from Ojibway participants' words and meanings related to parenting. Predetermined parenting or child rearing constructs developed outside a cultural group like the Ojibway do not take into account their world views and lived experiences (Kenny, Fairies, Fiske, & Voyageur, 2004 p. 40; Knodel, 1993). White, Maxim, & Beavon (2003) have noted the limited amount of research upholding Aboriginal perspectives compared to the enormous volumes of research on Aboriginal Peoples when used only as research subjects.

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Decolonized research seeks to validate Aboriginal experiences and perspectives and liberate Aboriginal Peoples from externally imposed ideals, theories, and measures (Smith, 1999). For this reason, Ojibway parents' ideas about their children's development, and the parenting practices they use to meet those needs, are solicited. Parents expressed their understanding of their child, such as, integrating traditional parenting teachings/values with contemporary knowledge and how urban life affected their reliance or reference to Ojibway culture.

Culture plays a role in the research process, as it is impossible for humans to think aculturally (Struthers & Peden-McAlpine, 2005). Aboriginal People have sought to take control of the research process by ensuring that cultural and historical information reflects their knowledge and understanding of the world (Castellano, 2002). Bishop (2005) calls this process a part of decolonization, where indigenous/Aboriginal research is carried out from an indigenous/Aboriginal purpose and perspective. Ward Churchill (1993) identified an indigenous position to research, based on the principles of resistance, political integrity, and privileging indigenous voices, while Bishop (2005), a Maori, identifies five categories in which to evaluate research about Maoris. In Canada, Battiste (2002) used the Medicine Wheel to describe the process of rediscovering indigenous knowledge: the Western door maps the effects of colonialism, the Northern door diagnoses colonialism, the Eastern door heals the effects from colonialism, and the Southern door envisions indigenous renaissance.

Research from a decolonization position does not mean an outright rejection of Western knowledge, rather it begins with a premise of existing Aboriginal knowledge and then compares it to other knowledge developed elsewhere (Lincoln, Gonzalez, &

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Gonzalez, 2008; Smith, 1999). Research from a decolonization perspective does not assume a neutral, universal position, which is unlike the claim of many theories developed outside of Aboriginal cultures (Duran & Duran, 1995).

Decolonization research, then, acknowledges oral tradition that is at the heart of North American indigenous cultures (Poupart, Martinez, Red Horse, & Schamberg, 2001). This tradition has been the usual mechanism of relaying and passing on information in these societies since time immemorial. Oral traditions take on several forms of communication, like story-telling, use of metaphors, legends, and the use of Talking Circles. For these reasons, a Talking Circle method was chosen to interview participants.

#### 3.3.1 Method

Talking Circles aspire to produce sincere discussions on the topic chosen by the person who called the Circle. Discussions, in Talking Circles, ebb and flow as individuals laugh, tell stories, revisit earlier points, contradict themselves and get off topic. Facilitating a Talking Circle requires the balance of the natural flow of conversations as well as meeting the needs of the research purpose. Participants come to the meeting with the understanding that information is being sought from them and that the facilitator (researcher) is using an interview guide to help stay focused. Participants create a synergy in Talking Circles not found in individual interviews.

A Talking Circle has cultural relevance and consistency with Aboriginal customs and values (Ashby, Gilchrist, & Miramontez, 1988; Kenny, 2002). Talking Circles have different names depending on who is using it and the territory of the Aboriginal group. Some individuals or Aboriginal cultures use the terms "Sacred Circle" or "Healing

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Circle” interchangeably to emphasize purposes of spiritual or emotional healing. These types of Circles are similar to group therapy or support groups. They do differ, though, in reference to the cultural understanding of healing, world view, and wellbeing. Some Aboriginal groups use “Sharing Circle” or “Talking Circle” to fulfil other general purposes of communication or information gathering. These general purposes are similar to the common understanding of focus groups, brainstorming sessions and team building exercises. It is important to know what terms are used for specific types of Circles and their purposes when working with Aboriginal Peoples throughout North America (Hart, 1996).

For the purposes of this study, the term ‘Talking Circle’ will be used because of the acceptance of the term in northwestern Ontario with the Anishnawbe (Ojibway). As well, I will use the words ‘Anishnawbe’ and ‘Ojibway’ interchangeably to refer to this linguistic group. The term ‘Aboriginal’ is assigned to the original inhabitants of what is now known as Canada and their descendants. When referring to the indigenous people from the United States, the term ‘Native American’ will designate this group. Different countries use various terminologies to refer to its indigenous population.

The circle, in Aboriginal societies, symbolizes completeness (Bopp, et al., 1984). Talking Circles are traditional patterns of intra-group communication specific to many Aboriginal Peoples (Hodge, 1996; Strickland, 1999). Talking Circles are rooted in traditional storytelling and religious ceremonies. These circles have re-emerged among Aboriginal Peoples as a preferred form of intra-group communication to share information, offer support or solve problems (Boyes-Watson, 2005): “A social context for sharing oneself, one’s experiences, feelings and thoughts with the rest of the participants

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is created” (Napoleon, 1991, p. 28). Talking Circles are sensitive to the participants’ particular Aboriginal culture through incorporation of their symbolic traditions such as burning sage, or passing an eagle feather or a rock to symbolize a person’s turn to talk. There is an understanding that the effort required to articulate a perspective is also necessary to respectfully listen to what others are saying in the group (Graveline, 1998). The respect shown to others, during the circle, is reciprocated to each member as they speak.

The Talking Circle also produces an environment where those who have been silenced and marginalized are given an opportunity to speak in safety (Jarrett, 1994). Individuals who participate in Talking Circles are expected to speak ‘from the heart,’ that is, to be sincere when speaking on the topic presented by the person who called the Circle (Graveline, 2000). In a Talking Circle, everybody is equal and everybody belongs; there is no hierarchy or judgement on the quality of information each person shares. Questions are asked in a way that encourages participants to answer as they deem appropriate. They can choose to be descriptive, explanatory, process oriented, or use metaphors and other cultural strategies. Participants were given the opportunity to speak more than once if they wanted to expand, clarify, or explain their answers. Talking Circles stimulate ideas through the synergy of group interaction, which is not available with individual interviews. Participants were told that the researcher would take the opportunity to ask follow-up questions if necessary.

As a cultural strategy, Talking Circles elicit contextual data through the experiences and perspectives of the participants. The participants’ common backgrounds of parenting, shared ethnicity, living in a major urban centre away from their community

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of origin, and being grouped with other parents whose children are approximately the same age should affirm some shared understandings or experiences: "Holding separate sessions with homogeneous but contrasting groups is believed to produce information in greater depth than would be the case with heterogeneous groups, because it will be easier for participants sharing similar key characteristics to identify with each other's experiences" (Knodel, 1995, p. 40). Because some of the participants know one another they might have discussed these topics prior to the Talking Circle; therefore, the possibility of prevalidated ideas exists (Reed, 1997). The goal of a Talking Circle is to provide culturally rich discussions through the process of conversations and stories of the participants (Becker, Affonso, & Blue Horse Beard, 2006).

Participants' experiences or perspectives may not necessarily be congruent with some features of Ojibway culture because of the people's circumstances and opportunities to acquire other cultural knowledge and practices. Kluckhohn (1961), who studied Native American tribes, identified this phenomenon as cultural variation, where individuals are expected to reflect the dominant intra-cultural discourse and, yet, exhibit characteristics that vary from their culture because of environmental or social forces. Cultural variation is a paradox for those seeking to understand and classify cultural characteristics because of centripetal and centrifugal forces working on the individual. Cultures try to maintain equilibrium; thus, some conformity is expected of individuals. Yet, cultures also have to face constant external pressures to adapt, adjust, or change. The term 'cultural variation' has been replaced with terms that identify external pressures cultures face, such as 'universalism versus particularism' (Pullman, 2001); global versus local (Sewpaul, 2006); and assimilation (Battiste & Henderson, 2005). Pressures that

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contribute to variations with cultural members have been identified as acculturation, separation, integration, and marginalization (Berry, 1992; Rudmin, 2003).

Qualitative researchers have grappled with the idea of validity because of being compared to, and pressured by, their quantitative counterparts (Guba & Lincoln, 1981): “Qualitative researchers employed parallel constructs to validity by using the concept of ‘trustworthiness,’ which contains properties like: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability” (Morse, 2002, p. 2). Debates within qualitative circles have centred on the properties of validity and the processes used to identify their existence. According to Kvale (1996), “reliability, generalizability and validity are not rejected outright, in a moderate postmodern perspective, instead they are reconceptualized to the possibility of relevancy to specific, local, personal, and community forms of truth, with a focus on daily life and local narrative” (p. 231). Trustworthiness can be established during the process of the study and after the fact by establishing criteria to evaluate the study.

Even though Talking Circles have existed in Aboriginal societies for centuries, their use in research is recent. As a result, there is not extensive literature discussing or analyzing its validity or reliability. The task of decolonized research using Talking Circles is to ascertain Aboriginal criteria of validity and reliability regarding their use. I will use the development of trustworthiness and its properties as a guide to describe the validating process for the Talking Circles. One of the most common forms of validity related to Talking Circles involves process, which is, conducting Talking Circles in the prescribed way of the culture in which the research is conducted. This may include some or all of these features: talking to an elder, praying, feasting, going clockwise from the participant who first answers the question, and using an eagle feather or other appropriate

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symbol during the Talking Circle. Other forms of Aboriginal criteria of validity relate to the acknowledgement of an Aboriginal worldview and values: of respect, listening, freedom to answer questions as they see fit, conducting member-checks on the information from the Talking Circle, and gift-giving to show appreciation for the participants' time and willingness to share their experiences and perspectives. This type of validity is similar to face validity; where cultural members, hearing about the Talking Circle, would recognize if it was conducted according to their traditions, even if they did not know the content of the information that was shared during the Circle.

In Talking Circles, after the research has been completed trustworthiness or validity is handled in several ways. Adhering to cultural processes has already been outlined above as an evaluation of trustworthiness during the research. However, popular features after the research is completed include: audit checks (Morse, 2002); member checks (Hains, 2001); and inter-rater reliability procedures (Knodel, 1995).

Audit checks adhere to research standards rather than local, contextual realities. These standards are related to the development of the research questions, choice of research design and method, coding and analytical procedures and reporting conclusions. In qualitative research, audit checks are iterative rather than linear, that is, there is a going back and forth, checking and rechecking rather than a straightforward procedure that is merely implemented. This study will be audited for adherence to research standards through the dissertation process of supervisor, PhD committee, external reviewer and examination committee through Memorial University School of Graduate Studies.

Member-checks involve members of the community and/or participants of the research where the study is being conducted. Members can participate in some or all

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aspects of the research. Member-checks do not treat participants as subjects only but as creators or co-creators of their own knowledge. The use of member-checks in research encourages indigenous people to create and participate in knowledge development.

There are some misgivings to the use of member-checks because they “restrain results to a more descriptive level in order to address participant’s concerns. Member-checks may actually invalidate the work of the researcher and keep the level of analysis inappropriately close to the data” (Morse, 2002, p. 8). This limitation occurs if member-checks are part of the whole research process and academic standards are not followed. If member-checks are limited to portions of the research where participants’ input is essential, such as verifying their responses, then the limitation described by Morse may not apply. Participant responses are synthesized, abstracted, and analyzed as a collection of data and no longer reflect their individual responses. At these junctures of the research process, the researcher’s skills and knowledge of the topic are utilized.

In this study, member-checks were limited to verifying the accuracy of their responses to the questions. Incorporating member-checks beyond the task of verifying their responses would unduly place responsibility on participants to meet academic requirements. Some researchers have moved member-checks beyond verifying transcribed responses by incorporating the use of inter-rater procedures.

Inter-rater reliability procedures are sometimes used for Talking Circles (Baskin, 2005b; Becker, et al., 2006) or focus groups (Knodel, 1995). Inter-rating can include community members and/or a research team. The research purpose determines the level of inter-rater participation in synthesizing, abstracting, or analyzing the data. The use of inter-rating adds another layer of rigour in some studies. However, as in other processes

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of research, there are limits to employing this procedure, most notably groupthink, where there exists an underlying shared bias. The use of inter-raters can add time and resources to a study because of the requirements to meet, process information, and reach a consensus. In this study, because of the exploratory nature of the topic, no inter-raters were required.

Validity of this research is therefore related to transparency about the processes used throughout the study and incorporation of cultural protocols and understandings regarding Talking Circles. Transparency of the researcher's bias, or positionality, entering the study is an important factor in weighing reliability and validity.

Researcher's using a qualitative method often identify their starting point on a given issue by declaring their perspectives and influences about the topic they are studying. This is contrasted with the assumption of a detached, neutral, objective observer promoted by a traditional quantitative or positivist approach. One common tool used to situate a researcher with the topic being studied is to use a continuum of being an insider or outsider to the participants' community (Chavez, 2008). An insider would share numerous characteristics of the participants being studied, while an outsider would share few characteristics. The insider-outsider continuum has been subdivided into degrees of being an insider or being an outsider. That is, an insider can move away from being an insider if they begin to take on characteristics that differ substantially from the group they originally identified with, for example, an Ojibway mother claiming she parents like a 'white' person. In this example, this mother will always have characteristics that identify her as an insider to other Ojibway mothers but on the continuum of insider-outsider, she may take on more characteristics of an outsider. The insider-outsider designation can

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come from the person themselves, or from the group, or third parties. It isn't clear which characteristics or how many characteristics it would take for a person to move along the continuum. That being said, an outsider can move towards insider status if they identify with key characteristics of the group and is accepted by the group in question.

On one end of the continuum is the insider who is an internal-insider or internal-outsider which represents the researcher who is socialized to, or cognizant of, the participants' community. Outsiders, on the other hand, can be considered external-insiders or external-outsider which represents distance in socialization from, or cognizance of, participants' community.

The advantages of an insider, both internal and external, is their ability to capture nuanced and unique insights, they have access and move around freely, they speak the language of participants and are considered more adept and effectual (Jacobs-Huey, 2002). The advantages of an insider are tempered by the pressures of reciprocity where participants' hold expectations of the insider that are not held with an outsider. In addition, the insider's closeness may prevent them from making coded information explicit, for example, when participants' responses end with phrases like, "you know" (Kanuha, 2000, p. 442). In this situation, participants' assume the researcher knows what they are talking about and do not elaborate on their response, however it is the responsibility of the researcher to be aware of this dynamic and to ask participants for more detail.

The advantages of being an outsider, both internal and external, are being in a position to be more objective, that is, not being influenced by parochial attitudes. Also, there is a willingness of participants to share more information with someone they

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consider uninformed. The disadvantages of being an outsider are being in a position which affects the researcher's ability to observe and interpret nuanced or unique information. The outsider's position also brings with it, the possibility of imposing an external worldview onto the research and participants, and being too far removed from the data to give meaningful analysis (Rose, 1997).

Chavez (2008) points out that the insider-outsider distinction assumes a false dichotomy because each person shares aspects of insideness and outsideness with every participant or community they study. For example, an insider may share the same gender as her participants, but be different in ethnicity, social class, or any other variable. Likewise, an outsider may not share the same gender as his participants but share the same ethnicity, social class, and so forth. The interaction of variables that influence a researcher to be considered an insider or outsider are not merely external, participants play a significant role in assigning the categories they use to evaluate whether someone is an insider or outsider. Far from being passive recipients, participants have their own interpretation or intent of their participation in the research process by advancing their own agenda, helping a compatriot/ally, or seeing the researcher as a liberator. Participants' intent adds another layer of complexity to the insider-outsider debate. With the insider-outsider continuum as a backdrop to considering my role and influences on the research, the following are key points on my journey with this topic.

I came across the topic of attachment theory and Aboriginal parents when I worked in an Aboriginal child welfare agency as a family support worker, later as a family counsellor and finally as a permanent care supervisor. In each role, my colleagues and I would encounter cases where the justification of removing a child, from an

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Aboriginal family, was based on the premises of attachment theory. Child welfare courts were also embracing the priority of attachment theory over other considerations. When I transitioned from social work practice to teaching at a university, I began to explore the role of attachment theory and Aboriginal parenting.

My mission seemed clear at the outset because I did not know the breadth and depth of attachment theory in academia. There were, and are, thousands of articles and hundreds of books written about the topic from several academic disciplines. I could not locate articles or books written with Aboriginal people questioning the premises and applicability of attachment theory to their children, parents, and families. There was a study using adult attachment to understand mental health among American Indian families (Christensen, 2001). Christensen's (2001) study reflects an imposed etic where concepts established outside the culture begin to frame the experience and perceptions of Native American mental health.

My bias entering into this research is to question two components of attachment theory and their premises, then to compare them with Ojibway parents' responses. With that in mind, I had a double duty. One was to examine the foundations of attachment theory; the other was to study Ojibway parenting perspectives and practices. I examined the social-political predisposition to ignore Ojibway knowledge as an important variable influencing this debate. I also studied what other cultures were encountering when attachment theory was implemented in their context. Finally, my starting point was to privilege Ojibway parenting perspectives and practices and to view attachment theory as an interloper to pre-existing Ojibway knowledge.

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Further examination of my influence on the research process led me to use the insider-outsider paradigm to make my position transparent to those who read this study. My role as an insider seeking participants for the study was mitigated by giving the initial four or five names of potential participants to the research assistant, who then asked each person on the list if they wanted to participate and for them to suggest others who may possibly participate. As it turned out, I was familiar with all the participants by being one person removed from them, i.e., I knew one of their parents or coworkers; we shared mutual acquaintances, or crossed paths when I was a student, counsellor, or professor at Lakehead University. My familiarity with participants gave me an insider status on several levels, i.e., being an Aboriginal person, living in the same city, being a parent, being the same gender and approximate age with roughly half of the participants, having similar acquaintances, and sharing a similar worldview. The collection of these shared attributes reduced my anxiety when conducting the Talking Circles.

The primary challenge, as an insider, was my familiarity with urban Aboriginal issues and cultural assumptions. The perspectives and practices of participants were familiar to me because I had to negotiate similar issues moving from an isolated community to a major urban centre as many of my peers from other First Nation communities. The similarity of our experiences may have prevented me from probing participants' responses than if the information was new to me. Though our experiences were similar, there were individual interpretations to each experience that made them unique. Even though I considered myself an insider on several attributes, there were other attributes that I did not share with the Ojibway participants.

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Attributes that could influence participants to consider me an outsider are: I was a Cree man asking Ojibway participants about their parenting perspectives and practices. To the other half of the participants who are younger than me, my age may have contributed to having an outsider status. For the mothers in the study, I was an Aboriginal male asking questions about their parenting. I am not sure whether my status as a professor, my social-economic status, or other unforeseen factors added to my outsider status. The limitation of using an insider-outsider paradigm is that my assessment may not represent participants' interpretation of me.

Another type of validity will come after the study when academics evaluate this research. Verifiability will come when Aboriginal participants and readers in general consider whether the conclusions from the study are plausible: that is, reflective of Aboriginal parent's experiences in an urban setting. One aspect of research about Ojibway parents is to recruit Ojibway parents to the study. The next section deals with how parents were contacted and eventually came to participate in the study.

### **3.3.2 Recruitment and Sample**

Participants were recruited using a purposive, snowball sampling method by seeking several similar characteristics. To participate in the Talking Circle individuals had to: a) be Anishnawbe (Ojibway) through self-definition, b) they had to be parents with at least one child under five-years-old or with one child over eighteen living in the home, c) be willing to participate in a Talking Circle, d) recommend an Ojibway mother or father to participate in the study, and e) be a resident of the city of Thunder Bay, Ontario.

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It is estimated that there are approximately 15,000 Aboriginals living in Thunder Bay (Statistics Canada, 2008b). The majority are Ojibway. Northern Ontario is the traditional territory of the Ojibway. The Ojibway are part of the Algonquin language group in Canada, which includes the Cree in western Canada to the Innu in Labrador. With the exception of the Plains Cree, the tribes that encompass the Algonquin language group live in sub-arctic forest regions of Canada. As a result of similar geographical contexts, the Cree, Ojibway, Odawa, Naskapi, Montagnais, and Innu share many historical and cultural practices of hunting, fishing, seasonal migrations, and small nomadic family groupings.

A research assistant was hired to provide four primary services. One was to contact individuals to ask if they wanted to participate in the study. Second, the assistant arranged the Talking Circles according to participants' availability. Third, during the Talking Circle the assistant sat outside of the Circle to record the first words of each participant's response to keep track of who was speaking. This expedited the fourth reason for the assistant, to transcribe the dialogue from the Talking Circle, to remember who was speaking, and what they were saying.

To reduce researcher influence on potential participants an assistant was provided with a few names of Ojibway individuals to begin the process of the snowball sample. The research assistant contacted these individuals to discuss their willingness to participate in the study. Potential participants were able to contact the research assistant directly by phone, email, or mail and enquire about the research if they had other questions beyond the initial conversation. If parents were interested in the study, the research assistant went through the "Description of the Study" (Appendix 1) and "Letter

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to Research Participants” (Appendix 2), and answered any questions they had. Each person was asked to provide the research assistant with the names of individuals who fulfilled the criteria for participation. The research assistant then contacted these individuals, following the process described earlier. The research assistant scheduled Talking Circles around parents’ availability. Each parent received directions to the location where the Talking Circle was taking place. When parents arrived, they were given the “Consent Form” (Appendix 3) and “Demographic Questionnaire” (Appendix 4) prior to participating in the Talking Circle.

Participants in this research who are living in an urban centre continue to consider themselves Ojibway, despite the absence of some common cultural practices, like living off the land or the presence of extended family. Some participants hunt or fish occasionally rather than regularly. Extended family takes on different roles when face-to-face encounters are not regularly available. Other aspects of Ojibway culture take on an added importance in order to replace those that are no longer customary. For example, now there is greater emphasis on cultural teachings and Ojibway world view, whereas, in the past, these topics would have been taken for granted. Participants shared how they have addressed cultural issues in an urban context, including the extended family.

### **3.4 Demographic Information**

Four Talking Circles were conducted in total, within a six-week period, and each Talking Circle lasted about 2.5 to 3.5 hours. There was an attempt to have equal numbers of mothers and fathers for each of the Talking Circles. For comparison purposes, groups were separated into mothers and fathers, and those who are relatively new to parenting to

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those who are parenting young adults (please see the results of the Demographic Questionnaire in **Table 1**). The group composition consisted of:

### **3.4.1 Fathers with at least one child under five years old (6 participants)**

The Ojibway fathers in this group range in age between thirty three to forty three years old. They come from six different First Nations communities throughout Ontario. All of the fathers were raised in their First Nation community until they moved to the city. One of the fathers moved to the city as a six-year-old and has lived in the city since. Two have been here for nine years and three have been in the city for less than three years.

Two of the fathers have six children, while three fathers have three children. The other has one child. Five of the six fathers speak their Aboriginal language. Five of the fathers have completed postsecondary education. The six fathers who participated in this Talking Circle do not share the same family constellations. One was raised in a typical 'nuclear' family, while the others varied from single mother, single father, grandparents living in the bush, one whose grandparents raised him in an urban setting and, finally, one father who was raised in a multiple-generation household where grandparents, parents, aunts, uncles and all their children occupied the same home at the same time.

One father of six children did not indicate whether he had access to helpers in parenting. The other fathers listed their spouse, family, friends, daycare or sitters as helping them to parent. Five of the six fathers held a childhood ceremony based on one of the following: Ojibway cultural teachings, Christian teachings or their unique family traditions. Two fathers have access to an Aboriginal elder as their resource person, while

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four do not indicate whether they access someone from the Aboriginal community to help them in cultural matters, which includes parenting.

#### **3.4.2 Mothers with at least one child under five years old (6 participants)**

The average age of the Ojibway mothers in the study was twenty nine years old.

They come from six different First Nations in Ontario. The length of time living in the city ranged from twenty six years to one year, with the average being fourteen years. One mother has three children, three moms have two children, and two mothers have one child each. Two mothers speak the Ojibway language, while four do not.

All of the mothers have postsecondary training. The moms listed a variety of helpers in parenting: spouse, family, grandparents, sitters, daycare, friends, and parenting programs. Two of the mothers had a Naming Ceremony for their children, while one of the moms had a baptism. The other three moms did not have a childhood ceremony for/with their child. One mother listed co-workers as a resource, while another mom listed an elder, friends and relatives as her resource in the city. Four mothers indicated that they did not access an Aboriginal resource person in the city.

#### **3.4.3 Fathers who has at least one child who is 18 years or older (3 participants)**

The average age of the three fathers who participated in this Talking Circle was fifty-one. They have lived in the city thirteen, twenty-three and thirty years respectively. Among the three, they have six, three and two children. They each come from a different First Nation in northwestern Ontario. Two of the fathers speak Ojibway and English, while the third speaks English only. One father does not have postsecondary training, one has a college diploma, and the third father has a university degree. Each father listed his spouse as his helper in parenting, and one father listed a medicine man as an Aboriginal

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resource person in the city. Two of the fathers had a baptismal ceremony for their child, while the third did not have any type of ceremony for his child.

#### **3.4.4 Mothers who have at least one child who is 18 years or older (5 participants)**

The average age for mothers with children over eighteen years old is forty five years old. These mothers have an average of two children each. All the mothers are from northwestern Ontario and have lived in the city, on average, for twenty one years. Two of the mothers speak Ojibway and English while the other three speak English only. All of these mothers have completed post-secondary training, both college and/or university. Most of the mothers were supported in parenting by a spouse, family member, and friends, and one used a daycare to help with parenting duties. One mother did not list anyone as helping her to raise her son. All of the mothers had their child baptized as infants; two of them later held a Naming Ceremony for their child. One mother changed her Christian denomination and had her infant dedicated rather than baptized. Two mothers accessed an Aboriginal resource while in the city, one was an elder, and the other a Native Catholic church.

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) and the Aboriginal Communities and Urban Sustainability Report (Graham, 2002) identified the important role of elders in the support and continuation of Aboriginal cultures in urban areas. What both reports do not make clear is whether Aboriginal parents utilize any elder in the urban centre or prefer elders from their community. This would be a significant factor in the continuation or discontinuation of cultural teachings and practices in an urban centre.

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Table 1. Demographic Information of Participants in Study

Participants	Age	Years in the city	Number of children	First Nation	Languages spoken	Education	Helpers in parenting	Childhood ceremonies	Aboriginal Resource Person
<b>Dads with children over 18 years old</b>									
1	47	30	3	Gull Bay	Ojibway & English	Diploma	Spouse	Baptism	Medicine Man, mentor
2	61	23	6	Whitesands	Ojibway & English	N/A	Spouse	None	N/A
3	46	13	2	Red Rock	English	HBSW	Spouse	Baptism	N/A
<b>Moms with children over 18 years old</b>									
4	44	15	4	Eabametoong	Ojibway & English	Diploma	Friends, relatives	Baptism/Dedication	N/A
5	47	5	1	Aamjiwinaang	English	BScN	Spouse, parents, daycare	Baptism	N/A
6	39	15	2	Long Lake	English	Diploma	Spouse, parents, family	Baptism	Kateri Church
7	44	44	3	Fort William	English	BScN	Family, Spouse	Baptism, Naming	N/A
8	53	27	1	Seine River	Ojibway & English	Diploma	N/A	Baptism, Naming	Elder
<b>Moms with children less than 5 years old</b>									
9	36	26	2	Sagamok	English	HBA, B.Ed.	Spouse, friend, sitter	Naming Ceremony	Co-workers
10	24	19	2	Moose Cree	English	College	Spouse, grandparents, programs	N/A	N/A
11	31	9	2	Big Trout	Oji-Cree, English	B.A/B.Ed.	Spouse, friends, family, sitter, daycare	Baptism	N/A
12	31	11	1	Eabametoong	English	Diploma	Spouse, family	N/A	N/A
13	23	23	3	Couchiching	English	College	Family, programs, boyfriend	N/A	N/A
14	29	1	1	Eagle Lake	Ojibway & English	B.A.	Spouse, daycare	Naming, Healing	Elders, friends, relatives
<b>Dads with children less than 5 years old</b>									
15	33	10	3	Six Nations	Ojibway & English	HBFA	Spouse, family, friend	Naming Ceremony	Elders
16	40	1	6	Wiwemikong	Ojibway & English	HBA	Spouse, daycare	Baptism, Naming	Elders
17	34	3	3	Eabametoong	Ojibway & English	Diploma	Sitters	Baptism	N/A
18	40	4	3	Bearskin	Oji-Cree & English	HBSW	Spouse, family, friends	N/A	N/A
19	39	9	1	Kitigan Zibi	English	M.Ed	Spouse, daycare	Dedication	N/A
20	43	37	6	Whitesands	Ojibway & English	Grade 6	N/A	Naming, Fasting	N/A

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### 3.5 The Talking Circle Process & Ethics

Once assembled in the circle, participants were given a brief overview of Aboriginal parenting and explanations of childhood in the academic literature and the limited amount of information that currently exists about Ojibway parents. Care was taken to speak in generalities and not to inadvertently influence participants by giving specific, detailed information or by focusing on those areas that are of interest to the researcher. Participants also heard of the researcher's journey in exploring the topic. They were told they are assisting in a PhD dissertation. Participants were encouraged not to feel pressure to provide information they think the researcher wants to hear but to speak from their point of view, to share their experiences of parenting. In addition, they were encouraged not to limit their answers to what they hear others in the circle say.

Care was taken to conduct the study according to ethical guidelines established by the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (Government of Canada, 2005). All participants were adults and competent to give free and informed consent to participate in this study. Participants were informed of the nature of the study by the research assistant (Appendix 1) and asked whether they were willing to participate after they heard the information (Appendix 2). Participants were given the Consent Form (Appendix 3) prior to the Talking Circle. The Consent Form included an option to withdraw at any point of the process even after the Talking Circles were completed.

Participants were told of the nature of information requested from them and that they are participating in a PhD dissertation about Ojibway parenting. Participants' anonymity in the dissertation would be safeguarded by not revealing names or

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information. Data will be aggregated to one of the four Talking Circle groups and/or refer to all participants. Participants were informed that they would have access to the completed dissertation through the School of Social Work office at Lakehead University.

Participants were made aware of the necessity to record digitally the conversations in the Talking Circle. Recordings were necessary due to the large amount of data produced during several hours of speaking. Participants were told that their responses will be transcribed and they will have an opportunity to review their responses for accuracy, not to clarify or add new information. Participants were told that the research assistant will sit outside the Circle to record a participant's first few words so as to keep track of who is talking when she transcribes the recording. Participants were informed that the research assistant signed an Oath of Confidentiality after she agreed to be employed for this research project. The recordings from the digital recorder will be erased when transcriptions are completed and verified by each participant. However, a copy of the recording will remain in the researcher's computer, which is password protected. Participants were told the researcher is required to keep research data up to seven years and that it would be kept secure.

As stated earlier, Aboriginal Peoples are taking greater control of research about them by including their perspectives when possible. Inclusion in research, beyond being mere subjects of research, is one aspect of a decolonization approach to undo past injustices of research by supporting Aboriginal perspectives that may have been ignored, overlooked, or devalued. Supporting Aboriginal perspectives does not prevent critical inquiry or negative conclusions being reached, rather, such positions must be shown to be accurate, informed, and ethical (Government of Canada, 2005). Participants were assured

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that the perspectives and experiences shared will not be used against them, their culture, and will not include judgment. For example, they will not be told they should have known better, or that they are bad parents. Participants were reminded of the pervasive influence of residential schooling among Aboriginal Peoples. The impact of residential schools can be direct for those who were former students, still dealing with the aftermath. For other participants, residential school impacts are indirect. They are the children or relatives of former students, and, as a result, bear the intergenerational effects. There was the likelihood that at least one of the participants was a residential school survivor or bearing intergenerational effects. For this reason participants were informed a trained counsellor would be available to them if memories are stirred and impacts of residential schooling are re-experienced. The counsellor was available to the participants for up to a month after the Talking Circle. Participants could make a request to see the counsellor through the research assistant.

Participants were reminded of the generally-accepted protocol of participating in a Talking Circle, which includes:

The researcher introduces the topic under consideration and facilitates the discussion in a non-judgmental way.

1. Participants' comments are addressed directly to the topic for the study, not to comments another person has made.
2. Opportunities to speak will be given by going around the circle in a clockwise fashion, thus providing each person the opportunity to participate. Participants will be given the choice to pass if they have not formed their response to the question.
3. Participants are free to express themselves in any way that is comfortable: by sharing a story, a personal experience, by using examples or metaphors, and so on.
4. Participants are encouraged to speak from their perspective and experiences.
5. Participants will have an opportunity to share more than once because additional information may come to them as they hear others talk.

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6. Participants will have the opportunity to identify additional guidelines for group conduct while in the Talking Circle.

Once the data was collected and transcribed, within five to seven days after the Talking Circle, participants received a copy of their responses (by mail, email, or picked up at Lakehead University's School of Social Work office during normal business hours). Participants were asked to verify their responses for accuracy to the best of their memory. If there were any corrections or discrepancies with their transcribed responses, they were asked to first contact the research assistant to address misspelled words or other minor changes. If a participant disagreed with whole sentences or large portions of their responses, they would then meet with the researcher and both would listen to the recording to address the discrepancy. Fortunately, the time period between the Talking Circle and viewing their transcribed responses was relatively short and their memories of the experience were fresh. Participants responded within one week of receiving a copy of their transcribed responses, and there were no changes required beyond minor typos. Unknown to each participant beforehand, each was given a fifty-dollar Wal-Mart giftcard for their participation in the Talking Circles.

### 3.6 Analysis of the Data

Researchers who use a decolonization perspective, and those who use Talking Circles as their methods, analyze data in different ways. Some researchers involve participants throughout the analysis and interpretation (Baskin, 2005a, 2005b), while others equate focus group methodology with Talking Circles and use its coding procedures for analysis (Johnson, Green, Anderson-Lewis, & Wynn, 2005). Positivist-oriented researchers use quantitative measures to analyze Talking Circle responses (Ernst,

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1994; Letourneau, et al., 2005). Several Aboriginal researchers immerse themselves in the world view of the indigenous group they are studying and use the Talking Circle as one step in the process of data collection and analysis (Baskin, 2005a; Hains, 2001). For some Aboriginal researchers, Talking Circles are combined with some or all of the following indigenous practices: fasting, prayer, consulting an elder, hosting a community feast, giving gifts, and so on (Graveline, 2000). The combination of processes or protocols differs between First Nations, Aboriginal communities, the Metis, or Inuit. It is the responsibility of the researcher to familiarize themselves with the appropriate protocol and to decide which analytical processes are appropriate for the people involved and the research question.

Analysis is an ongoing, cumulative, and iterative process in qualitative research because decisions must be made beginning with the selection of the research question, the discussion of the findings (Dey, 1993), and the constant rechecking of the process. Strauss and Corbin (1998) recommend researchers on the use notes and memos to record insights and questions throughout the research process. Crabtree and Miller (1992) concluded, after examining qualitative analysis styles, that the development of categories is central to the data analysis process.

A process of categorizing data has not been developed for those studying Ojibway people, therefore, the process of categorizing data in this study is similar to qualitative studies like grounded theory espoused by Strauss and Corbin (1998), who begin by identifying words, phrases or sentences from participants' responses. Responses are reviewed and compared. Similar responses are grouped together to form categories. Categories have features or dimensions that resemble one another and when several

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responses have these qualities they form a theme. Categories were examined within groups and between groups to determine developing themes. Categories unfolded because of the purpose of the research in mind, that is, whether the information collected and coded contributes to answering the research questions. The categories and themes created from the participants' responses to each of the questions were then used to compare and contrast what is already known in the literature on Aboriginal parenting and attachment theory's explanation of two childhood processes.

Qualitative researchers generally collect information above and beyond the questions that initiated the study; therefore, any information gathered that does not address the purposes of the research is treated as 'irrelevant' and will be put aside (Given & Olson, 2003; Wolcott, 1994). Information gathered from the participants that did not answer the research questions was not included in the analysis. The purpose of this exploratory study is to increase knowledge about Ojibway parenting perspectives and practices followed by comparing and contrasting two components of attachment theory.

The quality of the data is affected by the research design and method used to collect the information. The next section deals with some of the limits of using focus groups because critiques of Talking Circles as an indigenous research method are rare in the literature. Some caution is needed in paralleling these methods because they are based on different assumptions.

### 3.7 Limitations

Strickland, Chrisman, Yallup, Powell and Squeoch (1996) used the term focus groups interchangeably with Talking Circles when conducting research with Native Americans. Cultural ceremonies and their meanings play a significant role in

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differentiating focus groups from Talking Circles (Hains, 2001). Since culture is infused with Talking Circles, comparing the limitations of focus groups as equivalent to Talking Circles is a delicate matter. Talking Circles as an indigenous research method in academia is a relatively new phenomenon. Therefore, there are rare instances where its limits are discussed. Philosophical differences in world views is cited as the main gap between Western-based knowledge and Aboriginal knowledge (Duran & Duran, 1995). This situation makes it difficult when attempting to bridge the accumulation of knowledge developed by the respective world views. The cultural significance and value of Talking Circles has already been discussed above. This section will review some of the limitations of focus groups and then compare their potential applicability with Talking Circles.

#### 3.7.1 Group effect

Carey & Smith (1994) raise the concern of group effect in focus groups. They warn that group effect puts increased pressure on participants to say what is socially acceptable for the group, rather than reveal dissenting views or behaviours. Group effect assumes participants withhold their real answer in favour of what has been already stated, rather than recognizing a person can have multiple and conflicting views on any given topic. Parenting is a case in point where behaviours and attitudes range from loving, tender moments with children to those of frustration and exhaustion. In this study, some questions are of a general nature, while others explore which cultural influences reflect parenting experiences and child development knowledge. To counteract the influence of group effect each participant was asked to be the first to answer at least one question.

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Discerning group effect as understood by Carey & Smith (1994) implies the researcher knows each person's real views on the topic prior to the Talking Circle, making data gathering obsolete, unless the intent was to study group effect. When exploring a topic, such as Ojibway parenting, the desirability to distinguish group effect is not as crucial as the importance of obtaining scarce information. In fact, there is a presumption that some participants are willingly biased. They embrace group effect by identifying with an aspect of Ojibway culture. Therefore, they become individually involved with embracing the culture's position on the theme.

In the first question, fathers of children less than five years old all identified different categories of individuals who influenced their parenting. However, on the question of sensitivity, these fathers used the same example of their child climbing into bed with them as their initial example of being sensitive to their child's needs. Group effect may have less influence in some lines of questioning where there is minimal to no expectation of judgment by peers, as in the first question. However, with questions relying on personal opinion and the desirability to appear sensitive as in the sensitivity question, there may be increased pressure to stay close to the responses of the other participants. Undoubtedly, group effect exists in some form, whenever a group of people get together. However, what is affected and the degrees to which they are affected is a dynamic that is difficult to capture.

#### **3.7.2 Facilitator influence**

Morgan (1997) addresses facilitator influence on focus groups. The facilitator/researcher in most research-based focus groups chooses the theme to be discussed. If the information being sought by the researcher is at an exploratory stage,

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they usually want participants to speak freely on the topic, covering as much breadth and depth as possible. The researcher takes on the role of a learner and the participants share information. The gain in participants being free to express their ideas limits the ability to go in-depth with any particular perspective because of time. However, if the topic requires specialized knowledge, "the researcher takes more control in selecting questions but is not sure if the information gained actually mattered to the participants" (Morgan, 1997, p. 40). The topics selected for research can be publicly acceptable or taboo. A more common and acceptable topic generates discussion and ease with participants, while less socially acceptable topics can meet with silence and discomfort. The topic chosen for this study is common but Aboriginal parenting views are relatively scarce in the literature. The topic and the homogeneity of participants increase the likelihood of shared perspectives, experiences, and ease with one another. The researcher's involvement during the Talking Circles was minimal during the first three questions, thus allowing each individual to discuss a range of responses. The last two questions seek detailed information. As a result, participants were asked to expand on their responses if they appeared unclear.

Historically, Aboriginal people conducted Talking Circles routinely and a known elder or leader in the community presided over matters (Hains, 2001). There was an acknowledgement of the elder's authority in the community based on his or her expertise or wisdom. The elder was expected to influence those individuals who were seeking his or her point of view. By comparison, researchers must be aware of bias and attempt to manage bias in a transparent manner. Talking Circles were also used at community gatherings to hear members' concerns or opinions. In these public events, the

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elders/leaders listened and considered what was being said, with the option of giving an immediate response or one at a later date. The elders/leaders who facilitated a community Talking Circle would be similar to a researcher who is exposed to a variety of perspectives and has to synthesize multiple layers of information. Elders/leaders are not expected to hear opinions or rebuttals from participants at every Talking Circle, because there is an acknowledgement of the trustworthiness of the elder/leader's ability to consider, decide, and act on behalf of the community's best interests.

Undoubtedly, the presence of the elder/leader influences what is said, similar to the presence of a researcher. There is no way to avoid this influence. Having said that, it is hard to determine the degree of restraint a person feels in a social setting. There are a myriad of factors at work in the Talking Circle context that can limit or encourage individuals to share their perspective on topics chosen by the researcher.

#### **3.7.3 Concluding comments about limitations**

When Talking Circles focus on specific characteristics of a population, like ethnicity and parenting, they can indicate the range of this community's beliefs, ideas, or perspectives on these topics. This is especially useful when a topic is not well known, or little has been written in the past from this community's point of view. Questions are open-ended in Talking Circles, allowing participants to answer as they wish – in detail or generally. A challenge for researchers studying cultural groups, like the Ojibway, is the tendency for participants to respond to questions as if there is a shared understanding of the world. Consequently, participants who share several similar assumptions may limit the range of their responses because they are talking to insiders, those who share their worldview and they see it unnecessary to say more. If the researcher suspects this is

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happening, he should ask for further clarification. Talking Circles can also uncover indigenous terms used in the topic of interest, i.e. parenting and explanations of childhood.

It should be noted that generalization of the findings is constrained by the purposive and nonrandom snowball sampling technique used in this study. In addition, caution is warranted in generalizing these findings beyond the sample because responses reflect participants' individual interpretations and may not reflect the greater Ojibway culture and traditions. James (1954) criticized his colleagues for their uncritical comparison of the Ojibway of Northern Canada, who were living a subsistence lifestyle to their counterparts in the U.S. Midwest, who were living a sedentary lifestyle. Similarly, context affects participants' experiences and responses. The urban setting in which these participants live has some challenges and opportunities that do not exist in a First Nation community. For example, the relative homogeneity of a First nation community versus the heterogeneity of an urban community. Therefore, this study's findings are limited by this circumstance, although some similarities still exist with Ojibway parents in other contexts.

Although Talking Circles have produced discourses that have brought healing, validation, and liberation for Aboriginal Peoples, there are limits to its applicability, especially when used as the sole means of collecting information. The discourse produced in Talking Circles does not reveal how common a participant's views are in the Ojibway community. However, individual responses may give some indication for further inquiry. Also, the information gained in a Talking Circle does not necessarily reveal actual behaviours of the participants. Observation of participants or being immersed in their

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community would be another important and valuable method for revealing actual behaviours and opinions. The Talking Circle format does not give opportunity to build up a detailed picture of a participant's specific beliefs and experiences; an individual interview format would be preferable for this type of data. There are multiple indigenous formats for uncovering information/knowledge that are also available to researchers. A Talking Circle is only one method (Smith, 1999).

### 3.8 Chapter Summary

This study explores Ojibway parenting perspectives and their stated practices. Historically, Aboriginal People have had their perspectives devalued and ignored because of assimilation policies and negative stereotypes. In response to this silencing of Aboriginal voices, decolonizing research methods have developed to reestablish Aboriginal knowledge. The decolonization process must allow Aboriginal People to use their own words and ideas; thus, a Talking Circle format was chosen as the best means for this study. Talking Circles are a customary form of conveying ideas within Ojibway society. Participants were recruited using a purposive, snowball sampling technique and then divided into four groups, each representing mothers or fathers with children less than five years old or children over eighteen years of age living at home. Each group was asked the same question on parenting and their child's development. The only difference was that the parents of older children had to think back to when their child was an infant/toddler, whereas those with infant/toddlers could use present-day examples. Data was transcribed, verified by participants, and then analyzed for key themes related to the purpose of the research. The next chapter presents participants' responses in their own words with some commentary made by this writer.

## CHAPTER 4

**DATA PRESENTATION****4.1 Introduction**

Participants in this study, with the exception of one, were raised in their First Nation community in Ontario and relocated to Thunder Bay for one of the following reasons: employment, education, access to health services, or increased opportunities for their children. Participants come from seventeen out of the one hundred and thirty four First Nation communities in Ontario. Two participants are the most recent arrivals to Thunder Bay, being here for only one year, while one participant lived in Thunder Bay for forty four years. An interesting discovery, after the Talking Circles were completed, was that eighteen of the twenty participants have a postsecondary diploma or degree. Exposure to other ideas, places, and environments, during their training and/or living in an urban centre, has compelled the participants to reflect on their experiences and broaden perspectives about their ethnicity. Participant responses bear out their cultural orientation by remarking on the differences between their childhoods, communities, and culture from the urban environment they are now in.

A Talking Circle was chosen because of the cultural nature of the study and the interaction required of the participants. Three Talking Circles lasted three-and-a-half to four hours, which is a long time for the participants, researcher, and research assistant. There was a fifteen to twenty minute coffee and sandwich break after the first couple of hours, which also allowed people to eat, stretch, have a cigarette, or go to the bathroom.

One Talking Circle lasted two-and-a-half hours because there were only three participants. This group had eight parents prepared to attend, but a sudden and

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unexpected death occurred a day before the Talking Circle was to meet, affecting the ability of two individuals to attend. Two parents changed their mind about participating in the Talking Circle, on the day of the meeting, and the fifth participant was called to work out of town. It was decided to conduct the Talking Circle with the proviso that if this group of three parents introduced information that was significantly different than the previous three groups of parents then another Talking Circle with more participants from this group would convene. After the Talking Circle, I decided that another group would not be necessary because the responses were similar to the previous three groups of parents.

The process of reducing participant responses to manageable portions requires that repetitive statements be collapsed into one and extraneous comments be put to the side, i.e., those that are not germane to the purpose of the study (Chenail, 1995; Kvale, 1996). For this reason, transcripts were read and reflected upon repeatedly, keeping in mind the question being asked and the purpose of the research. Questions posed to the participants address the lack of information on Aboriginal parenting and giving opportunity to Aboriginal parents to voice their perspectives on parenting without being constrained by a predetermined theory. Two components of attachment theory are included in this exploratory study whereby participants are asked to comment on how they came to know and respond to their child's needs and what they intend to instill in their child that will stay with them into adulthood.

Participants' responses vary from giving biographical, cultural, and contextual information, assigning meanings to their parenting experiences, and wrestling with unresolved questions. Decolonization research keeps the essence of participants'

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responses by being faithful to their words and the contextual, biographical and/or cultural references used by them (Bishop, 2005).

Below is the sequence of five questions posed to the participants from each Talking Circle. Each question is answered in this sequence: a) fathers with children less than five years old; b) mothers with children less than five years old; c) fathers with children eighteen years old and living at home; d) mothers with children eighteen years old and living at home. This presentation style makes it easier to contrast all participants' responses from each Talking Circle. It is easier to detect cultural perspectives and practices that are common when the information from each question is in one location. The alternative is to present each Talking Circle separate and consider participants' responses individually.

The four Talking Circles will be summarized and emerging themes will be identified. The purpose of this study is to identify Ojibway parents' perspectives and practices in parenting and their views on two components of attachment theory.

Participants' verbatim responses are italicized with minor changes made for grammar, i.e. commas, periods, question marks. The researcher's comments are differentiated from participants' words by containing them in brackets to highlight the context and to give succinctness to their responses (Morgan, 1997). The goal is to allow the participants to speak for themselves as much as possible (Wolcott, 1990) yet reduce peripheral information. When presenting participants' responses the data does not speak for itself (Dey, 1993), it requires the reduction, reorganization, and interpretation of the researcher being guided by the purpose of the research and being faithful to the substance of the responses.

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The names of participants' and their children were changed to protect their privacy. The names of First Nation communities mentioned during the Talking Circle are written as First Nation to protect the anonymity of the individual. Participants' gave detailed description of their biography, culture, and circumstances, so it is possible for a person from their community to identify them.

At the end of each Talking Circle, participants were told to expect transcripts of their individual responses in the mail or through email within a week. Participants were to verify that their responses were transcribed accurately and not to add to, clarify, or explain their responses. Participants were to contact the research assistant if they had any questions or concerns regarding their transcripts. Each person received the phone number and email address of the researcher and research assistant. Participants responded within a week of receiving their transcripts and verified their responses were recorded accurately.

A common cultural protocol among the Ojibway and other Aboriginal groups is to gift the people who participated in the Talking Circle, or give a gesture of appreciation for their involvement. Thus, participants received a fifty-dollar Wal-Mart gift card. Participants did not know beforehand that this was part of the benefit of participating.

### **4.2 Who and what has influenced your perspectives on parenting and childrearing?**

The first question allows participants to identify whom and what, as well as how, they have been influenced in their parenting. The question was open-ended to allow participants the freedom to choose their sources of influence.

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### 4.2.1 Fathers with children under five years old

#### a. Mother's influence

One participant mentions his mother as most influential in shaping his parenting values because "*she has always been the core of the family...she always made sure our needs were met.*" The father of this participant was on the periphery, making occasional appearances during holidays and birthdays.

#### b. Father's influence

Another participant mentioned his father as the sole source of influence on his parenting values: "*The way I parent is really close to the way my dad did things.*" In another occasion, the same person stated, "*He has always been the biggest influence in my life*". This participant recalled many hunting and fishing trips with his father. This participant's mom died when he was eleven years old, and his father was left raising eight children.

Another participant, mentioned earlier, identified his father as teaching him an important lesson in life through being a poor role model of not spending time with his children. This participant interprets his parent's act of adopting a child as a "*second chance for parenting, especially my dad.*" The participant believes his father is redeeming for past mistakes through the adoption and by spending time with his grandchildren, "*I'm sure he is very proud to be a grandfather, and all that, he just seems really different from when I was a kid.*" A third participant who mentioned his father spoke of him as someone who was in and out of his life and would occasionally take him fishing or boating but had no significant impact.

#### c. Grandparents' influence

Two of the five participants were raised by their grandparents. They did not mention the conditions that led to these arrangements. One participant who had thought

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about his early influences acknowledged that *"my grandparents had the most effect on me, particularly my grandmother."* The other participant recalled his grandmother's unconditional love for others and her hospitality, while his grandfather's maxim of *"don't worry about it"* still resonated with him to this day. A third participant mentioned living in a multi-generational and multi-family home where grandparents, parents, aunts/uncles, and children lived in the same household. For this participant, grandparents were remembered as storytellers. The other three participants did not mention their grandparents at all.

#### **d. Life experiences**

Besides identifying individuals, participants revealed other influences on their parenting. Many participants recalled a particular troublesome area of life during their childhood that they witnessed and/or experienced and vowed not to allow that in their family. One participant witnessed violence and domestic abuse and commented on his dad: *"he wasn't the nicest guy when he was around. That translated into me doing everything more of the opposite than he had done it."*

Another participant stated, *"I don't use alcohol or drugs or whatever. I quit that over twenty years, or so ago now. The reason why I do that is because I don't want my children to see me like that. Because I seen my father and my grandparents like that and I didn't like it. So, for me, that's the only way I can stop the cycle."*

A third participant, mentioned earlier, used his father's absence during his childhood as a life lesson for him not to repeat. A fourth participant presented a balanced view of his parents *"I've seen my dad's mistakes, I've seen my mom's mistakes but I've*

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*also seen their examples, they weren't perfect or anything, but I think somehow they lacked their own skills as a parent so it was like a learning process for them as well."*

One participant mentioned the birth of his daughter as a defining moment,

*"When my daughter was born and the first time I held her, that slogan 'Stamp Out Virginity' came to mind that my daughter will see me as a figure in her life and how will she see me? Will she see me as a loving, caring, considerate father in her life, or will she see me as a person wearing this shirt saying 'Stamp out Virginity'. To this day, five years, going on six, I still see myself trying to be that kind, caring, considerate, compassionate father, rather than a person wearing this shirt saying..."*

This father goes on to mention that he is aware that *"whatever I do here with her reverberates ten or fifteen years down the road."* Although each father does not identify this effect explicitly as this particular father did, they all attest to the long term impact of parents' behaviours on their children, through changing troublesome areas they experienced and/or witnessed.

One father identified his attendance of residential school as affecting his ability to parent and driving him to seek answers in the Ojibway culture: *"I was kind of reborn into the culture because I was kind of forced into Christianity being in residential school"*. For this person, he had to undo the negative information he had received about himself and his culture and embrace cultural teachings. This father went on to talk about attending conferences on residential schools and hearing testimonies of former students that helped him identify his own need for healing.

### 4.2.2 Mothers with children under five years old

#### a. Mother's influence

These mothers identify their parents as being the most influential in shaping how they parent. All of these participants grew up in two-parent families; most were raised in a First Nation community with the exception of one mother. Most of these participants

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single out their mothers as the one who had the most impact. No one mentioned their father explicitly. One participant summed up the sentiment of all the mothers in this group when she stated *"I could see my mom in me when I'm with my daughter, sometimes that's good and sometimes I think 'My God!'"* One participant stated *"when I start yelling I see my mother and I don't want to be like that."* They also identified practical lessons learned from their mothers, such as, *"providing structure," "being strict," "learning to cook," "disciplining,"* and *"always being there."*

#### **b. In-Laws' influence**

One mother's comment on who influenced her parenting uncovers an important dynamic in the Aboriginal community in general, that is, the history of residential schools and their impacts on the family. For this mom, she had to turn to others outside her immediate family, *"My in-laws, they have lived a healthier life and they have helped me parent more than my own parents and grandparents did. I tried to do what my parents didn't do."* This participant made known that her parents had attended residential school and were not nurtured throughout their childhood and as a result did not know how to nurture their children: *"in my own family, with my mother and grandmother there was always screaming and very, very angry..."*. Another mom was given advice by her mother-in-law: *"my ex's mom kind of showed this to me and showed me how to go about doing things for your children."*

In-laws are also examples of what not to do, one mother mentions: *"she (daughter) spends time with her grandmother, so I know I try to do the opposite of what she does."* This mother was aware of the in-law's behaviours when her daughter slept

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over, allowing the granddaughter to eat candies whenever she wanted and not have a bedtime routine, and so on, undermining the mother's rules.

#### **c. Life experiences**

A couple of the mothers in the group reacted to negative incidents they have witnessed or experienced. One mother recalls her mother's impact by stating,

*"I didn't realize this until later on. She was very strict, very, but she was very authoritarian which was really mean but she put fear in me to actually listen to her, let alone the disappointment. She did the hitting and everything, that is the things I don't do, but yet I'm strict."*

Having had the type of upbringing she describes, she is careful not to repeat the same experience for her children. Another mother in the group refers to this when she remarks about her mother and the lesson learned: *"she scared me with fear, just like her mother (pointing to the previous speaker). I try to be strict, but when I start yelling, I see my mother and I don't want to be like that."*

#### **d. Other influences**

Mothers' disclosed a variety of influences on their parenting, beyond those mentioned above. One mother attended parenting classes and attributes the information she received there as being very helpful. Two mothers stated that their children, unknowingly, teach them about compassion and love. One mom remembered her grandmother's subtle influence of storytelling, where she revealed a warning or a teaching within the story's plot. Another mother learned about parenting, and what values to adopt, by assisting her sister in raising her children. Finally, one mother sought guidance from the person she considered would provide the best information.

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### 4.2.3 Fathers with children over eighteen years old

#### a. Parents' influence

All three of these men attribute parental influences on their subsequent parenting values. One man recalled the *"easy-going"* nature of his parents, with the understanding, *"but, if you messed up, you really got it."*

One man was animated about his desire to be held and to be told he was loved. He had discussions with his siblings about these matters and they told him to accept that he was loved without experiencing the holding and hearing the words. This father response to them was and continues to be: *"That is not good enough, I wanted to be held, I would rather been held and my mom saying 'I love you' everyday."*

The third father experienced and witnessed alcohol abuse and violence in his family and is able to take a lesson of family sticking together despite the *"dysfunctions."* He acknowledges his upbringing affected his parenting: *"that influenced how I parented, with all the scars or whatever influenced my parenting skills as time, when it was my turn to parent."*

#### b. Grandmothers' influence

One father recalls the availability of his grandmother when things were really bad at his home. He had the freedom to live with his grandmother as long as he wanted, until things cooled down at the house: *"My grandmother was my protector. She would take me away from my immediate family and spent a lot of time at her house. Even my aunts and uncles, my grandmother would prevent them from influencing me."* The other two fathers did not mention their grandparents as having influenced them.

#### c. Life experiences

The fathers used their childhood experiences as instructions on what to correct in their own parenting. The father who was not held and not told the words he wanted to

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hear, ensures his children hear it. This change occurred after stopping a dysfunctional lifestyle: *"When I stopped drinking and started questioning my belief systems ... trying to educate myself on how to do it differently ... a different way you can love your children."*

As a result of the changed lifestyle, he corrects what was missing in his life: *"And that is something I do everyday with my kids. I kissed them and told them I love them, ever since they were born."*

The second father reacted to his stern upbringing within a child welfare system as a foster child: *"So that is how I became a parent to my kids was strict that's simply because I did not want them to experience the things that I had to experience."*

#### 4.2.4 Mothers with children over eighteen years old

##### a. Parents' influence

Most of the mothers in this group stated their parents have influenced their parenting. One mother attributed the longevity of her parent's marriage as testament of providing a *"secure environment."* A second mother credited her parents *"old, traditional ways of camping, fishing, hunting, and speaking the language"* as being influential. A third mother acknowledged her parents but singled out her mother as *"the boss,"* of the family and *"she was always there helping me out with my own kids."* The fourth mother in the group said that she *"had two mothers,"* her mother and grandmother helping her, and influencing her values. One mother was raised by her aunt and uncle because her mother died when she was an infant. She learned a strict way of parenting through her aunt and uncle.

##### b. Life Experiences

These mothers, like those in the other Talking Circles, referred to negative experiences as lessons in life. One mother witnessed her parent's drinking:

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*“there are things I don’t do. Like at home, there was alcohol involved so that was one thing that I thought I would never do. So, growing up in that, I thought I would never do that for my own family cause I know what it feels like. And I kept that promise to myself.”* Another mother recalls: *“The way I was disciplined was very strict and kind of harsh and I didn’t want to be like that.”*

This mom went to missionaries that were living in her community for advice and counselling on how to discipline her children.

### **c. Extended family & In-Laws**

Some mothers grew up surrounded by parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and the community, in general, watching over each other’s children: *“I guess all the family was around I recall my aunts, uncles, and everybody was just family and everybody parented each other’s kids growing up in the community.”* Another mom was instructed by her in-laws to be strict with her children.

### **d. Cultural values**

One mother mentioned the role of cultural values that were prevalent during her childhood:

*“I guess what really influenced the way I parent, is that we were always taught to respect one another, you don’t mouth off to elders, and that kind of stuff. But also the thought of children should be seen and not heard.”*

### **4.2.5 Summary of who and what influenced participants**

Most participants mentioned their mothers as influencing their perspectives on parenting. Participants went on to describe personal qualities of their mother that were exemplars of a parent. For those participants who were not raised by their mother, they would identify the person who took responsibility for their wellbeing and describe personal qualities. Two participants mentioned that their family of origin did not teach them constructive parenting and had to rely on their in-laws for guidance.

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Participants also recalled a significant negative life event that remains a source of what not to do as a parent. For example, several participants grew up in a family where one or both parents drank alcohol excessively and responded to this event by not consuming alcohol or allowing it in their home.

### 4.3 What would be an example of Ojibway parenting?

#### 4.3.1 Fathers with children under five years old

##### a. Worldview

This category relates to participants' general outlook towards life, one that eventually affects their parenting practices. One father's conclusion about Aboriginal people is *"They were almost symbiotic with the spirit world, with nature around them but with each other and there is a true sense of communal aspect."* Later on, another father phrases his thoughts similarly, by stating

*"The biggest thing I've seen is that native people have more respect of things. Not just respect for living things, for everything, because we believe, part of the land, part of the earth, and the reason is because we believe everything is alive. ...That is the way I was brought up. If you go hunting, you throw tobacco down, whenever you go fishing, you put tobacco on the water to make fishing better."*

Another father's comments are slightly different. He only mentioned the land and not the previous inclusion of spirituality: *"The only thing I can think of as an Ojibway way of parenting is being out on the land and showing your kids one thing, whatever, ... associated with the Anishnawbe way.... One thing I don't know if it will ever change, being Anishnawbe, for me anyways, just means being part of the land."*

##### b. Humour

A couple of fathers comment on how Aboriginal people socially interact with one another through being, initially, *"quiet"* and eventually engaging in *"humour."* These social interactions have common characteristics that are continually repeated: *"and I*

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*know a lot of natives who are always laughing. Laughing puts everyone at ease and it is good medicine too. That is one of the biggest things about native parenting that I've seen."* Also, mentioned in an earlier category, the relationship between parents and children is described as "warm" "cosier," and full of "humour."

### c. Contrasted to 'White' parenting

Three of the fathers in this Talking Circle are married to "White" women and they contrast their answers of Ojibway parenting with examples of their spouse's thinking, her family, or, their generalization of Europeans:

*"I think sometimes, with my wife, she is non-native, I have to explain to her what parenting is all about .... I still have to keep explaining to her our way of doing things, some things like disciplining or maintaining some order in the house. ... With 'Nish' people (short form for Anishnawbe) I think we tend to be a little softer, cosier with the kids, with our family. I don't think they (Whites) see us like that, they see us as wooden Indians standing by the store. But when we're with our families, I see a lot of emotions and I don't see that in non-native families, it seems like they are kind of detached."*

One of the fathers offered a "fundamental difference in parenting" of 'white people' is *"they have a lot of order, there's bath time, bedtime, they tend not to tell stories, they don't touch, they don't play around as much, they don't laugh a lot."* This perception of order is in contrast to the response from one of the fathers in the group who likes to maintain order with his three boys, *"otherwise they are going to... lose full control and its going to take a bit of work to get this back."*

Another father told a story of taking his wife to the reserve:

*"When I took my wife to be back home, I said to her, she is not Indian, she's White, You just have to see this world. I said, I can't explain it to you, you just have to experience it. I can't tell you what it is like to sit down for a meal with a group of four people to eat and the next thing you know there's twenty of you. Or, going to bed, there is five people in the*

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*house and you wake up there is ten people sleeping on the floor, and no one locks their doors."*

To this father, the openness of sharing a meal or providing a place to sleep are important Ojibway values.

The third father acknowledged his wife's initiative on maintaining the Ojibway language, in spite of him.

*"I guess that's the Anishnawbe way of parenting, language-wise, that's really not too much, me. My wife, actually, is more of the one that wants to promote all that thing, than I do. She's not native either, she got all that from Head Start"*

In this situation, the white woman is trying to maintain an Anishnawbe language, while the speaker of the language is more relaxed about it.

### **d. Language**

Two fathers stated that the Anishnawbe language was an important feature of parenting: *"My daughter, and my sons, my other ones, they started learning Ojibway from their grandparents, ... in that sense they might learn an identity, you know, when they hear Ojibway."*

### **e. Indian Names**

One father's meaning of Ojibway parenting involved a ceremony, *"I think with my children, my grandmother gave them their Indian names. ... So I think this gave them their identity, so that they know, they have substance, more than just having brown skin and being called Indian, there's more to it."* A second father mentioned his parenting role, he taught his children their *"spirit names."* This father did not go into detail on the role of this feature of parenting.

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### **f. Other**

There were several answers to the question of Ojibway parenting. Some answers were given as a menu list, while other answers were described or explained. The list that follows are the words and phrases participants used to answer the question of Ojibway parenting.

One father spoke of teaching his children about “*dreams*” and of using “*story-telling*” as his primary teaching tool. Another father mentioned participating in “*ceremonies and pow-wows*” with his children. One participant commented on the ability of Ojibway people to “*make do*” with what is at hand and that this was a distinguishing feature of parenting. Making due was the ability to improvise when the context demands an action or requirement that you were not prepared for. This father was referring to hospitality, fishing, and harvesting berries. Another father spoke of “*sharing*” the harvest, of hunting or fishing, with community members. “*Doing things together as a family*” was another aspect of Ojibway parenting for one father. One father phrased his response by stating “*Once I had kids, it’s not about me anymore and it was about them*”. This father goes on to say “*I’m learning so my son can learn.*” This father acknowledged the requirement to change the focus of life from himself towards his children and realized that whatever knowledge he has is the basis of what his children would ultimately learn from him. Finally, one father described his responsibility of having to care for younger siblings as a training ground for learning to “*care for others*”.

### **4.3.2 Mothers with children under five years old**

Five of the six mothers grew up in a First Nations community. The other participant in this Talking Circle grew up in an urban centre and declined to answer this question. Presumably, because she did not have her First Nation community as a cultural

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reference point for Ojibway parenting: *"I don't really know how to answer that question because I don't know what life was like living on my reserve."*

All of these mothers had two-parent families, unlike their male counterparts with a variety of family constellations. The mothers' responses varied from the tentative *"I don't know"* to the assured *"I think we are different."*

### **a. There is no difference**

When questioned on Ojibway parenting, one participants said: *"I don't know. I have a lot of non-native friends, good friends, who are parents and we go through a lot of the same stuff. We think a lot of the same. I don't think so when you get down to it."* This mother socializes with parents who have similar aged children going through the educational system and presumably, comparable developmental stages. It is a natural social phenomenon to compare and contrast one another's children because of like experiences and challenges. As far as this mother is concerned, there are no differences when she compares her child and parenting with those of her non-native friends. Another mom individualizes parenting and by implication does not think there is an overall 'Ojibway-style' of parenting:

*"I guess that I can really say is that any differences between them is the individual background. I don't think it has anything to whether they are native or non-native it's just how they were brought up, the different ways they were brought up within their culture. I think that the backgrounds may kind of influence the values that are in your parenting not really your parenting, in general. Everybody's parenting styles are different whether you're native or non-native, you know what I mean?"*

### **b. "I have changed"**

More than one mother acknowledged that they are the ones who have changed since relocating to an urban centre: *" maybe it's myself that has changed from the way the community raises their children. Maybe I'm the one that's different, maybe I'm the*

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*one parenting like a white person.*" Another mom confirms the above statement with "*I keep thinking of what \*\* said about how maybe she changed and, I think it's true*" To these moms, they are not parenting in an Ojibway-style because they see more similarity with their non-Ojibway counterparts, than their peers from their First Nation community.

#### **c. Historically**

One mother viewed Ojibway parenting as a historical fact and found it difficult to identify it in contemporary society: "*There probably was a special kind of parenting and family and stuff like that which would be a little different compared to now.*"

#### **d. Community of Origin**

Each mother used their community of origin to compare their experiences of childhood with their children growing up in an urban centre, for example one participant claimed: "*For my childhood and how she is being raised is different. I know that.*" Additionally, these parents locate the influence of Ojibway parenting to their community of origin:

*"I watch some of the kids up north and my friends that are back home in my community it must just be the environment if people are there to support you and you can just let your child go play in the community. I'm sure if I raised her up north or in a different community it would be different. With a large extended family it would be different."*

Their urban community and immediate family are not able to reproduce the environment in which they can parent as their counterparts do back home. The urban context exerts its own rules of parenting that limits these moms from replicating their First Nation community-of-origin parenting practices.

#### **e. We are different**

"*I think we are different.*" This mom integrated "*the seven teachings*" as reflective of Ojibway parenting. These teachings are moral codes or values that govern social and

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individual behaviour. Responsibility of passing on these teachings rests with parents, extended family, and the community. This mom went on to state that she used the seven teachings to guide her daughter's behaviour.

### 4.3.3 Fathers with children over eighteen years old

These fathers are certain there is a unique style of parenting that is reflective of Ojibway people and they provided several examples. However, there was some acknowledgement of certain aspects of Ojibway parenting being lost or being unable to be fulfilled. One father commented on external forces, like the government, changing the community to the point that historical practices no longer exist. This father stated, "*But, yeah, I do believe there is a way to raise children but I didn't really get it. I really didn't get it. I feel cheated. There is a way and I wish I had it.*"

#### a. Living off the land

One father remembers his dad's lifestyle "*He used to go to the bush all winter and come back with fur and fish and all that.*" Yet, this participant did not get to experience the hunting/trapping lifestyle:

*"If I could have had that, I would love that. I never got the benefit of him teaching me any of it cause he was kind of beat up by alcohol, and he couldn't really take me out into the bush and teach me the Anishnawbe way."*

#### b. Connection to the land

One father distinguished his response stating a 'connection to the land' as opposed to 'living off the land':

*"I have a connection with the land, I didn't know it back then why I was so connected with it, but now I know what my spirit is, what my clan is, and it all makes sense to me now. So, like, we're a wolf clan."*

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This father does not comment on harvesting food or furs from the land, instead his association to the land is spiritual. Another father claims, *"I feel like, for some reason, I feel connected to the earth, but I don't know why? But I do."*

### **c. Extended family**

Ojibway parenting is reflected in extended family, according to one father:

*"There's a whole lot of sharing of themselves. Extended family just helping one another just to be able to live a good life. The families would get together every weekend or even in the summer and go and do the traditional way of life."*

However, times have changed, and these fathers point out *"Unfortunately, because of jobs and everything else, it is very seldom, we are unable to get together and share the good times."*

### **d. The community as extended family**

One father recalled a time when the community acted like one big extended family:

*"we were a close-knit community, like, but everything has changed. ... as much as people were messed up, and all that, there was this sense of everybody caring for everybody. ... there was this extended family motto you know and I thought that was right on, it was neat."*

This father shared the sentiment of the community spirit being lost by government interference: *"By the time I was born, the impact, it was already being impacted, the whole way of life was already being ripped out of there."*

### **e. Training style**

Parents, in-laws, or other adults had a certain style of training. One of the participants recalled following his father-in-law on his trapline and he would be shown how to set various traps. This father went on to say that detailed verbal instructions were

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not given, rather he was expected to learn how to trap by watching how it is done: *"they showed you what to do and you did it."*

#### **f. Unconditional love**

One father commented on the *"unconditional love that was shared right across"* the whole family. According to this father everyone in the family was included in activities and each one contributed according to their abilities:

*"everyone knew their part. My dad was the fisherman, my uncle was more of the hunter, and my other uncle was the trapper. And my aunts, the same way: cooking, baking, chores, and activities. So, that is the way they were utilized and they were respected each other for the gifts that they had."*

#### **4.3.4 Mothers with children over eighteen years old**

##### **a. Liberal-style parenting**

A couple of mothers refer to their observations of parents on the reserve, *"they don't say enough to their kids, maybe its because, its, they are on a reserve and they let their kids go out and play and go wherever and do whatever."*

##### **b. Extended family and community**

A mother shared her experience of living on her reserve, both historically and currently, as one extended family network: *"people look out for one another they watch over everybody's kids, ... I think that there is an Ojibway way because it is a community."*

This mother portrayed an opposite observation from the mother who commented on the liberal parenting practices of her community: *"if something happened we always went to get the parent. Nobody just left them, these kids doing something they knew wasn't right."*

Another mother picked up the theme of extended family and stated that she did not have extended family to help her because both her parents and those of her husband's had died prior to seeing their grandchildren. Also, from her observations: *"I think too, a long time ago, parents and grandparents were very involved in helping grandkids. I don't really*

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*notice that now that I'm parenting, I never really noticed that they were really helping."*

A third mother stated that her six sisters used to help one another out with their parenting, when their children were young.

### 4.3.5 Summary of Ojibway parenting question

Participants mentioned several features and practices of Ojibway culture as indicative of Ojibway parenting. These features range from the philosophical, linguistic, historical, ceremonial and social aspects (family, extended family, and community) of the culture. Some participants focused on particular practices like the language, humour, sharing, and living off the land.

There were some surprising responses when participants questioned whether they were 'Ojibway' in their parenting. Other participants, who were married to white women, compared their parenting with their wives to arrive at what Ojibway parenting is.

## 4.4 What was the significance of the ceremony or ritual with your child?

### 4.4.1 Fathers with children under five years old

#### a. Naming Ceremony

Two fathers mentioned the Naming Ceremony as part of the Ojibway parenting question earlier. One of the fathers gave an example of how the Naming Ceremony is applied to a situation where his child was teased at school. The father's advice to his child was: *"Tell them your Indian name, that's who you are."* The Naming Ceremony gives a child a name from the spirit world; this name also assigns certain characteristics and, in some instances, gives direction on one's life. The father used his child's spirit name to counteract negative images from teasing because the name is believed to be the true identity or nature of the child. Another father states that his daughter's *"Ojibway name"* foreshadowed her character.

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### **b. Contemporary Naming**

One father had four names for his daughter but they were not assigned according to Ojibway Naming Ceremony. This father took

*“... names that are symbolic, that represent some of the most powerful events in my life. That this is the only way I could express to my daughter this point. So she carries a lot of power behind those names. This rich legacy of strong, powerful women that she can look up to.”*

These names given to his daughter have an absolute quality “*but more importantly, or just as importantly, is having a tradition of caring and loving irregardless of what happens.*” Each name signifies a positive attribute, and it is the parents who must teach their daughter what these attributes are and what they mean. For this family, it is the mother’s and grandmothers’ positive characteristics that the daughter is ‘inheriting’ or is expected to emulate.

### **c. Birthing Experience**

One father declared that the birthing experience of his sons foreshadowed their personalities. “*I think that, one thing that I really noticed with my kids is that when they were born something always happens*”. This father went on to describe different set of circumstances for each of his son’s births and how this mirrored their personality development.

#### **4.4.2 Mothers with children under five years old**

Three of the six mothers have not participated in any type of ceremony for or with their children. These mothers are aware of the various ceremonies available to them, because they are able to name the ceremonies and some state they had planned to participate in such events.

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### a. Baptism

Three mothers had their children baptized in various denominations of the Christian faith. The significance of baptism was not described or explained by the mothers.

### b. Naming Ceremony

The mothers who had their child baptized also had their children participate in a Naming Ceremony. One of the mothers had her first child baptized, and her other children had a Naming Ceremony. These mothers did not go into detail about the Naming Ceremony.

## 4.4.3 Fathers with children over eighteen years old

### a. Baptism

Two of the three fathers in this group participated in infant baptism according to the Catholic tradition. One father admitted to being pressured by his aunts to get his daughter baptized, despite not knowing the teachings of the Catholic Church. This father participates in Ojibway spiritual practices and has his daughter accompany him occasionally. The other father who had his daughter baptized admits to attending church for his daughter's sake: *"I was doing it more for her than for myself so she wouldn't feel forced into it, the beliefs that go along with it, being baptized"*. The ceremony was significant for the church rather than a reflection of a personal belief held by the father or an understanding held by the child.

### b. Culture

The third father adopted Ojibway cultural practices later in his life, when his daughter was in her teens. He tells the story of trying to influence his daughter to participate in pow-wows and her resistance. The lesson he learned in this was discovering

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his daughter's autonomy and allowing her to choose to participate in Ojibway ceremonies.

### 4.4.4 Mothers with children over eighteen years old

#### a. Baptism

All five of the mothers in this group participated in infant baptism for their children. They all admitted to being influenced by family or the community to baptize their child. They participated “*because that is what you're supposed to do.*”

#### b. Naming Ceremony

One of the mothers participated in the Naming Ceremony with their children after they were adults.

#### c. Baby Dedication

One mother who had her first three children baptized, had her fourth child dedicated to the Lord. In the Christian faith, this practice puts the responsibility of raising the child upon the parents.

### 4.4.5 Summary of childhood ceremony

Most participants had a ceremony with their infant. Two types of ceremonies were predominant, the Naming Ceremony and/or Baptism. A Naming Ceremony had several meanings for parents: these included an identity, traits, and qualities that would assist their child on their life role and in being part of the Ojibway people. Family members and the community insisted upon baptism, for most participants. The actual teachings were not significant to most parents, because they did not understand the purpose of the ceremony. One participant did act on the teachings of baptism by having her child attend Sunday school throughout his childhood.

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One participant mentioned a family naming practice of conferring the names of grandparents and a plant to convey qualities that they aspire for their child. A couple of participants indicated that they did not have a ceremony for their child.

### **4.5 What are some of the more important needs of your child before they are two years old and how do/did you go about meeting those needs?**

#### **4.5.1 Fathers with children less than five years old**

The fathers in this group answered similarly to the first participant's response, that is, they used similar words or events. Their words echoed the sentiment of 'being there' for their children, and they used the same dilemma of the child coming to sleep with the parents during the night as the example. These fathers are all responding to a child-initiated need and do not mention their understanding of a child's needs prior to the child requesting assistance.

##### **a. "Being There" or "Being Available"**

One father expressed the sentiment of being there this way: *"Our daughter slept with us ever since ..., even until now. We were just letting her know that she was loved and there was always someone there for her at any time of the day."* Another father responds to the question of a child's needs by agreeing with the father who responded before him, *"It's like he said, they need that, and there is comfort there, and there is someone there that is going to take care of them."* The general attitude of 'being there' is more reactionary than proactive: that is, parents are willing to meet their children's needs as they unfold rather than state they know their child's needs ahead of time. It is not clear, whether this was their general disposition for parenting or only for these bedtime routines.

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### **b. Other**

In addition to agreeing with the sentiment of 'being there for your child,' two fathers provided information on additional needs that were not mentioned. One father answered by stating "*being loved is important to a child.*" The second father responded with: "*I think a child, before two, needs both parents.*" These fathers do not elaborate on their answers, instead they echoed the example of the child sleeping with the parents.

### **4.5.2 Mothers with children less than five years old**

There was a variety of answers from these mothers, ranging from "*not knowing what the child's needs are*" to "*knowing it all.*"

#### **a. Not Knowing**

Mothers who were in their teenage years when they became parents had the most difficulty in being aware of their child's needs. One mother states, "*I had no clue,*" another mom acknowledged: "*I didn't know what to do, I didn't know when to feed him or anything*".

#### **b. Knowing it all or intuitively**

A couple of mothers thought they "*knew it all*" and went about meeting their child's needs with very little support or information from others. One mother adopted an infant at nine weeks old and went about meeting her needs as she saw fit: "*I was a kick-ass parent.*" The other mom helped her sister raise two daughters and matter-of-factly met their needs with very little thought or emotional involvement. She stated: "*you know what they need because you put them on a schedule*". For these mothers, their interpretations of what the children needed were central to their behaviours.

#### **c. Personal struggles**

Two mothers struggled with post-partum depression. One mother, who thought she "*knew it all*" because of the easy process with the adopted child, had her second child

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through natural birth and was soon dependent on others and formal social services to help her parent. The second mother, who had helped her sister raise her children was “*a very nervous parent*”. A third parent revealed how her experiences of childhood affected her parenting: “*I realized if my needs aren’t being met I’m having a hard time to be a mom*”. These moms’ experiences show the importance of the parent’s state of mind in meeting a child’s needs.

#### **d. Multiple roles & responsibilities**

Many mothers provided examples of their children soliciting attention, but the mothers, for one reason or another, were prevented from immediately meeting that need. For these mothers, the additional responsibilities placed on them by their family, employer, or educational institution made juggling responsibilities difficult. At times, these multiple responsibilities were at the expense of meeting their children’s needs immediately. These mothers also told of reordering their priorities so that they did not have to ignore their children’s needs. For one mother, this meant delaying her postsecondary education until her children were older: “*I dropped out of college. I’m going back next year. Now I have all this extra time. I want to spend more time playing with them.*” For another mom, employed full time, this meant doing household chores after the children were in bed. In contrast, for one mom, it meant having to accept that her home would not be as tidy as it used to be.

#### **e. Formal services**

Some mothers sought formal social services, such as a parenting class, to help them identify their child’s needs. Other moms took advantage of formal services meant to assist in their parenting and to expose them to other parents.

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### **f. The child expressing what their needs are**

Several mothers spoke of their children wanting them to play or hug them: "*Now that she is older, she tells me what she needs.*" These spoken requests begin during the toddler years and onwards. At times these expression of need compete with other demands on the mother.

### **g. Trial & error**

During infancy, several mothers told of the "*trial and error*" process of understanding and getting to know their child's needs. The common experience was distinguishing the types of cries that signalled feeding, changing, or just being uncomfortable.

### **h. Appealing to others**

At the beginning of parenthood, many mothers were "*seeking a lot of advice*" from "*grandparents,*" "*mothers,*" "*nurses,*" and "*other parents.*" Some of these mothers had postsecondary training in child development and knew "*through textbooks*" many aspects of their child's development: "*I mean, I'm a teacher by trade, so I knew what the child needed developmentally and physically. But emotionally, that was difficult for me to just sit there and hold this baby.*" From this point, this particular mother sought out professional help.

### **4.5.3 Fathers with children over eighteen years old**

These fathers provided an array of examples of how they determined what their child's needs were. Rather than appealing to some abstract notion of children's needs, these fathers used the immediate context and their childhood experiences to inform regarding what their children needed.

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### **a. Stability**

One father described living with his in-laws as *“two families in conflict with one another. When we got our own place, it sort of stabilized and we were able to interact more like a family.”*

For this father, finding a home apart from his in-laws provided *“stability”* in his immediate family that was not there before. For another father, working out-of-town meant being absent during the week, which resulted in his infant son being fearful when he returned home. This father changed jobs to be with his son: *“So I started driving cab just so that I could see, so my son wouldn’t freak out, give him that steady, consistent attention that he needed.”* The infant’s fearful reaction alerted this father to the infant’s need for a constant presence of a caregiver to meet needs as they developed: *“I think that’s what they needed the most, just being there.”*

### **b. Education**

One father’s basic need for his children was for them to *“get an education, get them in school so they can learn something.”*

### **c. “Everything that I never had”**

One father exclaimed that

*“when I started having kids, there is one thing, for sure, that I wanted for them, and that is everything that I never had... the comfort, the attachment with my parents, the protection, safety, even the basic things. I wanted to make sure my kids had proper attire because I didn’t want them to go through embarrassment and everything else growing up.”*

For this father, his children’s needs were based on his recollection of personal experiences of deprivation.

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### 4.5.4 Mothers with children over eighteen years old

#### a. Safety and Security

One mother summed up her parenting during the first two years: *"I would have to say it was important that he feels safe and secure, and how I met that need was always being there for him."* Another mother echoed similar words: *"I think the most important thing for them, I guess, was their safety, security, being there for them."*

#### b. Both parents

Two different mothers repeated similar needs for their children during infancy: *"For me, it was both parents raising the kids, ... it was important for me to have the father beside me with the little babies and me staying at home with the baby."* The second mother also stressed the desire for having both parents: *"I guess, cause, I didn't grow up with my parents. I wanted my children to know that both of the parents were there ... just to feel security and love."*

### 4.5.5 Summary of question

Participants answered this question in two parts. Some focused on identifying what their child's needs were, while others emphasized meeting their child's needs. Those who identified their child's needs used words like "love," "stability," "safety," "security," "education", and "everything I never had."

Those participants who focused on the pragmatic nature of sensitivity describe their process of coming to understand what their children needed. For some it was through trial and error, while for others it meant seeking assistance, and a few participants acted on what they thought their child needed, relying on their intuition and the observations of other parents.

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### 4.6. What are you doing now that will impact your child into adulthood?

#### 4.6.1 Fathers with children less than five years old

##### a. Employment

For one father, “*having a job*” meant he could meet his family’s needs on a daily basis and this, in turn, will impact his children into the future. It was important for this father to communicate, to his children, the necessity of employment to meet day-to-day responsibilities:

*“They see me going to that big bank, Toronto Dominion, you know, and they would say, ‘Is that your bank? You can get money from there?’ I’d say, well you have to work in order to get money from the big bank”.*

According to this father, his employment is producing an outcome: “*I give them, I guess, security or something.*” This father describes his role as provider and that his employment created a stable environment for his children where their needs are continuously met, which results in “*security.*”

##### b. Role Modeling

One participant observed: “*You definitely have to watch things that you do, they learn vicariously by watching, they pick up a real lot.*” This father recognized that his behaviours were affecting to his children: “*To me, whatever you teach your kids, it’s going to come out later anyway.*” For this father, being vigilant in how he lives his life when his children are around is important.

##### c. Differing roles between parents

One father compared his parental role to his wife’s role: “*I’m not the backbone, but their mom gives them all the love.*” This father described his long absences from home, due to employment, as resulting in the mother bearing the primary responsibilities of meeting the children’s emotional needs. To this father, each parent contributed different features to their children’s development.

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### **d. Activities**

A couple of fathers believe that exposing their children to an assortment of activities and experiences will have a positive, long term effect. One father spoke of trying several activities with his daughter until she focused on one: *"Having her share and discover what she enjoys doing the most and have that fire light up in her eyes."* Similarly, another father spoke of relocating to an urban centre from a rural, isolated community, and, he thought that the myriad of activities his daughters were involved with *"will help them out in teaching."* For these fathers, the community provided opportunities for their children that have a long term impacts on the children discovering their passion in life which is connected to positive mental health.

### **e. Spending time with them**

For one father, time spent with his children *"empowers"* them. This father has three sons less than six years old, and, each week, he tries to spend some time with each child individually. He is able to see the positive effects of his attention, most notably on his six year old son. For this father, these weekly purposeful actions will have the long term effect of being *"successful in both worlds."* Both worlds refers to the Anishnawbe (Ojibway) world and white world.

## **4.6.2 Mothers with children under five years old**

### **a. Values towards oneself**

Most of the mothers indicated one or more values that they wished to instill in their children. Some of these values were focused towards the personal development of the child, e.g. *"a good work ethic," "self esteem,"* or, *"grow up to be good people."* One mother who adopted a child is careful to *"reassure"* her daughter that she is *"special"* because this mother knows that questions of belonging will surface later in life: *"I'm hoping that preparing her now."*

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### **b. Values directed towards others**

The majority of the values identified by the mothers were directed towards others, i.e., “*respect*,” “*don’t judge people*,” “*have empathy*,” and, “*treat others how they want to be treated*.” These mothers were developing their children’s attitude toward others.

### **c. Structure**

One mother declared the importance of providing “*structure*,” as a long term consequence, for her daughter in response to the unstructured environment when she visits with her dad. For this single mother, sharing custody of her daughter with the biological father highlighted a particular value because she saw the structure or routine being undermined by his actions or inactions.

## **4.6.3 Fathers of children over eighteen years old**

### **a. Education**

A long term impact that one father observed in his adult daughter is “*the value of education*.” This father went on to say how he cautioned his daughter that “*to survive in this day and age*” she needed an education.

### **b. Values directed towards others**

Two fathers taught their children to value other individuals, especially those who were victimized. One father attributes these values as stemming from his personal experience of being bullied as a child. The other father did not state the source of his emphasizing these values. Nevertheless, these fathers would tell their children to “*Stand up for the underdog*,” make sure you are “*treating people fair*,” and “*don’t ever think you are better than another person*.”

## **4.6.4 Mothers of children over eighteen years old**

These mothers responded to this question in a similar manner as previous participants. Their primary concern was linked to the values their children would

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eventually adopt. One value these parents mentioned, that was not mentioned by the others, was the importance of family.

#### **a. Role model**

Several mothers placed emphasis on their lifestyle while their children were growing up and believed that they are responsible for their adult children's choices, i.e. smoking, drinking alcohol: *"I smoked when I was younger, and I would tell my kids 'Do as I say, Not as I do.' I didn't want them to start smoking, so I quit. But, it wasn't long after that my son started smoking."* A couple of mothers echoed the same experience of smoking and watching their child start to smoke during adolescence.

#### **b. Family**

Several mothers expressed *"the importance of family"* and wanted their children to carry this value into their adulthood. These moms showed this value by ensuring their children attended family gatherings throughout the year. Another strategy was to prepare their children for their own families by giving instructions: *"I always try to tell them, 'If you decide and do have a family of their own trying to do things as a family and respecting one another.'"*

#### **c. Children's qualities**

One mother commented on a particular quality her son displayed while growing up and one of the implications of this quality: *"When my son was young, he was proud of himself, now he respects women."* For this mother, her son's pride transferred to his respect of women.

### **4.6.5 Summary of desired traits**

Participants identified several strategies to instill desirable traits in their child that will continue into adulthood. Many parents stressed that their behaviours modeled what their child would eventually follow, i.e. obtaining an education, abstaining from alcohol

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and cigarettes. Other parents explored several activities with their children until the child found a certain event that ignited a passion. These parents believed that finding a passion for something centres a person's life and is a foundation for positive qualities to flourish.

Many parents identified personal desirable traits, such as self-esteem, confidence, and so forth. Parents also desired their children would: "*stand up for the underdog, respect others and the importance of family and sharing.*" Other parents mentioned the strategy of providing a structure (routine) for their children. One parent spent time with each of his children to instill the knowledge that he loved them.

### 4.7 Summary of Participants' Responses

Categories from the responses of all participants' were created for each question by looking for common themes. In most cases, this meant looking for characteristics or features of responses that were similar. Several themes were chosen for each question that best reflected the responses from all participants. In many cases, themes revealed the roles of other people in the participants' lives, as well as significant life experiences and, their urban context of parenting, and goals for their children.

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**Table 2. Summary of participants' responses**

QUESTIONS	THEMES	EXAMPLES
1. Who or what influenced your perspectives on parenting and childrearing?	a. Primary Caregivers  b. Other influences  c. Life experiences	"She made sure our needs were met" "My father had the biggest influence in my life" "I turned to fictional parents on TV to know what to do" "My in-laws lived a healthier life than my parents" I want them to have a better life than I had
2. What would be an example of Ojibway parenting?	a. Ojibway worldview & cultural practices  b. Community	"They were symbiotic with the spirit world" "Its being out on the land, showing your kids the Anishnawbe way" "I raise my kids differently than my siblings and friends up north" "I don't have extended family to turn to when I am out here"
3. What was the significance of the ceremony with your child?	a. Naming Ceremony  b. Family Names  c. Baptism	"They got an identity, they know who they are"  "She is named after powerful women in her life"  "It was something you were expected to do"
4. What was your perception of your child's needs?	a. What they focused on  b. Meeting their child's needs	"I made sure they had everything I never had" "Safety and security" "Stability"  "Trial & error" "Asking others what to do"
5. What are you doing now that will impact your child into adulthood?	a. Instilling personal values  b. Instilling value towards others  c. Parents as role models	"I want them to respect themselves"  "Treat people fair" "Stand up for the underdog"  "Children learn vicariously through watching you"

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### 4.7.1 Themes of parenting influences

#### a. Caregiver's influence

The majority of participants of the four Talking Circles mentioned individuals who had primary care for them as children as their most influential source of parenting. Caregivers were primarily the mother, and then the father, followed by grandparents and extended family. Most participants mentioned positive qualities of their primary caregiver as the virtues that influenced them. Participants stated such facts as, *"she (mother) was the core of the family, she made sure our needs were met," "my father had the biggest influence on me,"* and *"my grandparents showed unconditional love and hospitality."*

Some participants mentioned the neglectful qualities of their caregiver a lesson on what not to do as a parent, i.e. *"I try to do the opposite of what my parents did," "my father wasn't the nicest guy to be around," "I try to learn from my father's mistakes."* Despite the disappointment expressed by participants pertaining to their caregivers, participants were able to implement positive changes to themselves and their family routines: *"I wasn't hugged or told I was loved, but I do that with my kids."*

#### b. Other influences

Some participants identified individuals outside their immediate family who influenced their parenting and nurturing qualities. One parent mentioned an unconventional process; he found influences in fictional parent-characters on TV: *"One key thing, when my parents broke up, I became the main male caregiver in the home, we were kind of latch-key children at the time. We were left to our own devices. We were by ourselves a lot so I took what I perceived as positive role models in pop culture and tried to take some of those values and try to either do what I thought was cool, or good, or right for that matter, became some of my core values."*

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For those participants who could not use their biological family as a source of positive influence, they turned to their in-laws for parenting advice: *“My in-laws, they have lived a healthier life and they have helped me parent more than my own parents and grandparents did.”*

### **c. Life experiences**

Most participants remembered an unpleasant life experience such as poverty, alcohol abuse, and other negative life events that motivated them to provide a better experience for their family. The most common response was to do the opposite of what they had gone through, i.e. not allowing alcohol in their home if their parents abused alcohol; not spanking their child, if they were spanked as children; providing clothing, a home, stressing education, if these were not part of their upbringing.

One participant recalled how residential schooling affected him and how he had to learn traditional teachings on parenting: *“I was kind of reborn into the culture because I was kind of forced into Christianity being in residential school.”* There is a motivation from parents that spans gender and generations when it comes to providing a better quality of life for their children than the one they experienced.

A couple of fathers used the birth of their first child as the catalyst to reflect on their lives and to make changes based on their idea of being a good father. For one father, it meant quitting the party circuit, for another it meant prioritizing his child's needs instead of his own.

## **4.7.2 Themes of Ojibway parenting?**

### **a. Ojibway worldview & practices**

Participants emphasized various aspects of Ojibway culture as indicative of traditional parenting. Ojibway parenting consists of various aspects of the culture, such

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as: participating in a Naming Ceremony, having a particular worldview, speaking the Ojibway language, using dreams as information from the spirit world, sharing in tangible ways, and living off the land or being connected to the land. For participants, Ojibway parenting was more than just child care activities.

#### **b. Community as context for Ojibway parenting**

Some participants reminisced about the extended family system and community spirit that existed when they were children in their First Nation community. Many located the source of Ojibway influence as stemming from their community and extended family. However, the influence of the community and family into the urban environment was tenuous for some.

Some participants compared their parenting styles with those from their respective First Nation community. They believed that they had been changed by moving to the urban contexts. Participants saw themselves as more akin to their non-Aboriginal counterparts in the urban setting than their siblings and friends who were parenting on a First Nation community.

### **4.7.3 Themes of childhood ceremonies**

#### **a. Naming Ceremony**

Several participants held a Naming Ceremony for their children according to Ojibway cultural practices. The ceremony confers on the child a name that can be a combination of a role they will play in the future, personal qualities, and/or a specific gifting/talent to serve people. This ceremony, among many others, has experienced a renaissance in the last decade among Ojibway people.

#### **b. Family names**

One participant used several names for his daughter based on female family members who personified various positive characteristics. He reminded his daughter,

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throughout her life, the reasons for each of her four names. This practice connected the young girl with several familial generations and sought to instill positive attributes in her life.

#### **c. Birthing**

Although not a childhood ceremony, one participant used the birthing process as a foreshadowing of his children's personality. Whether the birthing process was easy, difficult, or complicated by other circumstances, this father asserted that his children's character development continued to affirm his initial discernment.

#### **d. Baptism**

Several participants had their children baptized into the Christian faith. Many of these baptisms were instigated by family and/or community pressure. All of the participants stated that they were not aware of the teachings of baptism and, once the ceremony was over, there was no follow up by the church, their family, or community.

#### **e. No ceremony**

Several participants did not have any type of ceremony with their child, despite being aware of the availability of the above events.

### **4.7.4 Themes of parents' perceptions of their children's needs**

#### **a. Knowing their needs**

Participants who focused on the first part of the question answered the question "How do you know what your child's needs are?" They used words and phrases like, "*I made sure they had everything I never had,*" "*Safety and Security,*" "*Love.*" As well, one parent stated, "*I knew it all, I was a kick-ass parent,*" while other parents emphasized, "*Being there,*" "*Having both parents,*" "*Stability,*" and "*Education.*" Some of these responses reflect parents' using their past experiences to help them understand their child and gain confidence in their assumptions of what to do with children. Participants, who

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mentioned general human qualities, i.e. love or stability, did not specify how they came to consider these traits as deserving attention. Meanwhile, a couple of parents stated that they knew their children's needs because they simply asked their child to express their needs to them. Participants came to know their child's needs through their experience of childhood, assumptions of need, and responding to their immediate context.

### **b. Meeting their needs**

Some participants focused on the question "How did you go about meeting your child's need?" These participants acknowledged the need of informal help through extended family and friends, while others sought formal help. In addition to having assistance from others, many parents recognized the trial and error nature of parenting as they got to know the personality of each child and made adjustments accordingly.

Many participants expressed their personal struggles as parents in meeting their child's needs. Personal struggles varied from juggling multiple responsibilities, dealing with health concerns for themselves and/or their child, and having to undo some of their own childhood issues while learning healthy ways to parent.

## **4.7.5 Themes of participants' responses to the long term impact question**

### **a. Values towards oneself**

Most participants mentioned a value that they wanted their child to take as their own when they became adults. These values included "*respect*," "*a good work ethic*," "*self-esteem*," "*the importance of family*," and the value of "*education*" (learning).

### **b. Values towards others**

Participants also stated they wanted their children to develop positive qualities towards others. These traits included "*treating people fair*," "*standing up for the underdog*," "*not thinking of themselves as better than others*," and having "*empathy*."

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### **c. Parents as role models**

Some parents referred to themselves as being role models, whether they intentionally acted the part or not. The passive side of being a role model was “*being there for your child*,” while being an active role model included “*exposing your child to opportunities*.” Parents recognized that behaviours were observed and their words heard by their children and realized that their examples exert a positive or negative influence on their children.

The Talking Circle method enabled participants to discuss parenting using their own words and descriptions of their behaviours. Participants’ responses provide a basis in which to begin to discern contemporary Ojibway parenting perspectives and practices. Responses to the questions on knowing their child’s needs and responding to them, along with their long-term goals of parenting can begin to answer attachment theory’s sensitivity and security components.

## CHAPTER 5

## ANALYSIS

**5.1 Introduction**

This analysis is guided by the purpose of identifying perspectives or practices of Ojibway participants' parenting that are considered distinctive from conventional Western parenting. Two components of attachment theory will also be analyzed for their consistency with Ojibway parents' perspectives and stated practices.

The themes extrapolated from participants' responses will form the basis for analysis and are consistent with decolonizing research (Lincoln, et al., 2008). Participants' responses are considered in their entirety, that is, what they suggest about Ojibway worldview, parenting practices, and so forth. Some responses overlap with preceding questions and are therefore used liberally for the purpose of this study; for example, participants were asked about Ojibway parenting and their responses overlapped with the subsequent question on childhood ceremonies; and the childhood ceremony question partly answered what is selected as a need in the question on sensitivity.

Analysis will not be restricted solely to themes developed from responses; rather it will be the foundation from which ideas are explored. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) recognize that important ideas are not solely present in the data, but emerge as collected data are abstracted and synthesized along with the literature to generate ideas about Ojibway parenting, sensitivity, and security. Ojibway parents' perspectives and experiences, as well as their properties and features, are included in the wider discussion of the topics explored in this study.

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One response to the condition of Aboriginal knowledge being ignored or the absence of Aboriginal participants in research studies is the creation of decolonizing research. This branch of study recognizes the social construction of knowledge and the political nature of selecting what knowledge is pertinent on any given situation. Decolonizing research, therefore, advocates Aboriginal/indigenous perspectives and experiences from externally imposed ideals, theories, and measures. Decolonizing research also uses communication processes that are familiar with the particular group being studied. For this reason, a Talking Circle method was chosen because it is familiar to the Ojibway people of north western Ontario.

The appeal of disclosing Ojibway participants' perspectives and experiences is to recognize their knowledge base. This may help those who make decisions on behalf of Ojibway or Aboriginal Peoples. The scarcity of information on parenting, sensitivity, and security from Ojibway parents' perspectives makes it necessary to bring their knowledge of these topics to the foreground.

One contention of this study is the absence of historical and contextual factors that affect the assumptions of universalizing theories. What follows below is a review of participants' comments with the literature to highlight the personal impact of historical and contextual factors. The larger historical and social forces contribute to the unique features of Ojibway parenting. Unique features are identified from participants' childhood experiences in a First Nation community and the current context of parenting in an urban centre.

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### **5.2 Historical factors affect parenting**

Historical experiences have conditioned Aboriginal people to be guarded against solutions offered by government and those outside the culture who act on behalf of their interests. Ojibway participants were cognizant of the historical factors affecting them and their relations with the government of Canada. Several participants noted the changes in their lifetime from a nomadic, subsistence lifestyle to a more sedentary one. These changes continue to have an impact on how they identify with the Ojibway culture without using the subsistent lifestyle as one of the foundations. As this way of life is decreasing, other identifying features or practices, representing Ojibway people, are emerging in contemporary conditions. Some of these features or practices include: practicing traditional spirituality, pow wow dancing, espousing a particular value, or having art or craft products representing Ojibway culture.

The literature review and participant comments reveal the impact of the government intervention that colonized Aboriginal Peoples in Canada. Colonizers conferred upon the colonized an inferior status, which paved the way to 'speaking to' Aboriginal Peoples in terms of what is in their best interests rather than Aboriginal Peoples 'speaking for' themselves. The silencing of Aboriginal People marginalized much of their existing knowledge, which included parenting. The dominant discourse of colonization permeated interactions between the newcomers and the Aboriginal population.

The literature review cited numerous attempts of the federal government to eliminate several aspects of Aboriginal culture, such as speaking their languages, gatherings at pow-wows or potlatches, and traditional parenting styles (Awasis Agency of

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Northern Manitoba, 1997; Hamilton & Sinclair, 1991; RCAP, 1996; Swinomish Tribal Mental Health Project, 1991). A number of participants mentioned a damaging effect on their communities and parents due to government assimilation policies, including the residential school era.

In response to historical, and some would say contemporary, factors there is a collective wariness towards the government of Canada because of its role in attempting to destroy many aspects of Aboriginal cultural identity. This circumstance has forced Ojibway parents to focus on cultural survival through emphasizing cultural practices, values, beliefs, traditions, and identities as part of their parenting practices. Participants in this study stress various aspects of Ojibway culture in their parenting because they do not want to be absorbed by mainstream culture. Though they cannot model a subsistence lifestyle in an urban centre, many participants utilize various cultural teachings and traditions as a way to ensure their child has knowledge and experience of Ojibway culture.

Several participants appealed to traditional Ojibway culture, prior to European contact, as the approach to restore what has been lost to assimilation. One participant imagined that, historically, Ojibway families met the qualities of sharing, respect, and several other espoused parenting values. Reference to historic conditions to emulate is commendable, on the one hand, because it is a source of inspiration and motivation to continually strive to achieve positive qualities. On the other hand, the historic conditions and contexts that created the development of particular parenting values cannot be reproduced in contemporary society to the same degree. Those who use culture, in the historic sense, as a source of inspiration/motivation face the impossibility of reproducing

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the conditions that spawned particular values. Thus, in the long run, Aboriginal people can only reach marginal levels of historical parenting practices. Nevertheless, Ojibway culture is being utilized by participants to inform them on several aspects of parenting. In addition to the impact of historical forces; Ojibway participants point out the impacts that their urban context has on their parenting.

### 5.3 Contextual factors affect parenting

Contexts are important for situating behaviours and grasping social and cultural importance (Dey, 1993). As stated earlier in this study, Aboriginal cultures arrange their family systems specific to their geographic contexts and social networks (RCAP, 1996). Participants described their childhood context of their First Nation territory and the lifestyle that was prevalent. Various members of the community were expected to contribute to the functioning of family and community. For many participants, this meant engaging in hunting and gathering activities. The presence of family and extended family meant that roles and tasks of parenting were distributed amongst a group of people.

One assertion put forth in this study is the failure of researchers and/or professionals to consider the Aboriginal (Ojibway) context when implementing a universal parenting or child development theory. At the time of this study, participants were all residing in a large urban centre and parenting in a context that is dissimilar with their upbringing in a First Nation community. Nineteen of the twenty participants were raised in their First nation community. Study members commented that they were the first in their family to relocate to an urban centre and deal with the challenges that come as part of this new context. During their upbringing, participants experienced relative cultural and social homogeneity in their home community. When in their First Nation

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community, questions of their ethnicity, social behavior, or cultural practices were rarely elicited. The change to an urban context rendered them unfamiliar with the norms of urban life and required them to reconsider their taken-for-granted parenting assumptions and practices. Participants revealed their struggles in coming to terms with their inability to replicate for their children their own childhood experiences of freedom in the First Nation community, as well as the presence of and access to extended family and land-based activities.

When the parents compared their upbringing to the urban context, they described limits to the freedom of movement and sense of space. Participants' childhood memories were of playing with friends and freely visiting extended family scattered throughout the community. In contrast, some described the confining nature of urban life by always having their child physically close to them when in public. They also discussed the enclosing nature of their house or backyard when used as play areas for the child. However, if their child has only known urban life, then the urban context may not be as stifling as parents imagine.

Urban life is full of strangers to those who were used to knowing, and being known by, practically everyone in the community. The descriptions of their First Nation community as "*extended-family*" meant that constant attention of children was not needed because parents came to rely on family, friends, and neighbours to keep watch over their children and could be counted on to contact parents or intervene if necessary. The expectation and reliance on others meant that parents were probably not aware of minor incidents their child was involved in because someone else resolved the matter, with or without the parent's knowledge. In contrast, urban life means that parents were usually in

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physical proximity to their children and more aware of what transpired with their child throughout a given day. Activities are structured for the child rather than unfolding according to the rhythm of community life.

The majority of participants participated in land-based activities during their childhood. Land-based activities included: camping, fishing, trapping, hunting and harvesting berries or herbal medicines. Several parents commented that their involvement in these activities did not occur until they went back to their First Nation territory, which was usually once or twice a year. For some, the increased effort to locate and participate in traditional and cultural activities in an urban centre meant these activities were reduced to a few days per year, if at all. Both situations limit the amount of time parents had to pass on the skills and knowledge of land-based activities to their children.

Many participants were the first in their family to receive a post-secondary education. Eighteen of the twenty participants completed a post-secondary diploma or degree. This is an unusual concentration of post-secondary-educated First Nations (Ojibway) people (90%) because of the relatively small percentage (3 %) of First Nations students that complete university (Usher, 2009). Completion of a degree or diploma exposed participants to a broad range of ideas and increased their employment marketability. However, the price of their success meant being away from family and community.

For most participants, the urban context created a tension in terms of being unfamiliar with social norms, having to change their parenting style, and experiencing cultural dissonance. Being first to relocate to an urban centre or complete a post-secondary degree or diploma meant that these participants encountered circumstances

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that their family members did not have to negotiate. Therefore, family members could not equip the person with prior required knowledge. In some ways, participants are leaving one way of life to establish another.

Because of the urban context, participants could not replicate their childhood environment and had to learn new ways of parenting. They had to transition from their familiar perspectives and practices to new ones. In light of the new urban context, participants' First Nation communities continue to play a role in their lives. Most group members referred to their communities as repositories of their Ojibway heritage, for example knowledge of living-off-the-land, maintaining the Ojibway language, and various cultural teachings and practices. Although some elements of Ojibway culture were forced into the background, because of the new context, other elements came to the foreground. The next section addresses cultural factors that had an impact on participants' parenting in the urban context.

#### **5.4 Cultural factors affect parenting**

When participants relocated to an urban centre, they were not just changing physical location they were also exposed to other cultures. Participants' had opportunities to acquire other parenting knowledge and practices and this may result in no longer being congruent with some features of Ojibway culture. Kluckhohn (1961), who studied Native American tribes, identified this phenomenon as cultural variation, where individuals are expected to reflect their dominant intra-cultural features and, yet, exhibit characteristics that vary from their culture because of being exposed to new environmental or social forces.

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Most participants were transitioning from their First Nation community to a major urban centre where new parenting knowledge and strategies were required. Participants remarked on their disparate parenting practices when compared to their counterparts in their First Nation community. Yet, participants also brought their culture with them to the urban centre and had to select which aspects of the Ojibway culture to implement in their new surroundings.

The internal struggle for participants comes from the phenomenon of implicitly referring to and applying their culture's customs and knowledge of parenting practices onto a context that does not support them (Harkness & Super, 2006). Participants' comments confirm that their cultural understandings and practices are inherited from their parents, extended family, and the cultural community in which they were raised. This does not mean that parents prefer to be homogeneous; rather, they use their culture and experience as a basis of parenting information until they have to adopt new patterns according to new contexts. In light of this urban challenge, the literature on Ojibway and Aboriginal parenting largely reflects a subsistent lifestyle and assorted traditional practices as representative of a cultural foundation. The subsistent lifestyle, of working off the land in family groupings, and perspective that arises from it, i.e., knowledge of animal patterns, weather, and suitable clothing, has provided solutions to the challenges previous generations of parents have faced (Densmore, 1970; Hilger, 1951; Jennes, 1935). However, participants' urban circumstances created new lifestyle demands that their parents have not encountered, and historical solutions were not informative to the new conditions. This made parenting a dynamic enterprise where previous information and strategies coexist with the new ones being developed.

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Participants revealed the tension of the natural pull towards using their upbringing as a template for parenting while the context and culture of urban life was not able to support some of their learned strategies. One parent mused whether she was parenting like a "*white person*?" The basis of her comment focused on the parenting similarities she shared with her non-Aboriginal peers in the urban centre and the dissimilar practices of her family and friends back in her home community. This mom had developed parenting strategies that were required in an urban context, and they were perceived as vastly different from those in her home community. Several participants commented on the difference between parents in their First Nation community and those in an urban context. Social and environmental pressures made it compulsory for Ojibway parents to adapt to their new context. For some parents, this felt like they were losing a part of their Ojibway culture because outwardly they cared for their child like conventional, mainstream parents.

Despite the changes in parenting behaviour in an urban centre, all participants personally identified with their cultural heritage. Differences in the age of participants meant that some had resolved questions of their identity in the midst of changing circumstances/context, while others who were fairly new to the urban context were still struggling to resolve their questions.

Participants referred to their cultural heritage as a source of strength and pride. Parents used their culture as a basis to teach their children their identity, living a spiritual life and cultivating values towards themselves and others. A consistent theme from participants and the literature review focused on the values, beliefs, and ceremonies of the Ojibway culture.

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### 5.4.1 Values and beliefs

The caveat to the dynamic nature of culture, at the behavioural level, is the slower pace of change at the internal level, i.e., cultural values and beliefs. Brant (1990) wrote of child-rearing values and beliefs of Aboriginal cultures, including the Ojibway, in an attempt to explain behaviours of Aboriginal parents and children. He believed that the values and beliefs currently informing Aboriginal parents were adaptive to the subsistent contexts, that is, small groupings of families, numbering fifteen to twenty individuals, in close proximity because of living off the land. These living arrangements emphasized values and relationship characteristics that ensured the survival and productivity of the group. Despite the passage of time and the changed context in which they originated, these values have been slow to change and continue to play a role in social relationships and parenting.

Those who have migrated to urban settings have left part of their cultural heritage behind; however, a physical move off the land, or from the First Nation community, does not automatically shed Ojibway culture, i.e., values and beliefs. Participants' comments revealed the Ojibway culture's emphasis of sharing, respecting, helping those who need it and valuing family. Parenting according to these cultural values would include teaching and modelling them throughout the child's life. Despite the changed parenting behaviours in the urban context, there remains an attitude or disposition towards parenting that reflects historical values developed from a subsistent lifestyle. These values and beliefs also considered the subtlety of relationships and of maintaining favourable orientation among one another. For example, one participant commented on the subtlety of her grandmother's correction by using a seemingly unrelated story to convey information and

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a moral lesson regarding the present circumstances. The participant used the same subtle strategy when correcting her children.

Emphasizing values and beliefs developed from a subsistent lifestyle may be difficult to establish in an urban setting when the frailty of human life is not as pronounced. For example, the historical subsistent lifestyle of the Ojibway meant that obtaining food was a constant preoccupation because of the uncertainty of locating game or fish. There was an advantage to having several hunters or fishers rather than relying on one individual because of the land area that could be covered and the increased opportunities of finding game. In light of this necessity, there was a survival benefit to sharing resources among the group. Sharing, helping those who need it and valuing the importance of family were intertwined with the survival of the subsistent group.

In the urban setting, where such stark contrasts of life and death are not considered when deciding to share or help others, it is not known how these cultural values are maintained and exercised by the Ojibway participants. The urban centre is generally based on a sedentary lifestyle, a wage economy, and the acquisition of material goods and the availability of social programs and services. In contrast, the subsistent economy is based on nomadic lifestyle depended upon the skills and labour of every individual in the group and minimal acquisition of material possessions. Sharing, helping those in need, and valuing the importance of family take on a different meaning when implementing historical Ojibway cultural values in an urban setting.

In many First Nation communities, the expressions of cultural values are challenged by the contemporary use of freezers to store food rather than participating in the historical practice of sharing the abundance of game and fish. Cultural practices are

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undergoing change through the use of motorized boats and snowmobiles which eliminate the role of a family going out together to hunt and fish, thus reducing one aspect of the importance of family. Also, there is a change from the custom of sharing game or fish with the frail and elderly first, that is, those who cannot go out onto the land to fend for themselves, to the contemporary practice of sharing only with family and friends.

Participants acknowledged that the urban context changed some of their cultural parenting patterns; it is likely that the espoused Ojibway cultural values will take on different features as well. Parents did not go into detail whether the cultural value of sharing took on different forms in an urban context, i.e., money, information, social networks, and other forms of sharing that enabled people to live in their new urban surroundings.

Participants also commented on how they taught their children the cultural values and practices of respecting the land and being aware of their spiritual nature through prayer, dreams, and visions. In northern Ontario it isn't hard to find examples of environmental damage due to clear-cutting practices of the logging industry, flooded lands due to hydro projects and acid-rain damage from mining smelters. These industries have impacted First Nations' use of the land and ability to acquire game, fish and fur-bearing animals. First Nations' reliance on fish and wildlife has made Aboriginal people aware of the precarious balance between their needs and nature's ability to meet those needs. Individuals who do not rely on fish and wildlife are not as sensitive to the impacts their actions have on the land and water. This may be part of the reason, among many, for the wide-scale destruction of fish and wildlife habitat by major industries. Ojibway

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participants are teaching their children the importance of nature, despite not being dependent on it as their parents or grandparents were or are.

Some participants emphasized spiritual teachings of the Ojibway culture through cultivating an awareness of dreams, visions, and ceremonies. One father talked to his children about their dreams and helps them interpret the meaning by being aware of what was happening in their lives or referring to their Indian name. The father is helping his children link their dreams with their present circumstances and help them discern whether these are aligned with their Indian name. Another father took his children out on the land to conduct ceremonies during various seasons. These practices occur when the child is older and is able to communicate with their parents about spiritual matters.

None of the participants mentioned the spiritual world of an infant; the belief that infants transition from the spirit world to inhabit a physical body, as the literature review suggests, is part of Ojibway or Aboriginal world view. Perhaps this understanding of the infant rests with the older generation and has not been passed down to the current generation of parents because they left their communities, to attend high school and/or post-secondary institutions, when they were not yet parents themselves.

Many of the participants recognize the inherent wisdom of Ojibway cultural values, for example, strengthening relations amongst those around you, sharing, or cultivating a spiritual understanding. However, some of these are taking on different expressions from previous generations because of the changed conditions.

One expression of the value placed on infants/children that has been affected historically is Ojibway childhood ceremonies. Most Ojibway ceremonies were prohibited from public expression as part of the assimilation strategy to introduce European

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practices. This meant that those who wanted to maintain Ojibway ceremonies had to practice in secret and with limited number of participants. Approximately half of the participants revealed two predominant practices with their infants, Naming Ceremony and/or Baptism, while the other half did not state their participation in childhood ceremonial or cultural practices.

### **5.4.2 Naming/Introducing infants to parents, family and community**

A common practice with many cultures is the recognition and initiation of the newborn into the community in which they belong. These various practices convey information about the child and some of the responsibilities of the parents, family, and community. One outward expression of a cultural belief among the Ojibway, regardless of where they reside, is the Naming Ceremony.

#### **5.4.2 a. Naming Ceremony**

In relation to children and their development, cultures collectively build on their understandings and explanations of children's optimal development, which they pass on to successive generations of parents. These understandings and explanations inform parents about their child's needs and behaviours or ceremonies that will meet those needs.

The historical significance of the government of Canada and/or Christian denominations stopping the Naming Ceremony from being practiced created a state of confusion for the first generation of Ojibway parents impacted by this decision. Parents who oriented their child-rearing activities according to the Ojibway name of the child no longer had their familiar foundation to build upon. Instead, Ojibway parents were told to obtain 'Christian names,' which meant European names. The Christian names would not

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have had the same effect as the child's Ojibway name because they did not convey a direction for the child or identify certain characteristics and a future condition/role for the child. Participants' experiences of baptism revealed the lack of significance attributed to the practice and its minimal role in affecting parenting practices.

Based on the participants' descriptions of the Naming Ceremony, the chosen name must: 1) foretell several personal qualities of the child; 2) remain unchanged throughout a person's life; 3) identify the bearer's role and responsibility in the culture; and, 4) is a source of identity and inspiration. (See **Table 3**)

The Naming Ceremony's approach to children is different from conventional parenting understandings. The Naming Ceremony identifies several characteristics of the person before they are shaped by personality or experience. Perhaps this may explain what looks like permissive parenting, to outsiders, because the parent believes that key characteristics of the child have already been identified. This perspective is at odds with many child development or parenting theories that prescribe specific actions for parents and its predicted positive consequence. Conventional parental understanding refers to experience and personality as ongoing developments in the child's life and parents mold and shape what the person is to become, rather than facilitate who the child already is.

Some participants mentioned that their child's characteristics were identified through the Naming Ceremony. For example, one parent stated that his daughter was going to be a strong, confident, and assertive person when she became an adult because that was what the elder told him. This parent saw some of these developing characteristics displayed in his daughter's personality and behaviours, since the elder revealed them to him. This father will emphasize the characteristics related to the

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Ojibway name and presumably pay less attention to characteristics that do not. He approached parenting with key features identified and consciously oriented towards the fulfilment of certain characteristics of his daughter. At this point in the child's life (less than five years old), the father is referring to himself and his wife in implementing the Naming Ceremony characteristics.

For many parents, using the child's Ojibway name to inform parenting is relatively new, that is, none of the participants had yet parented their children from birth to adulthood using the child's Ojibway name as a guide. It remains to be seen what influence this type of parenting has on those children who were oriented to this perspective.

Another example of an Aboriginal parenting role is using the Ojibway name as an antidote to being teased at school. One parent reminded his child that regardless of the names they were being called at school, their Ojibway name was the true reflection of who they were. The Ojibway name of the person can play a powerful role in annulling negative experiences or labels. During childhood, the person has to be reminded of its significance by those who know their Ojibway name. However, daycare workers, teachers, or social workers that come into contact with the Ojibway child, in an urban setting, may not be familiar with this parenting strategy and cannot join with or reinforce Ojibway parents. This is one of the limitations of using a cultural strategy to parenting, when the strategy is not well known and therefore cannot be reinforced by cultural outsiders. Demographically, the Ojibway are a minority in an urban context and are spread out throughout the city, therefore cannot readily educate daycare workers, teachers, or others that play a role in the child's life.

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Ojibway parents, who participated in the Naming Ceremony, did not allude to the psychological phenomenon called the Pygmalion Effect (or self-fulfilling prophecy), where certain characteristics of the child are identified by a respected person and parents expect those characteristics to be prominent and act upon them. Instead, parents believed that the elder who gave the Ojibway name to their child had heard from the spirit world regarding the child's destiny.

The characteristics identified in the Naming Ceremony remain with the person throughout their life. The characteristics are initially developed by the parents, then by the family and community, and eventually the bearer of the name as they progress through life and new dimensions are discovered. For example, the development of boldness may appear as impulsiveness during childhood, recklessness during adolescence, boldness in adulthood and resoluteness in old age.

Additionally, being bold would take on different features with close relationships compared to being in a public setting. The characteristic of boldness has its downside, if left undeveloped, whereby the person can become overconfident, reckless, and irrational.

Historically, the characteristic of boldness would have been readily seen in the Ojibway culture in warriors, leaders, hunters, and mothers protecting their young from danger. In contemporary Ojibway culture, those individuals with a predominant characteristic of boldness might be police officers or any type of community leader. In any case, there is a role and responsibility within the culture for the positive expression of boldness.

Participants did not elaborate whether their child can fulfil the destiny of their Ojibway name in a non-Ojibway context, which all participants were living at the time of

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this study. Parents did not give examples of roles and responsibilities in an urban centre that their child would assume as part of the fulfilment of the name given. Historically, the origin of the ceremony linked the name to being fulfilled in an Ojibway community or context. Contemporary writers describing the Naming Ceremony have not made this aspect of the person's destiny clear.

Participants did not comment on the urban context as limiting the expression or fulfilment of the child's Ojibway name. They did comment on the significance of receiving their Ojibway name. The most common feature was the sense of belonging/identity it conveyed for the person, that they were rooted in their culture and their culture was rooted in them. Most participants obtained their Ojibway name when they were adults rather than the usual pattern of parents initiating the ceremony during infancy. Participants describe receiving their Ojibway name as answering a fundamental question of who they are. In turn, they sought out an elder to conduct the Naming Ceremony for their children. Parents indicated that they would convey the significance of the name to their children as they grew up.

The people who reminded the child of their name throughout their lifetime were usually extended family members and primarily the grandparents because of proximity and access to the child. In addition to cultural ceremonies for children, there has been an incorporation of mainstream childhood ceremonies, like baptism and family members naming children after an ancestor's prominent characteristics.

#### **5.4.2 b. Baptism**

Several parents participated in the baptism of their child, of which three of the ten also participated in a Naming Ceremony. Infant baptismal ceremonies vary slightly

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among the Christian denominations that practice this rite. However, the meaning of baptism depends greatly upon the Christian denomination to which the person belongs. The baptismal ceremony initiates the person into the Christian faith and community.

The ceremony, or liturgy, is well established within each denomination. In a typical ceremony, the priest applies water to the child's head and follows a standardized prayer. As the water is sprinkled over the child's head, the priest quotes a scripture verse from Matthew 28:19: "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Most Christian denominations place the responsibility on parents to develop their child's spiritual nature through prayer, encouragement, spiritual nurture, instruction, and exemplary living, guiding the child to eventually make their own commitment to the Christian faith. The baptismal service is an important family time where extended family is also charged to watch over and nurture the child into the faith. The ceremony also includes the congregation of the church where the family attends and usually ends with a time of fellowship and a meal.

It is noteworthy that nine of the ten parents disclosed that their involvement in baptizing their children was because of pressure by family and/or the community. Only one participant acknowledged that she began to attend church as a result of baptizing her child. The other nine participants did not elaborate on the teachings of infant baptism, or what roles, responsibilities, or obligations they acquired or implemented as a result of their participation. It seems the significance of baptism was not communicated to the parents by those who advocated for the ceremony. Once the external pressure from family and community ceased, for many participants, there was no internal motivation to acquire a fuller understanding of the baptismal ceremony. In contrast, those participants

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who were involved in the Naming Ceremony were personally motivated to seek this ceremony and apply the teachings associated with this ceremony as well as other aspects of Ojibway traditional knowledge.

Baptism is an example of an imposed-etic, for most of these participants, where a ceremony is introduced into a culture and has to be maintained by those outside the cultural community. In nine of the ten experiences with baptism, it held significant meaning to those performing the rite, but not to those receiving the practice. However, there are Aboriginal groups where Christianity has been adopted as part of their cultural beliefs and practices and this includes baptism. Despite many similarities between baptism and the Naming Ceremony, infant baptism has not had an ongoing influence with the Ojibway participants. The similarities between the two ceremonies are: 1) the name remains unchanged throughout the person's life; 2) it is a source of inspiration and motivation; 3) it foretells characteristics to aspire to; 4) parents have a role and responsibility to develop the qualities identified; and 5) both ceremonies communicate belonging, i.e. to a church or culture. Participants did not mention the similarities of both practices; instead, they referred to the source of the practices, i.e., Ojibway culture or the Church, as the influence on their involvement.

Besides the imposed-etic explanation of the waning influence of baptism among Ojibway parents, there are two other possibilities. Historical events affecting the Christian church have implicated several denominations in abusive practices with children in residential schools. As a result of these histories, the Church's influence has been affected with Metis, Inuit, and First Nations People, including the Ojibway. In

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addition, other church denominations, that do not practice infant baptism, are replacing historic denominations in Aboriginal communities.

Infant baptism differs from a Naming Ceremony in several ways: 1) parents choose a name, sometimes after a saint or biblical character, versus one being chosen for the parents by an elder; 2) an infant is part of the universal church versus belonging to the Ojibway culture; and 3) identified characteristics are from the personhood of Christ versus characteristics identified by the culture.

For several participants, initiating the newborn resonated more strongly with Ojibway culture than the Christian church. Several participants described their identities stemming from their Ojibway name, and they did not ascribe a similar influence to the name given to them at baptism. Nine of the ten participants did not mention ongoing participation in the Christian community in which they were baptized, whereas they are actively involved in the Ojibway community. This suggests that participants are influenced by the Ojibway culture more than the particular Christian denomination in which they were baptized. One participant did not take part in the Naming Ceremony or baptism; instead, he named his daughter after prominent women in his and his wife's families.

#### **5.4.2 c. Family-based naming**

A different use of naming and introducing an infant is the passing down of ancestral names to successive generations (Okpik, 2005; Voss, Douville, Little Soldier, & Twiss, 1999), with the intent of simulating the ancestor's characteristics. One participant recounted the meaning of the four names he gave his daughter: one was his wife's name, then one for each of their grandmothers, and a fourth name after a plant. Each of the three

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women had a prominent quality that the couple wanted their daughter to emulate, and the plant exemplified hardiness and resilience. Each of these positive characteristics were communicated to the child throughout her life.

The significance of family names is comparable to the Ojibway name and name received at baptism in a number of ways: 1) the names remain unchanged throughout the person's life; 2) it is a source of inspiration for parents, child, and family, and 3) it emphasizes specific characteristics.

When all three practices are compared they vary in a number of ways: 1) Parents choose the child's name for baptism or family-based naming, but not for the Naming Ceremony; 2) Parents choose the qualities they want to emphasize by assigning a name to their child, whereas, the name given and the qualities associated with it are chosen by an elder in the Naming Ceremony; 3) Baptized infants' and parent-identified names maintain an immediate-family legacy, or refer to historical figures, while the name identified in the Naming Ceremony may not reflect historical figures or family history; 4) The Naming Ceremony or baptism involve a spiritual dimension because it is conducted by a person committed to a spiritual lifestyle and they use prayer and related activities during the process, while family-based naming does not; 5) And, finally, in family-based naming, there is no implied connection to the Ojibway culture or any responsibility to it; in contrast, a person who is given a name, in a Naming Ceremony has implicit and explicit obligations and responsibilities towards the culture. Similarly, a person is expected to participate in the faith community in which they were baptized. When compared to one another, each of these three identified practices has features that differ and some that are similar to one another.

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### 5.4.2 d. Summary of naming/introducing infants

Participants who experienced one of the three mentioned childhood practices were divided between fulfilling others' expectations and conscientiously following cultural or familial expectations. Participants' mentioned at least one instance, from each of the three practices, where they were involved in their child's life as a result of participating in these early ceremonies. For example, one father who took part in the Naming Ceremony also teaches his child about dreams and visions as part of following cultural teachings. One parent began attending church as a result of baptizing her infant and enrolled him in Sunday school during his childhood. The father who named his daughter after his wife and both sets of grandmothers ensured his daughter was influenced by these women. For these participants, the childhood practices are a reflection of their general attentive disposition towards their children.

Alternatively, involvement in childhood ceremonies does not guarantee adherence to the teachings associated with the particular practice. Nine of the ten participants did not pursue further religious interest of the teachings of infant baptism, yet they were conscientious about other aspects of their parenting roles and responsibilities. Parents involved with baptism expose the transitory nature of ceremonies when individuals involved are not adherent to the teachings underlying the practice. This suggests that the mothers and fathers involved in infant baptism already had other sources of information and inspiration to raise their children.

Ten, of twenty, participants were not involved in any childhood ceremony and there was no noticeable difference in their descriptions of parenting compared to those who had taken part in a childhood ceremony. Those who were not involved in any

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ceremony did mention involvement with their child regarding opportunities for their children to explore cultural and/or recreational activities. Parents' involvement with their children spanned several areas; they include spiritual, moral, recreational, and cultural matters. Each parent is convinced that their involvement in the identified activities benefit their child. This raises the question of equifinality, that is, whether the same end state may be achieved via many different paths or trajectories. It is uncertain whether simply being involved in your child's life is sufficient to build positive, nurturing qualities in them and in the parent-child relationship or whether there are specific areas that must be attended to in order to achieve the results parents desire.

The beliefs and teachings associated with childhood naming imply benefits of parental involvement. In the Naming Ceremony, parents learn of the child's destiny through the name given and focus on preparing the infant for their journey in life. Children who are baptized are initiated into the community of faith and assured of their place in the kingdom of God. In family-based naming, children are made aware of the continuation of a positive family legacy. These practices offer substantial motivation for parents, families, and the community to ensure their continuation. Yet, those who did not participate in any of the three practices did not feel compelled to get involved. There were no noticeable differences in other parenting experiences between those who participated in a ceremony from those who had not. Most parents shared similar struggles with relocating, adjusting to parenting in an urban centre, and negotiating their cultural priorities.

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**Table 3: Comparison of Naming/Introducing Infants**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Naming Ceremony</b>	<b>Baptism</b>	<b>Parents Name Child</b>
<b>Chosen by ...</b>	Elder	Parents, with an influence to use biblical names	Parents, with an expectation to use family members names
<b>Remains unchanged throughout life</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Entrusts roles and responsibilities to the parent</b>	Parent to develop the qualities associated with the name given	Parent to develop Christ-like characteristics in child	Parents to develop qualities they desire from the name(s) given
<b>Inspires and motivates</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Indicates qualities desired for the child</b>	Yes, associated with the name given	Christ-likeness	Positive traits of the person named after
<b>Spiritual in nature</b>	Elder receives name from the spirit world	Christian faith	No
<b>Cultural Role</b>	Provides context for the nurturing of the person into their name	No, the church denomination encourages the person to live out the meaning of their baptism with a Christian agenda	Yes, because a child can be named after a cultural role model. No, because a person important to the family may not have cultural ties
<b>Parental Role</b>	Reminds, teaches, enables, and exposes to other cultural ceremonies	Reminds, teaches, enables and expects child to be confirmed into the faith	Reminds, teaches, enables the child of family history and the individuals they are named after
<b>Family Role</b>	Encourages the person to implement qualities associated with their name	Encourages the person to implement their Christian faith	Encourages the person in the qualities of the person they are named after
<b>Community Involvement</b>	Cultural community	Christian denomination	Family and extended family

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### 5.4.3 Extended family

The literature review identified the extended family as a pivotal component in the structure of the family and the nuclear family as a subsystem of it (RCAP, 1996; Red Horse, 1980b). Although not unique to Aboriginal societies, extended families are an important feature of support and socialization for Ojibway people. Furthermore, most participants experienced the full range of what an extended-family is, which includes: their aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins, and ultimately the community. Participants had interconnecting relationships with their extended family and were nurtured and supported by them throughout their childhood.

The influence of participants' extended family is restricted in two ways. First, participants' comments are in the past tense, indicating they no longer have the same level of relationship with extended family as they had in the past. Second, participants visit their First Nation community once or twice a year, which means that the exposure of their children to extended family is limited and the ability to transmit cultural knowledge and practices are reduced significantly.

The function of the extended family was drastically reduced for those who had moved to an urban centre. Participants could not replicate the functions and relationships of extended family with their children. Most parents kept regular contact by phone, mail, or email with family, friends and extended-family and are able to receive some support, advice, and guidance.

In an urban centre, the absence of extended family creates an emphasis on the nuclear family model where both parents carry full responsibilities of parenting, rather than distributing the tasks of parenting to several family members. For many of these

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participants, they are the first generation of parents to live the exclusive nuclear-family model without being surrounded by extended family, friends, and their First Nation community. Several participants miss the presence of extended family and the multiple roles it played in their lives, i.e., cultural and familial continuity, babysitting, and several other forms of support and tangible aid. In light of this new circumstance, participants had to create a network of relationships with co-workers, with parents from the same school their children attended, or from clubs, associations, or church groups. These new relationships were based on common features of their lives, i.e. work, school, or leisure activities. The transition of relationships has been a difficult process.

The new form of extended family in the urban centre does not have the same ease as those back in their community. One mother commented that she had to remind her daughter not to go to the kitchen to help herself to a drink or food when visiting friends. There were degrees of etiquette or formality observed with those considered friends or acquaintances versus family. Some participants taught their child to know the difference between the two.

It is not known by participants' comments and through the literature the extent that new relationships created in the urban context parallel the features of an extended family. One key feature would be the ethnicity of individuals, because one of the primary roles of the extended family is the transmission of cultural knowledge/identity. Though healthy, nurturing relationships can be developed in an urban centre that mirror many aspects of extended family, those relationships may not be able to contribute in cultural ways that are important to Ojibway parents. Several of the Ojibway mothers with young children echoed this sentiment when they compared their parenting style with peers from

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their First Nation community. The mothers with young children enjoyed the friendships developed with other mothers in urban areas, and the effect of this relationship was to parent like them rather than family and friends back home. Participants had to seek out Ojibway cultural activities or develop relationships with other Ojibway/Aboriginal people in the urban centre in order for their child to be exposed to the culture.

What is also not clear for participants with children under five years old is whether the new network of friends in the urban centre shared the same values or beliefs deemed important to Ojibway people or whether there is a re-ordering of values because of the influence of new relationships and cultures. The values and beliefs identified by participants were: sharing, respect, helping those who need it, the importance of family, respecting the land, and being aware of their spiritual nature. None of the participants mentioned whether their non-Ojibway peers shared values or beliefs important to them. Participants with children who were over eighteen years of age continued to ascribe to Ojibway cultural values and beliefs in a greater way than their younger counterparts. The passage of time will reveal whether younger parents will be influenced to modify or change their current values or beliefs.

Among extended family members, grandparents were mentioned the most by participants. The primary reasons for grandparents being mentioned by participants were the parental roles they assumed from their adult children and for imparting cultural knowledge.

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### 5.4.4 Grandparents

Participants describe grandparents' roles of taking them out on the land, ensuring they spoke the Ojibway language, and passing down familial, cultural, and communal history. Some grandparents took on parental roles when it was necessary.

For those in First Nation communities, grandparents continue many of these practices, while Ojibway parents in urban centres do not have access to this cultural resource. Urban parents, who do not have a safety net of grandparents or extended family, rely on formal services like daycare, children's aid societies, and numerous parenting or children's programs. However, these are time-limited services and there are no expectations of continuing relationships between worker and client.

The absence of grandparents from participants' lives made them aware that their recourse if things went awry was the formal services offered in the city. Some participants received parenting education soon after their child was born and were grateful for the service. Those who received the service did not comment whether the information and skills they received were objectionable to Ojibway world views. The parenting advice dealt with practical matters of feeding, discerning types of cries, and establishing a routine for the baby. Some of these young mothers did not have the basic knowledge of raising an infant, and, therefore, did not object to the service they received.

The loss of the role of grandparents' is similar to that of the larger extended family, where the service provided by professionals are generic in nature and does not cater to the individual's cultural preference. Ojibway values, beliefs, and cultural teachings do not form part of parenting programs offered in an urban centre. In these circumstances, Ojibway parents do not have parenting knowledge supported by

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traditional teachings or informing mothers of the role of their child's Ojibway name. The usual practice is to focus on the physical, mental, or emotional nature of the child based on theories or models that have been developed outside of Ojibway culture. The spiritual nature, which is considered preeminent among the Ojibway, especially during infancy, is rarely referred to by service providers in the city.

#### **5.4.5 Summary of cultural influence of extended family and grandparents**

Historical and contextual forces affect how parents focus on their role and what they emphasize with their children. For Ojibway people, protecting further erosion of their culture is a priority, after a century of assimilation policies of the federal government. Many features of parenting on a First Nation's community could not be replicated in an urban centre, which left participants searching for alternative means to pass on cultural knowledge and practices to their children. A primary difference is that Ojibway parents in an urban centre have to be intentional and explicit in cultivating an Ojibway culture, while their counterparts on their First Nation's community can rely on grandparents, extended family, and the cultural context to transmit many aspects of the culture.

Participants are aware of the ease in which they drifted in and out of extended family homes as they were growing up on their First Nation's community. Extended family and grandparents offered them numerous opportunities to learn Ojibway cultural knowledge and activities, including going out on the land. The absence of this network and safety net in the urban centre put the onus on parents to seek alternative networks not based on pre-existing relationships or sharing the same cultural perspectives or practices.

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Participants' circumstances in the urban centre raises the question of the role of attachment theory in the lives of Ojibway parents when cultural influences are in transition or reduced. The next section will compare and contrast participants' responses with two components of attachment theory.

### 5.5 Ojibway parenting and attachment theory: Sensitivity

In this study, the construct of sensitivity is distinguished between participants' perspectives of their parenting and attachment theory's definition. An attachment theory definition of sensitivity will be compared with participants' responses. Participants were asked how they came to know their infant's needs and what they did to meet those needs. An open-ended question allowed them to answer freely without being constrained by the definition created by attachment theory. Participants' responses initially focused on their experiences with becoming parents and how that affected them, they went on to answer the question of their child's needs and their responses to them.

Participants, at the outset, answered the question regarding their child's needs by describing their sense of confidence and competence as parents and the challenges confronting them. There were six categories of confidence/competence identified.

First, there was one parent who felt like a "*kick-ass parent*" and knew what to do with minimal assistance from others. This participant described her attitude as if a switch was turned on and she began to make decisions based on her idea of what a good parent would do. In this particular case, parenthood happened overnight when the husband and wife received a call asking if they wanted to adopt an infant from their community. The next day, the infant was in their arms and parenting began immediately, rather than having the usual preparatory time before and during a pregnancy. The mother recounted

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how she was a cool, objective person with the infant and did not have the emotional ups and downs of other mothers with infants of similar age.

When a parent is confident, or overconfident, they will go about meeting their infant's needs with minimal self-reflection and not request outside intervention, as this parent demonstrated. One consequence of this disposition is not considering whether the correct need of the infant is being met. There is concern whether the infant is recognized as having separate needs or preferences than the ones being defined for them by the (over) confident caregiver. This type of parenting is a one-sided relationship where the caregiver is always right. The absence of extended family or grandparents could not moderate this parent's disposition.

Second, many parents reported "*being there*" for their child, that is, being ready and willing to respond to the child's needs as they became known. These parents told stories of being able and willing to respond to their infant's needs as they arose. Several stories focused on the experience of the toddler climbing into bed with the parents and allowing the behaviour to continue until the child felt safe to sleep on their own bed throughout the night. The disposition of "*being there*" focuses on the reactions of parents and does not reveal information about the infant's or toddler's needs.

If the idea of 'being there' for the child is extrapolated from the examples given by parents, then this means they respond to a child-initiated need. However, from the example given during the Talking Circle, there is not a consensus among parents on the appropriateness of allowing a toddler to continue the practice of climbing into bed with its parents. Most participants do not distinguish between a child's preference, a desire, a want, or similarly related dispositions, versus a need. The semantic distinction affects

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whether the concept of sensitivity is activated. According to attachment theorists (Bowlby, 1969; Bretherton, 1997), infant need is based on evolutionary survival, whereas parents did not make similar distinctions.

Third, there were those parents who recognized the trial-and-error aspect of parenting as they came to understand their role and responsibilities as parents. When participants did not know how to meet a specific need of the infant, they explored several options to find which one worked. The most common experience was distinguishing the infant's types of cries, one for feeding, one for changing diapers, and so forth. The trial-and-error period was time consuming and exhausting as these young parents dealt with an infant that was usually crying by the time they understood what was needed.

Experience was the primary teacher, for trial-and-error parenting, as these parents eventually learned what their infants needed. These temporary accomplishments in learning were overshadowed by the continuous requirement to learn new information of their infant's emerging needs. One of the shortcomings to trial-and-error parenting is that attention is paid only to visible or audible cues of the infant. Therefore, the infant may have emotional, cognitive, or spiritual needs that require stimulation and, they may not be communicated through crying or fussing, and a parent would miss attending to these needs. An overreliance on trial-and error parenting, therefore, does not anticipate what an infant or child may need and parents do not prepare themselves to meet emerging needs.

Fourth, other parents were overwhelmed with layers of responsibilities from work, household chores, childcare, and marriage. These conditions affected their sense of competence as a parent. Several of the parents with young children described their circumstances of a full-time job and the switch to a full-time parent when they got home.

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This situation is exhausting for parents as they describe the conflicting desire to spend time with their child and also wanting to take a break or catch up with household chores. For most parents, household chores were more urgent, initially, while they asked their child to put off their request. Eventually, guilt and the disappointment of the child forced parents to stop household chores and focus on their child. Many parents reorganized their schedules to spend time with their child shortly after work. Household chores and other activities were put on hold until the child's need to connect with the parent had been satisfied.

These overworked parents eventually learned to respond to their child's needs over a period of weeks or months. Similar to the trial-and-error style of parenting, the child's continuous communication of need is eventually heard through the multiple distractions parents encounter, i.e., work, housework, other children, and marriage. Participants' responses convey the message that parenting is a series of multiple tasks competing for attention until the child's need is prioritized. Once parents made up their mind to put their child's need first, multi-tasking was reduced to less stressful levels.

Fifth, parenthood affected some participants psychologically by raising issues of their own childhood or being over-protective of their child, thus causing anxiety and loss of confidence in their parenting abilities. For these parents, emotional and psychological challenges emerged after their child was born. One parent was reduced to a sense of helplessness when her child was born, despite successfully parenting an adopted child earlier. She was able to receive help from several service providers in the community during the first year. The assistance received enabled this parent to assume her role with minimal formal services after the first year.

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Other parents were reminded of their troubled childhoods and the desire not to repeat their negative experiences for their child. For these parents, their heightened desire to be a better parent became self-defeating as they tried to be a perfect parent. The normal trial-and-error parenting inevitably included moments of failure that did not measure up to their self-imposed standards, which then represented indictments of their inability to parent. These parents had friends, family members, and professional service providers to assist them in working out their unrealistic demands on themselves. These parents did meet their child's needs; however, their psychological/emotional responses to parenting prevented them from maintaining a long-term healthy parenting pattern without external support and counseling.

Finally, some parents knew immediately that they lacked the information and abilities to parent a newborn and, thus, sought help from family, friends, and professionals. These parents came to know their infant's needs through external sources by being aware of their need to learn. Being proactive in parenting exposed them to many facets of their child's development that they would not otherwise have known.

In summary, participants' responded to the question of knowing their infant's needs and responding to them by first describing their competence as a parent to those who lacked information or skills to parent. Competence was not global in nature, that is some parents were confident in their abilities with one child but not a subsequent child, or they were confident to respond to the child's needs at a certain stage but struggled at a different developmental stage. Similarly, parents who obtained support because they lacked information about their child, or specific skills, were able to acquire confidence in their parenting once they received help.

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Rather than being informed by theory, parents used personal observations and experiences, children's reactions, cultural teachings, family, and friends to gauge their parenting. Participants confronted the impediments that kept them from being competent parents. They increased their abilities to focus on their child's needs and met their parenting responsibilities. Participants' descriptions of parenting differ from that of attachment theory, which focuses on infant's needs as the gauge for determining caregiver sensitivity.

The next section will compare and contrast attachment theory's sensitivity construct with participants' descriptions of children's need and their responses to those needs. It should be noted that parents' descriptions are not identical with attachment theory's sensitivity construct. In order to compare and contrast ideas, attachment theory's constructs will be used to reference participants' responses. The components of the sensitivity construct that will be compared and contrasted are: a) needs, b) awareness, c) response, d) timing, e) appropriateness, f) infant or child-initiated signal, g) core motivations of infant/child, and h) the pattern of parental behaviour towards their child. These components overlap considerably while parenting; they are highlighted to respond to the constructs and processes alluded to by participants and used by attachment theory. There are some features of the sensitivity construct that cannot be compared in this study because they were not suggested in participants' responses. Most participants' responses reflect parenting a toddler/young child as opposed to parenting an infant. This distinction is important because the sensitivity construct was developed for infants, yet it is often applied with children as well.

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### 5.5. a. Need

Bowlby (1969) defined infant needs from an evolutionary perspective, therefore crucial to survival in the first years of life. Participants did not frame their perspectives of infant need from an evolutionary perspective, instead they gave a range of needs in the child's life and identified who informed them of that need. Parents were informed by their own upbringing, family, friends, cultural teachings, and professional support in getting to know a child's needs. Participants' assorted definitions of need are in stark contrast with an evolutionary perspective based on survival needs while other needs are considered flexible and ancillary.

Participants' responses also reveal that children's needs are varied and intersecting with the life of the family and the social/cultural context. Some participants' descriptions of parenting were similar to those parents who anticipated their child's need before the infant initiated a signal (Rothbaum, et al., 2000). This style of parenting would not fit into the sequence developed by attachment theory where an infant-initiated signal and an appropriate caregiver response are expected. The parenting style described by participants could be interpreted as insensitive, according to attachment theory, because the infant or child may not associate parent's behaviours with a need being met.

Other parents were aware of their infants' needs but did not know how to respond to them. Several parents resolved their dilemma through trial-and-error or by asking for assistance. Though there is a trial-and-error aspect to all parenting, parents eventually met the child's needs as they figured out which need was being communicated. The trial-and-error process requires the parent to be attentive to their actions in order to gauge its suitability.

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The other feature of the trial-and-error parenting process is the child being persistent until the parent figures out what to do. Participants' portrayal of their children is one of determined effort in communicating their needs. In this ongoing parent-child relationship, there is a development of synchrony where the caregiver becomes aware of the infant's need and adjusts or adapts to maximize the relationship.

Some parents who were aware of their child's need and knew how to meet the need postponed their response to attend to other responsibilities. These parents, after a period of guilt, frustration, and anger at themselves, eventually prioritized their child's needs before attending to other responsibilities. The delayed response is interpreted as insensitive parenting because the child no longer associated its need being met with the signal sent earlier.

Attachment theory's definition of need includes infant identified and initiated, being immediate in nature and with the core motivations of proximity seeking and comfort. Ojibway parents' understanding of infant's need takes into account those initiated by the infant, but also includes those identified by parents, culture, and context. Immediate tangible needs were recognized, so were abstract and long term or ongoing needs such as love, security, stability, and cultural identity. Participants did not express whether the emphasis of an infant-initiated need clashed with their various experiences of anticipating, delaying, or having infant needs identified by others.

Reducing the scope of infant needs to those initiated by the infant/child obscures participants' experiences and definitions of need and the various roles and contexts involved in meeting those needs. For example, an infant or child may resist being bathed and not initiate future requirement for cleanliness, yet the parent is acting on a need even

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though the child has not identified it as such. Defining sensitive parenting as meeting the needs of proximity seeking or comfort obscures other needs of the infant. Further considerations of infant need are required when considering the other pathways of identifying their needs.

#### **5.5. b. Awareness**

Parents' awareness of infants' needs range from not being aware to ignoring their signals. Some parents described being unaware of what an infant needed until they were informed by their parent, in-law, or professional. Other parents ignored the child's signal of need by continuing to do housework. Most parents, however, were aware of what their infant or child needed and went about meeting those needs.

As stated earlier, awareness of the child's needs extended beyond immediate physical needs, because of the influence of personal, cultural, familial, spiritual, and social sources. Parents were highly motivated to meet certain needs that they had not received from their childhood. For example, one parent committed himself to tell his children daily that he loved them because he did not hear those words as a child. Other parents missed out on cultural teachings or practices and made up for this by instituting them in daily practice. These circumstances indicate that awareness of some infant needs are not exclusively infant identified. In other circumstances, awareness of what an infant needs are initially borne by external sources until the parent internalizes the information to make it part of their daily caregiving repertoire. For example, some parents had rudimentary awareness of what an infant needed until someone pointed out other needs of infants, i.e., maintaining a routine, stimulating them by talk, play, or singing. Over time, this parent came to understand that she did not have to passively wait until a signal is

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communicated by her infant. This parent proactively met the infant's needs that the infant was not aware they had.

Being aware of an infant's needs is only the beginning of being deemed a sensitive parent, according to attachment theory (Bretherton, 1985). The parent is required to have a response to an infant-initiated need; the response must occur within a certain time threshold and be appropriate to the need expressed.

#### **5.5. c. Response**

Several participants indicated that they responded to their infant/child's needs as they became aware of them; however, they also anticipated their child's needs as well as delayed their response because of other responsibilities. For some participants, not knowing how to respond, or questioning whether they were responding correctly, was a frustration. Participants were exposed to several sources of information on how and when to respond to their child, i.e., family members, cultural teachings, friends, or health-care professionals.

In families where multiple generations live in the same household, there may be pressure from grandparents, aunts, or uncles to respond in a specific way, such as ignoring a child's cry in order for them to self soothe. These examples and others underscore that response to need is varied and contextual.

According to attachment theory (Ainsworth, et al., 1978), being aware and responding to an infant's need is not sufficient to indicate that the parent is acting in a sensitive manner. The other components of timing and appropriateness are required to occur in tandem with awareness and response.

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### 5.5. d. Timing

Another aspect of the sensitivity construct is the timing of the parent's response to the infant-initiated signal. Timing is important, in attachment theory, because the infant has to associate the signal being sent with the need being met.

Participants indicated they varied from immediate response to a delayed response, to the point that they frustrated their child. Most parents pointed out the preferred timing is to meet their child's need immediately; however, this is not always possible because of multiple demands on their time. Parents who delayed their response to their child's needs thought that they could meet the need at a later time and did not imply the child would forget the need was communicated. The examples of delayed response given by participants were of children wanting to play with parents therefore their response time may be different when infants are involved.

Parents' responses indicate that they are primary caregivers without the presence of extended family to provide child care support. Participants' peers from their First Nation community usually have tangible support and encouragement from extended family. At times, this means that the mother can afford to be less vigilant in her response time when there are others available to meet the infant's need.

Although response and timing are important aspects of meeting a child's needs, there is an understanding that parents cannot meet every infant-initiated or child-initiated need immediately. According to attachment theory (Ainsworth & Marvin, 1994), the overall pattern of responding in a timely manner builds sufficient relationship with the child so that temporary lapses in response time will not undo the level of care the child has come to expect. It is not known what the limits are in the number of delayed timing

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before it is detrimental to the caregiver-child relationship, or whether each child is affected similarly. The fourth sequence in Ainsworth's (1978) criteria of sensitivity is the appropriateness of the response.

### 5.5. e. Appropriateness

An appropriate response to an infant-initiated signal is one that is timely and meets the need that is being expressed. For example, an infant is hungry and sends out a signal indicating their hunger and the parent responds with food. An inappropriate response would be playing with the child when they are expressing hunger.

Appropriate response is a learning process for new parents; therefore, there is a flexible threshold in which to meet infant or children's needs. Participants' experiences with trial-and-error parenting meant that they expressed both appropriate and inappropriate responses to their child's needs because of being new and uninformed parents. As parents gained experience and tuned into the communication of their infant, they were better able to meet the need expressed by the infant.

Appropriate needs are linked with the necessities of life, i.e., food, clothing, shelter, nurturance and security (Bretherton, 1985). What appear to be incontrovertible needs are debatable on how much of each is necessary for the development of the infant or child. Parenting contexts are diverse and access to life sustaining resources is varied; therefore, meeting the necessities of life means something different according to the context. Cultures develop parenting beliefs and practices designed to respond to their context and maintain and sustain their society. There remains an unresolved debate on appropriate responses to the physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual development of children (Chao, 2001). In many cases, appropriate caregiving becomes culturally

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defined rather than representing a universal standard. For many Ojibway parents', establishing a cultural identity was an important feature during infancy and childhood, as well as basic needs.

Participants recounted their appropriate responses to their children's needs including delayed responses. According to attachment theory, a delayed, appropriate response is considered insensitive if the infant/child does not associate the need being met with the signal sent earlier. Participants were aware of this fact but did not associate their actions and the child's reactions with attachment theory explanations.

#### **5.5. f. Core motivations**

Attachment theory identifies basic infant motivations as proximity seeking and comfort, and they communicate these needs by sending out a variety of signals (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). The infant has to have these survival features in order to elicit care and nurturance of its mother or other caregivers.

Participants' descriptions of their infant or child's internal needs were limited to their need to be loved, to be safe and secure, the importance of cultural identity, and their desire to play. In addition to discussing children's needs, participants focused on their parenting responsibilities. Parents referred to their upbringing, culture, and contexts when situating their children's needs. Infant or children's motivations were not made explicit.

If participants' responses are taken liberally, then some of their descriptions of children's behavior can be interpreted as proximity seeking and comfort, i.e., climbing into bed with parents and wanting to spend time with their parent when they got home from work. In these circumstances, participants met their child's needs even though, in some cases, it took a few disappointments of the child to get the desired behaviour from

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the parent. The examples given by parents are those of toddlers and young children, not infants.

This situation raises an interesting issue when parents are primarily oriented to external roles and responsibilities and do not prioritize needs from the infant or child's perspective as attachment theory does. Some parents had come to the conclusion that prioritizing children's needs over other responsibilities was beneficial to the parent-child relationship. It must be remembered that these participants are living a nuclear-family model, where extended family cannot meet the child's needs prior to the parent coming home from work.

It is clear that parents do not have a survival orientation towards describing their child's needs or motivations. Instead, their descriptions of meeting the child's needs and responding to internal motivations are informed by personal experience, cultural teachings, and context. If the needs of the participants' children's are met by these perspectives then it may not be necessary to introduce attachment theory and its corresponding world view.

#### **5.5. g. Infant-initiated signal**

Participants identified multiple sources of information to help them know what to do with their child. Participants' reliance on several sources to identify their child's need is counter to attachment theory's sole source of an infant-initiated signal. Adhering to several sources in identifying an infant's or child's need can seem haphazard and inconsistent to a theory that is informed by a single source. Parents were proud of the lessons learned through their experiences, observations and their perspectives informed by the Ojibway culture. A sole reliance on infant-initiated signal to inform what an infant

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or child needs does away with the wealth of personal, familial and cultural information acquired over a long period of time and may not be a realistic appraisal of what happens in families of all cultures.

The majority of responses reflect parent-initiated responses to their child's needs and preferences, similar to Japanese parents that initiate meeting their child's needs (Rothbaum, et al., 2000). For example, some parents described initiating a Naming Ceremony because of their adherence to cultural practices; other parents kept their child close to them when in public even though the child wanted to explore their surroundings; still, other parents described enlisting their child in multiple recreational activities in the hope that one of these activities would light a passion in the child. Parents initiated the naming ceremony because they saw it as a core cultural need of the child. This parenting behaviour is influenced by cultural traditions, not by the child's internal mechanisms or the parent's creation of this practice. The external nature of the Naming Ceremony is similar to German mothers who changed a particular parenting practice because the culture dictated it (Grossmann, et al., 1985). The parents at Biefeld stopped picking up their child when they turned one year old; this practice was not based on the child's developmental requirements or the parent's conclusion of good parenting. Rather, the choice, to stop picking up their child, was based on the tradition and influence of the cultural community.

Participants' responses indicate a mixture of child-initiated, parent-initiated and culturally-prescribed needs being met. Each activity of meeting infant, toddler and child's needs are important during the phase of development they are in. Parents do not identify which route of meeting needs is preeminent for the child's overall sense of wellbeing. It

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could be argued that all cases of meeting a child's needs are important regardless whether it is based on the child's, parent's, or the culture's prescription. Cross cultural examination of the sensitivity construct reveals multiple and intersecting definitions of need and those who initiate the process of meeting children's needs (Wainryb, 2004). Attachment theory has made the infant-initiated need preeminent from the other types of need while many cultures do not. It would make sense to prioritize infant need with an evolutionary perspective if danger is imminent. However, imminent danger is not part of participants' perspectives or experiences, and they have not had to prioritize their child's needs according to the requirements of physical survival.

#### **5.5. h. Patterned behaviour**

Another aspect of the sensitivity construct extrapolated from participants' answers is reference to the pattern of behaviours towards their child. Meeting the needs of infants and children on an ongoing basis establishes a pattern that the infant/child comes to expect and rely upon. When parents do not occasionally meet their infant's or child's needs, this does not undo the pattern that has been established (Ainsworth & Marvin, 1994).

Participants stated that their most influential caregiver was the person who consistently met their needs during their childhood. In turn, participants recognized the importance of establishing a consistent, care-giving regimen with their children. This aspect of parenting is self-evident to those who may not know the hidden psychological processes of the sensitivity construct.

Maintaining patterned parenting behaviour that meets infants' or children's needs can be considered a universal requirement and is not exclusive to attachment theory. The

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reason or motivation for keeping patterned behaviour is informed by several sources.

Attachment theory may be a source of explanation for some parents, however, Ojibway parents are informed by their experiences and cultural beliefs/teachings.

#### **5.5. i. Summary of sensitivity**

Participants spoke of various stages/ages when they commented on their children, despite being asked to comment on their children during the first two years of life. The reason for trying to limit participants' responses to the first two years is that attachment theory focuses on infants, six to twenty four months old, to identify core motivations and build the sensitivity construct around this phase of development. Participants' responses can be considered coarse-grained, similar to critiques of attachment theory's definition of sensitivity (P. M. Crittenden & Claussen, 2000). There are many variables to sensitive parenting that one theory does not adequately explain diverse parenting experiences, contexts, and prescribed responses.

When the Ojibway caregiver-child relationship is compared with attachment theory's construct, participants do not assign the same importance to the relationship as the theory asserts. Ojibway participants did not convey that their relationship with their child was the pivotal structure for the child's wellbeing. This is not to say that Ojibway parents do not value the relationship they have with their child, rather, they see themselves as one part of the overall influence of their child. When attachment theory reduces Ojibway parenting influence and its outcomes to one parent it ignores their reliance on multiple sources of influence for their child's wellbeing. For the Ojibway parent to consider themselves pivotal would mean putting one's self ahead in importance from family, extended family, friends, community and the culture. The stance of

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considering themselves more important than others goes against Ojibway sensibilities of acknowledging and relying on multiple sources of influence on the child. For the Ojibway parent, being considered the sole source for meeting their child's needs puts a burden on them that their culture has distributed over several layers of family, extended family and friends.

The Ojibway participants' perspectives of the caregiver-child relationship are in contrast to a primary parent responding to an infant's needs. The literature review highlighted this dilemma by indicating the unresolved nature on the number of caregivers a child can have and whether an attachment can be formed with each one. Several cultures, including the Ojibway, have arranged their caregiving arrangements to include multiple caregivers which usually include family, extended family, friends or paid caregivers.

Participants highlighted the varied nature of meeting their child's needs by not always knowing what to do or how to respond. Participants relied on multiple sources of information to help them know what to do with their child. Parents were proud of the parenting lessons learned through their experiences, observations and their perspectives informed by the Ojibway culture. A sole reliance on an infant-initiated signal does away with the wealth of personal, familial and cultural information acquired over a long period of time.

Relying on several sources of information is in contrast to attachment theory that describes and explains two core motivations of proximity seeking and comfort. Parents who adhere to sources beyond an infant-initiated signal will seem haphazard and inconsistent to attachment theory. For example, parents implemented a Naming

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Ceremony for their child at various ages and then emphasized characteristics identified by the name given. The characteristics focused on by the parents may not be related to proximity seeking or comfort. The four features of a sensitive response to an infant-initiated signal of awareness, response, timing and appropriateness may not apply to needs not based on those considered crucial by attachment theorists.

Participants' responded to the question of knowing their infant's needs and responding to them by describing a wide-range of answers that indicates their competence as a parent to those who lacked information or skills to parent. Competence was not global in nature, that is, some parents were confident in their abilities with one child but not subsequent children, or they were confident to respond to the child's needs at a certain stage but struggled at a different developmental stage. Similarly, parents who obtained support because they lacked information about their child, or specific skills, were able to acquire confidence in their parenting once they received help.

The other component of attachment theory that will be compared and contrasted with participants' responses is the concept of infant security. According to attachment theory, this trait is acquired through the sensitive parenting of a particular caregiver with a particular child.

### **5.6 Ojibway parenting and attachment theory: Security**

Participants were asked what they desired to instill in their children that would continue to be evident into adulthood. This line of questioning explored whether the concept of security would be mentioned as one of the characteristics identified by Ojibway parents. There were a set of conditions that parents identified that they desired for their children, i.e., stable environment, having their needs met, structure or routine,

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being surrounded by family, child finding their passion in life, parents being good role models, and the parent spending time with their child in order to communicate the value they placed on their child. Participants also identified values they desired their children to possess that were personal and focused on others, i.e., self-esteem, work ethic, and being good to others.

One participant recalled moving around a lot with his young family and living with in-laws and other relatives. The participant saw the situation creating a sense of instability with his children and acted on his observation by finding his own place. This father noticed the change in his family when they were established in their own home.

Another parent identified the importance of having his children's needs met as laying the foundation for security. Based on the participant's overall comments, his interpretation of need was generalized. He saw his role as the provider of finances in order for his spouse to carry on her role with the children.

Some participants identified structure or having a healthy routine as an important foundation for their children. One participant struggled with her estranged husband on having similar routines with their child for both homes. This parent saw the damage of having competing routines i.e., the child is confused, one parent is viewed as an authoritarian while the other does not maintain equivalent rules for the child.

Most participants identified the context of being surrounded by family as a healthy condition for their children. In several occasions, participants commented on the role of family and its ability to cushion the blows of life by responding with support, tangible help, or encouragement.

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Many participants also identified the role of exploring and eventually finding an activity that the child would find fulfilling. The suggestion is that there are positive qualities associated with the exploration and finding an activity the child enjoys. For example, for parents, they communicate with their child about which activities to explore and they spend time together. For the child, they identify their likes and dislikes about an activity, and when they find one they like, they commit to it; their self-esteem increases as they develop knowledge and skills associated with the activity, and they widen their social networks.

Several parents commented on being role models for their children. For some parents, being a role model was not an intentional act because they saw their children repeating behaviours or speech that were not positive. For other parents, they purposely displayed behaviours and speech they wanted their children to repeat. All parents recognized the influence they were having on their children.

Finally, the set of conditions that some parents establish with their child is intentionally spending time with them to communicate their value to the parent and to get to know the individuality of their child. The act of being present is seen as valuable to the child by laying a foundation of worth and love. For parents with several children, the act of spending time with each one is important to get to know their unique personality and qualities.

Besides identifying a set of conditions, Ojibway parents also pointed out values they wished to see established in their children that accompanied them into adulthood. Some values were directed internally to the child, for example those that focused on self-

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esteem and developing a work ethic. External values were those that concentrated on treating others right, respecting others, and standing up for the underdog.

In attachment theory, the concept of security plays a significant role because it reflects the culmination of parenting behaviours. According to attachment theorists, when parents consistently meet the child's needs, the child feels secure in the relationship and this gives an overall sense of optimism towards life. The child's sense of security is towards the relationship established with the caregiver who provides for their needs; therefore, security has to be established through repetitive care-giving over a prolonged period of time.

Participants' responses are compared and contrasted with the internal state of the child versus external conditions that give an overall sense of wellbeing, one aspect of which is security. Participants did not refer to the equivalent of an internal working model, where the infant/child stores their experiences, evaluating the caregiver's response and forming conclusions from them. This concept was more difficult to elicit from participants because of its specific, technical nature of an internal state. The nature of the research question did not lead parents towards this type or level of knowledge.

#### **5.6. a. External conditions versus internal states**

Participants described external conditions they desired for their children in order to develop positive qualities. This focus was consistent with participants in all four groups. Parents wanted a stable environment, structure/routine, to spend time with their child, and be surrounded by a network of family. These eclectic conditions or activities, individually and collectively, contribute towards establishing an environment for the child to develop. They would reconsider or change the activity or environment if they

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were not producing the desired results in their child. Participants' responses raise several questions about Ojibway perspectives on parenting when compared with attachment security.

First, parents took responsibility in choosing activities or external conditions their child would be exposed to but they did not place themselves as the principal influence. This was most notable for those who participated in various ceremonies with their child, i.e., Naming Ceremony, baptism and family naming. It could be argued that parents were principal coordinators of the external conditions or activities their child would be exposed to. That is, they welcomed the various influences their child was exposed to, especially those involving family and culture. This is in contrast to the emphasis placed on the mother-infant dyad in attachment theory.

Second, the court case referred to in the beginning of this study, where Chief and Council and the extended family requested their citizen/child be repatriated (A.[...] (First Nation) v. Children's Aid Society of Toronto, 2004), resembles the external orientation taken by participants. Neither the participants nor those involved in the court case referred to internal psychological or emotional states of the children to validate their requests or perspectives. It was sufficient for Chief and Council and family to know where the child would be and which family would be surrounding the child once back in the community. Similarly, participants oriented to positive external environmental conditions, including behaviours, to shape the child.

The court case reflects different beginning points towards mutual goal of the child's wellbeing. Zylberberg (1991) described the political nature of child welfare court

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decisions that reflect dominant society's perspectives, i.e., attachment theory, and their difficulty in being able to relate to contrary, but equivalent, perspectives.

Third, participants' descriptions of external conditions do not negate awareness of an internal state of the child. After describing an activity or another external condition, participants eventually referred to values or other positive qualities of their children resulting from an activity. Positive qualities included: sense of stability resulting from the family having their own house; security from having regular income that meets children's needs; and knowing they are loved by a parent's individual attention. These qualities can be said to contain psychological or emotional elements; however, parents did not identify them. Perhaps, given enough time and repeated discussions, Ojibway parents may have revealed their own hidden psychological processes embedded in their external activities.

#### **5.6. b. Summary of security**

In attachment theory, the trait of attachment security is between a caregiver and a child, whereas Ojibway parents acknowledge several sources contributing to an overall sense of wellbeing for the child. Ojibway parents emphasize an external orientation when it comes to developing positive qualities, such as: having a home of their own created stability for the family who had been living with various relatives and in-laws; being employed and meeting the needs of the family creates security; and intentionally spending time with each child will communicate the worth the father has for each one. Attachment theory, on the other hand, has an internal orientation based on a dyadic relationship between caregiver and child and the development of the psychological trait of security. The development of security for children is not opposed by Ojibway parents, rather the route to developing the trait may be in question; Ojibway parents may feel

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constrained by attachment theorists' focus on the dyadic relationship while attachment theorists may not validate the many external sources influencing the child's sense of security beyond an identified caregiver.

When attachment theory reduces parenting influence and its outcomes to one parent it ignores Ojibway parents' reliance on multiple sources of influence for their child's wellbeing.

Ojibway participants did not allude to evolutionary, biological mechanisms influencing their child or their parenting, whereas attachment theory does. In principle, if parents were guided by the ceremonies, as described earlier, and followed the teachings associated with them, they would most likely fulfill some of the conditions of the secure relationship outlined by attachment theorists. However, the unresolved nature of cultural preferences defining parenting and child development means that debates on these topics will continue. Ojibway parents want their parenting knowledge to be recognized for its benefits to their children and not be superseded by external theories.

### 5.7 Migration

A serendipitous finding in this study relates to the impact of migration from a First Nation community to an urban centre. The impact of the relocation forced participants to reexamine some of their cultural assumptions because familiar practices and family contexts were no longer available. The urban context challenged participants' primary identification with the Ojibway cultural reference to a subsistent lifestyle along with the customary roles of family participating in the upbringing of children.

Identification with a subsistence lifestyle and the qualities that result from it was not fully informative to the new conditions. For this reason, many participants focused on

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cultural activities that could be implemented in an urban centre, i.e., reference to values, childhood ceremonies, and spiritual practices. Relocation required a reordering of cultural perspectives and practices that included parenting. Ojibway culture is expressed and emphasized differently between those in a First Nation community from Ojibway parents living in an urban centre. Parents, in the urban centre, stopped or reduced some parenting practices while simultaneously expanding their repertoire of parenting styles and perspectives because of exposure to other contexts, cultures, and information. This process is reminiscent of what Kluckhohn (1961) describes as cultural variation, where segments of a culture emphasize different aspects of their culture or adopt practices or perspectives from other cultures. This phenomenon can have a positive outcome whereby the Ojibway culture is able to incorporate several contexts, perspectives, and practices without being threatened of dissolving or being assimilated. There may be some individuals, within the Ojibway community, who would insist that essential aspects of the culture be based from a subsistent lifestyle. Those who do not practice this lifestyle or its corresponding values may be relegated to the margins of their culture.

Migration has changed several parenting behaviours, but parenting perspectives have been slower to change and are dealt with as they become evident during parenting. Participants are expanding what it means to be Ojibway parents in an urban centre by incorporating ideas and practices without losing their identification to their culture.

### 5.8 Summary

In summary, parenting practices and perspectives have undergone a shift from those Ojibway who parent in a First Nation community to those who parent in urban communities. The most visible shift occurs at the behavioural level where participants'

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children are not as free to roam in the urban community because of the absence of family, extended family, friends, and the population size that accommodates these activities. Parents cannot rely on familiar structures and supports they had on their First Nation community and had to change their parenting practices in response to their urban environment. Access to the land for subsistent activities is reduced, for those Ojibway living in an urban centre, because of the costs, distance and time.

History plays a role in participants' orientation to family, community, and culture as a reference to their identity as Ojibway people. Historical factors also affect the wariness of Ojibway participants in considering alternate views when their history reflects continuous assimilation strategies of the federal government.

Participants urban location play a role in reordering cultural preferences by relegating some cultural practices and perspectives to the background while simultaneously bringing others to the foreground. Context also introduces new parenting practices and perspectives that are required to function in the new environment.

Cultural factors are important to Ojibway participants, as they negotiate which practices or perspectives go to the background and which come to the foreground. This process usually involves participants' Ojibway identities and is therefore slow to change and sometimes distressing. It is more difficult for Ojibway parents in an urban centre to maintain their cultural orientation when not surrounded by family, community, and their culture. Even though urban Ojibway cannot replicate some historical parenting practices, this does not diminish their appeal to their culture. Participants emphasized various cultural teachings and practices with minimal direct involvement of family and extended family. Participants have to be intentional and vigilant in implementing cultural practices

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and teachings, while their peers, in a First Nation community, could rely on family, community, friends and the Ojibway culture to influence their child and reinforce their parenting and teachings.

If participants' descriptions of their parenting practices are taken as discrete events, then they appear familiar with descriptions of sensitive parenting put forth by attachment theory. However, participants are informed by Ojibway culture, experience, family, friends and context when referencing their parenting behavior and perspectives. Ojibway participants do not reference the philosophical and theoretical foundations of attachment theory when describing their behaviours or perspectives. This distinction is important to Ojibway parents who look to their culture to inform them on parenting.

Participants did not place themselves as the core influence of their child and, therefore, do not consider the dyadic relationship as producing the security trait. Participants did recall their childhoods and the consistent meeting of their needs by one or both parents or their grandparents and the bond that developed between them. It was not clear, from participants' descriptions, whether the bond developed between their caregivers was similar to the trait of security as defined by attachment theorists. Participants relied on external conditions, both environmental and behavioural, to shape and influence their child.

The next chapter will examine the implications and consequences of the questions raised in this chapter. The role of historical and contextual factors for Ojibway participants raises interesting questions of the implementation of theories developed elsewhere. History and context play a role in the readiness or uneasiness of individuals or cultures to accept an imposed-etic. The urban context exerts its influence on Ojibway

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parents to negotiate how they implement cultural features of parenting. The Ojibway culture influences parenting by emphasizing certain behaviours and perspectives, which may be at odds to ideas introduced from outside. A careful examination of the sensitivity construct revealed that some parenting behaviours appear similar, as discrete behaviors, while the reason or meaning of the behavior is informed by differing worldviews. Finally, the idea of a secure base, as understood by attachment theorists, was not reflected in the dyadic relationship of Ojibway parents. Participants referred to culture, family, friends, community, and context as producing the environment for healthy development. The implications and consequences of these questions will be dealt with in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 6

## CONCLUSION

**6.1 Summary of Study**

This study explored Ojibway parenting perspectives and practices based on participants' responses to questions asked in a Talking Circle and from the literature on this topic. Two components of attachment theory were compared and contrasted to participants' perspectives and practices of meeting their child's needs and their desired traits for their child when they reached adulthood.

Background information was given on the contextual and historical factors that played a role in the absence of Aboriginal knowledge in the public forum, which includes parenting knowledge. One consequence of this situation was displayed in Justice Mesbur's acknowledgement of ignorance of unique features of Aboriginal parenting. As a result, she ruled in favour of a psychological theory that interpreted the Aboriginal children's condition and likelihood of positive development. The plan of Chief and Council and extended family to repatriate the children and provide similar care as the foster parents was not compelling to convince the court of the similar likelihood of positive development. This case, and others like it, highlight the consequence when Aboriginal parenting knowledge is absent in the public forum.

The literature describes several features of Aboriginal parenting based on the cultural practice of subsistent living from the land, the important role of family and extended family and adhering to various cultural teachings and traditions. Participants, in this study, were living in an urban centre; their childhood experience reflected much of what the literature states. However, their new location, in an urban centre, prevented the

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continuation of some aspects of their traditional life. Participants, therefore, acquired additional parenting perspectives and practices that their counterparts on their First Nation community do not. For example, First Nation parents do not have to be as vigilant of their children because of the presence of family, extended family and friends in the home or in the community, whereas urban Aboriginal parents are not surrounded by similar layers of support. The context, therefore, altered participants' traditional, cultural parenting expressions in some areas and significantly reduces it in other areas. This is most readily acknowledged in access to and participation in land-based activities. Aboriginal participants are also affected by the absence of family and extended family in the urban centre. Friends and service providers have been able to replace some of the roles family or extended-family play in the lives of Ojibway parents. The one area that cannot be readily replaced is the impartation of cultural perspectives and practices' including the Ojibway language; therefore, the Ojibway community continues to play a role in participants' lives.

An exploratory study was conducted to respond to Justice Mesbur's lack of knowledge of Aboriginal parenting and the subsequent use of attachment theory to justify keeping the children away from family and community. To respond to this situation, the following questions were asked of participants.

1. *Who and what has influenced Ojibway parents' perspectives on parenting and child rearing?*
2. *What are some examples of Ojibway parenting?*
3. *What is the significance of the ceremony or ritual in raising a child and in parenting?*
4. *What are the important needs of a child before he/she is two years old and how do parents meet these needs?*

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### 5. *What do parents do to prepare their child for adulthood?*

Ojibway participants were chosen using a snowball sample in an urban centre. A Talking Circle format was used with participants because of its familiarity within the Ojibway community. Participants' responses indicate their appeal to Ojibway cultural teachings and traditions to inform their parenting. When the culture is silent, that is, previous parenting knowledge and solutions are not informative to their new urban context, then participants access other knowledge developed by other urban aboriginal parents, friends, and/or professional service providers.

The application of attachment theory to Ojibway families presents several dilemmas because of the shared history between Aboriginal Peoples and Canadian society; the implication of the theory to Ojibway families who use culture as a foundation for parenting knowledge; and the unfamiliarity of Aboriginal parenting knowledge of professionals who work with Aboriginals. The next section will address the implications to theory and practice raised by this study.

## 6.2 Summary of Findings

The questions that guided this study were: What are Ojibway parenting perspectives and practices and is attachment theory's sensitivity and security constructs similar or dissimilar from Ojibway participants' perspectives and/or practices? Before attachment theory can be considered on its merits, the history and context of Aboriginal People in Canada was examined for its role in influencing this issue. The historical relationship between Canada and Aboriginal cultures have been characterized by assimilation practices of Canada, where Aboriginal Peoples were expected to forsake

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their culture and embrace an European-based culture and mindset. It is in this context that attachment theory is seen as a continuation of ignoring Aboriginal parenting knowledge by preferring knowledge developed outside of Aboriginal cultures. Attachment theory was created without collaboration or participation of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada, which includes the Ojibway. Yet, this theory is meant to explain and include Ojibway sensitive parenting and the resulting security developed by the child. When attachment theory is applied uncritically, that is, not considering the Ojibway family's perspectives, then it resembles the same dynamics of assimilation, that is, those outside the culture deciding what is good for Aboriginal families. Before attachment theory could be compared and contrasted with Ojibway parenting perspectives and practices, Ojibway parents had to be interviewed.

Ojibway participants were transitioning from using their upbringing as a template for parenting to establishing new ways to parent in an urban centre not surrounded by familiar cultural environment. This meant that some cultural practices, like hunting and fishing, were suspended until they were able to return to their First Nation territories. Ojibway parents continued to utilize some Ojibway cultural teachings and practices in their families. Half of the participants were involved in the Naming Ceremony for their children, several identified values important to the Ojibway, i.e., respect, sharing, and helping those in need. All participants mentioned the struggle in having to negotiate their parenting assumptions and practices in order to fit into the new context of the urban centre. The Ojibway culture continued to influence participants in their new urban surroundings.

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Ojibway participants indicated that their parenting perspectives and practices were acquired from several sources, but did not specify attachment theory. Ojibway parents' montage of ideas were identified earlier in this study as stemming from Ojibway culture, personal experiences and observations, information garnered from family, friends, their community, and the occasional professional service provider. For most parents these assortments of sources were sufficient to parent without reference to parenting theories. For a few parents, family support or professional services were vital because they did not have information required to parent their child at a particular stage, or their own functioning was compromised necessitating professional intervention.

Participants were asked what they desired to instill in their child that would continue into adulthood. The predominant theme that emerged was the role Ojibway parents assumed by creating or exposing their children to positive environments. These external conditions ranged from: parents being employed in order to meet the needs of their children, parents exploring several recreational or leisure activities with their children until the child found their passion for an activity, and parents teaching their children values towards others and themselves.

### **6.3 Implication for theory**

Ojibway parents described perspectives and behaviours that differed from attachment theory's explanations of sensitivity and security. Ojibway parents held a broader definition of sensitivity where they met their child's need based on information from several sources, whereas attachment theory has a single source, the child. The implication of applying attachment theory to Ojibway parents is to reduce their conceptions of sensitive caregiving to one source – the infant's or child's signal of need.

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Attachment theory's use of a single source to gauge sensitive parenting has a polarizing effect, where one parenting style is the right way and other ways to attend to a child's needs are not considered sensitive parenting. Based on this polarization, attachment theory, then, can interpret Ojibway parenting as insensitive when Ojibway parents believe they are behaving sensitively towards their child.

Attachment theory reduces an infant's motivations to proximity seeking and comfort based on evolutionary principles of survival. Ojibway parents, on the other hand, described their children's needs as: the need to be loved, to be safe and secure, and the importance of an Ojibway identity. Reducing an infant's motivations to proximity seeking and comfort obscures other motivations that are assigned by cultural groups, like the Ojibway. For example, some Ojibway parents followed cultural teachings by arranging a Naming Ceremony for their child in order to know their child's destiny and place within the culture. Attachment theory does not identify changing motivations of children in their development and subsequent roles of parents and other caregivers. There is a danger of overextending attachment theory's explanations of infant motivations without corresponding modifications for other motivations or developmental changes.

Attachment theory's construct of security is based on the development of a sensitive parent responding to their child's need, resulting in a sense of security in the relationship. Ojibway parents, however, identified several personal characteristics and cultural values they wanted to instill in their child that would continue in adulthood. One parent did mention how his children acquired security, his explanation focused on providing for his children's needs through being employed and this created the sense of security. This interpretation of security is not based on the development of a personal

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relationship with each child, but on the provision of their needs nonetheless. Most parents answered similarly by identifying external conditions first, then the accompanying sense of wellbeing on their child. Based on parents' responses, the idea of security is replaced by an overall sense of wellbeing for the child by the deliberate creation or exposure of positive external conditions. One of these external conditions can include parent's relationship with their child, but it is not considered preminent to other influences. The implication for Ojibway parents when applying attachment theory's definition of security is to disregard the external conditions they have created or the cultural values they espouse in favour of the caregiver-child relationship route to the development of security. Attachment theory fails to fully reflect the Ojibway infant or child's reality or Ojibway parents' perspectives or practices. The Ojibway culture, then, provides several more options for the child's overall sense of wellbeing than the sole route identified by attachment theory.

### 6.4 Implication for Culture

Before considering the implications of this research to Ojibway culture, it must be restated that Ojibway culture is not a monolithic, homogeneous culture. Instead, there is recognition of a dynamic variability in individual and collective expressions of Ojibway culture. For example, the culture is not practiced identically today as in historical periods; there are different influences on those Ojibway living in urban centres from those who live on a First Nation community; and individuals adhere to some Ojibway cultural values and meaning systems and not to others. At the individual level, there are increased variations in cultural expressions, while collectively, there are recognizable, shared understandings and practices of Ojibway culture.

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The role of cultural variation among the Ojibway reveals the multifaceted characteristics of their culture and the misconception of a homogeneous culture. As long as the Ojibway were separate from mainstream Canadian society, on their First Nations territories, they could be characterized or stereotyped as a homogeneous culture. The recent out-migration of half the Ojibway population from their First Nation territories onto Canadian urban communities has challenged the primary descriptions the literature has of the Ojibway, and indeed, of Aboriginals. There is a gap from the present experiences of Ojibway people and what is reported in the academic literature. Part of this gap in the literature is attributed to the minimal amount of scholarship being written about the contemporary Ojibway.

Participants' adherence to their cultural worldview and their responses to the questions in this study do not indicate that they build their knowledge of parenting with the same constructs that inform attachment theory. Participants did not indicate that their parenting or perception of their child was based on evolutionary, biological, or psychoanalytic ideas. Instead, Ojibway parents' referred to cultural roles and rules they follow and implied that non-Ojibway parents are not expected to do likewise. This is contrasted with attachment theory's claim of universality and the expectation that parents everywhere are subject to the theory's claims. The assumption of universality gives attachment theory its impetus to apply it to parents from all cultural groups. An added consequence to attachment theory's claim to universality is that there is minimal motivation to get to know other cultural groups' parenting perspectives or practices. If there is no requirement to get to know a culture's parenting perspectives or practices then this can create an alienating and dehumanizing effect on Ojibway parents because of the

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assumption that knowledge developed elsewhere better explains what is happening to them.

Because Ojibway culture is not homogeneous and individuals are free to consider alternative explanations of parenting, there may be Ojibway parents that will embrace external theories, like attachment theory as their foundational knowledge for parenting. This possibility always exists, therefore it cannot be ruled out that attachment theory will not be used in the future by some Ojibway parents.

The appeal of a universal, objective, overarching theory, like attachment theory, is its claim of representing parenting and child development realities, independent of cultural realities. Critics of cultural arguments state that theories of parenting or child development cannot be developed for every culture. The critics favour an imposed etic where attachment theory's knowledge is applied on other cultures then changes or modifications to parts of the theory are made while retaining its essential aspects. It is assumed that there is agreement on what the essential aspects are and where modifications are necessary. For example, most Ojibway parents considered the cultural upbringing of their child as the essential route to positive development while attachment theory considers the caregiver-child relationship as the essential route. Disagreement on basic questions, like what is considered essential, underscores the necessity of involving Ojibway parents in discussions of their parenting. The lack of research on Aboriginal families does not create the conditions in which attachment theory can be considered with culture-specific components.

When considering attachment theory and Ojibway parenting, an imposed etic favours attachment theory because it has established resources to conduct research and

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has committed followers who are in positions of power to implement the theory. Ojibway people, in contrast, have minimal research regarding their ideas of parenting and do not have individuals in positions of power to counteract claims made by external theories, like attachment theory. The cultural group that is being imposed upon react to an already established worldview represented by the theory. This process can slowly erode Ojibway parenting knowledge over time because the theory has set the parameters of the discussion that has already been implemented and established with mainstream culture.

As stated previously, Ojibway concerns have been overlooked because they do not fit into attachment theory's frame of reference. One consequence of this process, for the Ojibway, is the common practice of professionals referring to theories developed in mainstream Canadian culture rather than inquiring about Ojibway parenting knowledge. This exacerbates the feeling of cultural groups, like the Ojibway, being marginalized. The sentiment borne by marginalized groups is that outside forces are not concerned with the implications of their ideas on those who do not share the worldview implied in their theories.

Aboriginal tribes, including the Ojibway, know by experience the damage of their knowledge being devalued. Aboriginal Peoples, including the Ojibway, are in the process of reclaiming their knowledge that had been ignored, devalued, misunderstood, or prohibited. The foundation of Ojibway knowledge exists in their culture as opposed to evolutionary principles advocated by attachment theory. For this reason, parenting perspectives and behaviours differ because Ojibway culture and attachment theory are building from different foundations. The foundations in which culture or theory is based affects what happens in practice.

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### **6.5 Implication for practice**

Human service professionals are exposed to a variety of parenting or child development theories during their training, which probably includes attachment theory. However, it is unlikely that they are exposed to Aboriginal parenting knowledge that presents an equally compelling discourse for parenting. When parenting theories and practices are continually flowing from outside the Ojibway culture they displace local knowledge. Ojibway parenting knowledge is displaced by human service professionals and the government funding source and/or institution responsible in carrying out the service. The professional may be practicing from their chosen theoretical persuasion, like attachment theory, without regard for the Ojibway families they are working with. The process of considering attachment theory in response to Ojibway realities requires practitioners to be culturally informed and well aware of Ojibway parenting perspectives and practices in order to evaluate attachment concepts adequately. This study advocates for Ojibway parenting knowledge to be in the foreground, whenever Ojibway families are involved, because of its relative absence in current parenting discourse. An institution, professional body, or government policy may advocate a particular theoretical outlook, without taking into consideration the multiple realities of the families they serve.

There can be a gap between academics who are aware of the limited role of attachment theory and practitioners who may be applying the theory uncritically. For example, the theory may apply to infants in the first months of life and yet the practitioner applies the theory to children of all ages. Academics have not developed benchmarks where attachment theory may not be the applicable theory to inform practitioners on particular cases.

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### 6.6 Limitations

One of the limitations of a qualitative study is its trade off of representativeness for rich descriptions of the topic under study. Ojibway participants, therefore, are representing themselves in their responses, and do not speak for the Ojibway culture. That being said, having been raised and exposed to Ojibway culture, participants' responses do have an authenticity that reflects Ojibway culture. Ojibway participants were able to identify and describe several common Ojibway parenting perspectives and practices.

Representativeness is also affected by the dynamic nature of Ojibway culture because some individuals orient themselves primarily to cultural perspectives and practices while others also embrace ideas external from the culture. Some participants, therefore, felt like they were losing or giving up parts of their culture while other participants view their urban setting as an opportunity to acquire new parenting knowledge and skills to add to their current repertoire.

The snowball sampling technique produced Ojibway participants that had several similar characteristics. One characteristic that may affect representativeness is participants' postsecondary diploma or degree. In the Aboriginal population, including the Ojibway, obtaining a postsecondary diploma or degree represents less than five percent of Aboriginal population. In this study, ninety percent of participants acquired a postsecondary diploma or degree. This group of Ojibway parents have a characteristic that differs from ninety-five percent of their peers, which may affect their responses.

The Talking Circle method has its inherent limitations; some have already been described in chapter three. What has not been described are the open-ended questions and

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their general nature, yet two questions were reliant on specific information in which to compare and contrast two components of attachment theory. The issue of time in a Talking Circle format restricts how long the researcher or participant spend on a question. After three to four and-a-half hours, participants were tired and did not go into as much detail with later questions as they did with the initial questions.

An exploratory study aims to increase knowledge about contemporary Ojibway parenting, which has been overshadowed by historical conditions and by lack of scholarly attention. For example, Ojibway parents are no longer living off the land, therefore, new perspectives and practices are required for urban Ojibway parents. The exploratory nature of this study does not permit strong statements from the data, rather it identifies areas that have not been considered and could be examined further. The results from exploratory research are also used to create preliminary concepts identified by participants but nonexistent in the academic literature with this group.

Minimal to nonexistent research on Ojibway parenting can lead to the overreliance on cultural assertions, therefore, pairing knowledge by examining actual parenting behaviours can address this issue. The prevalence of perspectives and practices shared by participants is not known in the Ojibway community.

This study highlighted differences or uniqueness of Ojibway or Aboriginal parenting rather than the similarities shared with Canadian parents. The dynamic nature of culture and the increased urbanization of Aboriginal Peoples will produce some parenting similarities because of the influence of similar social and environmental forces. Focusing on differences between Ojibway parents and mainstream Canadian parents can

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also obscure the times when external parenting theories, concepts, or practices reflect Ojibway perspectives or practices.

### **6.7 Recommendations**

Research with Aboriginal Peoples has been increasing in the academy, especially the participation of Aboriginals in all aspect of the research process. Recommendations for researching minimally-explored topics, from an Aboriginal perspective, include using methods that are familiar with the group in question. If a Talking Circle method is used, reduce the number of topics so as to explore the topic's features more fully. This study explored unique features of Aboriginal parenting, and then went on to explore similarities or dissimilarities of two components of attachment theory. It would have been more prudent to choose either the topic of: uniqueness of Ojibway parenting, Ojibway participants' understanding of parental sensitivity, or the idea of communicating a sense of wellbeing to a child. Since many topics regarding Ojibway parenting have not been explored, it would be advisable to increase the number of occurrences that participants can meet to discuss the research topic in a Talking Circle format. Perhaps combining a Grounded Theory approach with Talking Circles can identify features of the topic until they are saturated. Once preliminary Ojibway parenting concepts have been established, an empirical study can be designed to see how the concepts identified are applied in actual caregiving situations.

When Ojibway people were considered a homogeneous unit, contextual and environmental forces of migration, educational levels, economic opportunities, and other similar influences were largely ignored. These influences are creating varied experiences of parenting and child development for the Ojibway. Ojibway participants can probably

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explore with the researcher, those influences that differ from their peers in other settings and how it affects them. This would assist in gauging the applicability of findings to Ojibway people in general.

There are theories that come close to reflecting Ojibway perspectives and practices of the extended family network, for example, Affective Relationships Theory (Takahashi, 2005), the Convoy Model (Levitt, 2005). If a researcher was going to explore the role of family and extended family concepts in the Ojibway community, then he/she could use these theories that approximate the phenomenon in question and use them as discussion points in clarifying the details of Ojibway understandings and experiences.

### 6.8 Conclusions

This study suggests that there are unique features to Ojibway parenting that are not reflected in mainstream Canadian parenting. To protect further erosion of their parenting knowledge and practices, Ojibway people, therefore, have to state their objections to externally imposed theories that negatively impact them. Objections can take the form of doing their own research, or using political and legal means to challenge externally imposed theories, and the policies and practices that emanate from them.

Parental sensitivity and infant security, as understood by attachment theorists and practitioners, are two concepts that have minimal resonance to the participants in this study. The concepts are defined and practiced differently than what Ojibway participants have come to understand their parenting role. That being said, even though an external theory may approximate Ojibway parenting perspectives and practices, it does not mean that they can be ignored when they articulate negative effects of the theory in question.

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## Appendix 1

**DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY**

I am looking for Ojibway parents to participate in a study entitled "The role of culture in parenting: some Ojibway parents' perspective." I am a doctoral candidate at Memorial University's School of Social Work PhD program. The purpose of the study is to explore the views of Ojibway parents about their parenting behaviour and the cultural values informing them. The information gained from this study will provide me with cultural specific information on parental behaviour and values, and it will contribute to the body of knowledge relevant to those who work with Ojibway and possibly other Aboriginal parents.

I would be very much interested in your views and experiences on parenting. Additionally, I will seek your views on two ideas (parental sensitivity and childhood security) important for those studying parenting and childhood, and you will be asked to comment on these topics. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions, no judgements passed on your abilities as a parent.

You will be asked to participate in a Talking Circle with six to eight others. There will be one Talking Circle for mothers with children under five years old and another one for fathers with children under five years old. The Talking Circle will take about two hours of your time. The topic to be discussed will be introduced by me and guidelines will be given on what will happen during the Talking Circle. You will be asked your views about what and who has influenced your parenting and how this is reflected in your parenting behaviours. It is expected that several rounds of the Talking Circle will be needed to fully explore everyone's thoughts, ideas and experiences fully.

I will ask you to sign a consent form showing that you have given your permission to participate in the Talking Circle. The consent form will be kept in a file separate from the study results in order to maintain confidentiality and anonymity.

Digital audio recordings will be made of the discussions held during the Talking Circle. A research assistant (Sonya Matson) will sit outside the circle to keep track of the flow of the conversation for ease of transcription. These recordings will be transcribed and all data will be stored securely in my possession. No individual will be identified in the doctoral dissertation that will result from this study.

You can contact me at 343-8417 or by email [rneckowa@lakeheadu.ca](mailto:rneckowa@lakeheadu.ca) if you have questions or want clarification on the study.

## The Role of Culture in Parenting

## Appendix 2

**LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS**

Dear Participant

Thank you for volunteering to participate in this study entitled "The role of culture in parenting: some Ojibway parents' perspectives." I am a doctoral candidate at Memorial University's School of Social Work PhD program. The purpose of the study is to explore the views of Ojibway parents about their parenting, their child's development and the values of their culture. The information gained from this study will provide me with cultural specific information on parental values and behaviour, and it will contribute to the body of knowledge relevant to those who work with Aboriginal parents.

I would be very much interested in your views and experiences on parenting. Additionally, I will seek your views on two ideas (parental sensitivity and childhood security) important for those studying parenting and childhood, and you will be asked to comment on these topics. There are no right or wrong answers to the questions, no judgments passed on your abilities as a parent.

You will be asked to participate in a Talking Circle with six to eight others. The Talking Circle will take place at Lakehead University and is expected to last about two hours. The topic to be discussed will be introduced by me and guidelines will be given on what will happen during the Talking Circle. You will be asked your views about what and who has influenced your parenting and how this is reflected in your behaviours. It is expected that several rounds of the Talking Circle will be needed to explore fully everyone's thoughts, ideas and experiences fully.

I will also ask you to sign a consent form showing that you have given your permission to participate in the Talking Circle, fill out a brief demographic questionnaire. You may withdraw from participating in the Talking Circle in one of three ways. One, you can leave after the topic has been introduced and before anyone has started sharing. (There will be opportunity to leave for those who want to withdraw from the study.) Two, you can indicate that you do not want to participate or that you are not ready to participate, by passing the rock immediately to the person on your left, when it reaches you in the circle. You will have opportunity to share in successive rounds. Three, when the Talking Circle is completed, you can withdraw by informing me that you do not want your information to be part of the dissertation. The consent form will be kept in a file separate from the study results in order to maintain confidentiality and anonymity.

With your permission digital audio recordings will be made of the discussions held during the Talking Circle. A research assistant will sit outside the circle to keep track of the flow of the conversation for ease of transcription. These recordings will be transcribed and all data will be stored securely in a locked cabinet. No individual will be identified in the doctoral dissertation that will result from this study.

Raymond Neckoway

## The Role of Culture in Parenting

## Appendix 3

**CONSENT FORM**

I have read the Participant Letter and I am aware of the nature of this study. My signature on this form indicates that I am willing to participate in a study by Raymond Neckoway entitled "The role of culture in parenting: some Ojibway parents' perspectives." I understand that this study is a partial fulfillment of Raymond's doctoral studies through Memorial University of Newfoundland School of Social Work.

I have received an explanation about the nature of the study and its purpose. I understand the following:

1. The proposal for this research has been approved by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research at Memorial University. If I have ethical concerns about this research (such as the way I have been treated or my rights as a participant), I may contact the Chairperson of the ICHER at [icher@mun.ca](mailto:icher@mun.ca) or by telephone at 709-737- 8368. I understand that:
2. I will be interviewed in a Talking Circle
3. The interview will be electronically recorded
4. The interview will be transcribed
5. The electronic recording will be erased after it has been transcribed.
6. Transcripts will remain with Raymond Neckoway and be stored securely
7. The data provided by me will remain confidential and I will remain anonymous in the dissertation.
8. I can withdraw from the study at any time and have my data withdrawn
9. There is no apparent danger of physical or psychological harm.
10. I will have opportunity to read the dissertation once it is completed. I will be able to take the dissertation on loan from the School of Social Work office at Lakehead University during regular business hours.

---

Signature of Participant

---

Date

## The Role of Culture in Parenting

## Appendix 4

**DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you lived in the Thunder Bay? \_\_\_\_\_

First Nation affiliation: (if applicable) \_\_\_\_\_

Number of children and their ages: \_\_\_\_\_

Languages spoken: \_\_\_\_\_

Education achieved to date: \_\_\_\_\_

Who helps in your parenting? (reference their relation to you, not their names. For example, spouse, aunt, grandmother, neighbour, friend, daycare, babysitter, godparents, etc. If more than one friend, aunt, babysitter, etc., helps out, indicate the number)

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Have you participated in any ceremonies for or with your child, for example, a naming ceremony, a walking out ceremony, a baptism, a baby dedication?

\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_ No Please indicate which one(s) if you answered Yes: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Are there individuals who hold formal or informal positions in the Aboriginal community that help in your parenting activities? (elders, medicine man, mentors, clan members, and so on).

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_