

INTERGENERATIONAL
COMMUNICATION & WELL-BEING
IN ABORIGINAL LIFE

Terri-Lynn Fox

Bachelor of Arts (Psychology, University of Lethbridge, 2000)

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ABSTRACT

This thesis discusses intergenerational communication and well-being in Aboriginal life, using a literature review and research conducted in relation to the Blood people and culture. It addresses issues concerning lack of communication of traditional ways of knowing, teaching, and being. Interviews were used to better understand the dynamics of intergenerational communication and well-being. It is historically known by First Nations communities that the older people of the clan or tribe taught the children from infancy to adolescence. This, unfortunately, is not the case in many First Nations communities today, due to colonization, assimilation, and segregation. It is hoped this research will assist those who wish to develop, implement and enhance future social, educational, and health programs for the well-being of the First Nations child, family and community. The results also suggest ways in which to enhance and foster the value of elders in the community.

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Glossary

Band. Means a body of Indians (a) for whose use and benefit in common, lands, the legal title to which is vested in Her Majesty, have been set apart before, on or after September 4, 1951; (b) for whose use and benefit in common, money are held by Her Majesty; or (c) declared by the Governor in Council to be a band for the purposes of this Act (Indian Act, 2000).

Gesellschaft. Relations that are formal, goal-oriented, heterogeneous, and based on individual self-interest, competition, and a complex division of labor; these relationships are found most often in advanced agrarian and industrial societies.

Gemeinschaft. Relations that are based on a relatively homogeneous culture and tend to be intimate, informal, cooperative, and imbued with a sense of moral obligation to the group most often associated with kinship ties; these relationships are typical of hunter-gatherer, horticultural, and other relatively small preindustrial societies.

Indian. Means a person who pursuant to the Indian Act (2000) who is registered as an Indian or is entitled to be registered as an Indian.

Life-world. The taken-for-granted stream of everyday routines, interaction, and events that are seen as the source of not only individual experience but the collective experience of groups and societies.

Member (of a band). Means a person whose name appears on a Band List or who is entitled to have his name appear on a Band List (Indian Act, 2000).

Reserve. Means a tract of land, the legal title to which is vested in Her Majesty, that has been set apart by Her Majesty for the use and benefit of a band (Indian Act, 2000).

Note: The utilization of the Indian Act definitions, “Band”, “Indians”, “Members”, and “Reserve”, was chosen because this specific document has governed First Nations people prior to, and since the signing of Treaties, specifically Treaty 7 for the Blood Tribe. This has structured the reality of the Blood Tribe life today (however, one may also argue that these are imposed definitions).

Chapter 1

Introduction

History of Blood Tribe People



"You ask what I think of pictures and writings. I think it is very good to make a record of what goes on. Life is changing very fast. Soon these scenes will only be memories. The young people will never know how we operated our holy ways if they cannot see and read and hear these records that can be made today. We all have treasured photographs of our long-gone chiefs and relatives and camps. In the same way, our grandchildren will someday treasure a record of what things are still like today." (Mokakin - Patrick Weasel Head Sr. (1900-1983) - Blood Tribe Elder, (*Hungry Wolf*, 1977).

There is considerable evidence (a diet of buffalo and wild vegetation—lean protein and quality carbohydrates and little or no record of disease) to show that Aboriginal people enjoyed good health at the time of the first contact with Europeans (Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Gathering Strength*, 1996, Vol. 3: 111). There are recollections of how things were, as much as 500 years ago, in records such as winter counts or pictographs. Deloria (1973: 112) details,

“The best-known method of recording these experiences was the winter count of the Plains Indians.” A large animal hide, usually buffalo, would be specially tanned, and each year a figure or symbol illustrating the most memorable event experience by the community would be painted on the hide. However, the chances of a continuous subject matter appearing on a winter count were nil. One year might be remembered as the year that horses came to the people, the next year might be the year when the berries were extremely large, or the year after perhaps the tribe might have made peace with an enemy or visited a strange river on its migrations.”

Deloria mentions other methods used by tribes to record community experiences similar to winter counts. The Pimas and Papagos of Arizona had calendar sticks on which symbols were carved. By remembering what the symbols represented, a reader could recite a short chronology of recent years. Yet, the ability of the reader limited the extent to which the history could be recorded (113) and transmitted, and all these methods of recording depended on a vibrant oral tradition.

Sadly, not every First Nations reserve was so fortunate to have these recollections or artifacts to pass on. The quotation at the beginning of this chapter illustrates the necessity and importance of recording certain elements of traditional cultural knowledge while respecting what is sacred (secret) and adhering to the specific customs of various tribes. One example of this sacredness of secret knowledge is

the Horn Society. *Charcoal's World* (Dempsey, 1998: 34-35), illustrates how this specific society is the most respected organization on the reserve. Although the main purpose was to cure the sick and bring good fortune to the tribe, its powers were so strong that its participants were greatly revered. A Blood woman once explained (ibid: 35):

"The members of the Horn Society are regarded as very powerful men and women. It is very dangerous even to talk about them and one must not tell what is done in the society; ill luck will surely befall him if he does. The ceremonies are secret. The power of members is so great that to wish anyone ill or dead is all that is needed to bring the realization."

Taking into account what has been written above and what the researcher knows, this secret knowledge cannot be further sought after. Acquiring knowledge relevant to intergenerational communication is the key; however some knowledge can be recorded, as explained by Mokakin. Hale (1991: 48) states that oral tradition projects are necessary to help preserve the past, and that the meshing of written documents and oral history to make a more complete record of the past is imperative.

Aboriginal people use many methods to protect and preserve their traditional knowledge and skills for the benefit of their people and culture; most often relying on oral culture as the means of transmission; knowledge is passed on through apprenticeship to a shaman or by going out on the land with an elder (Brascoupé, Endemann, Cassidy and Langford, 1999: 112). This knowledge can be very detailed, as Dickason notes:

"Amerindians are all by nature physicians, apothecaries and doctors, by virtue of the knowledge and experience they have of certain herbs, which they use successfully to cure ills that seem to us incurable...The process by which the Amerindians acquired their herbal lore is not clearly understood, but there is no doubt about the results."

More than 500 drugs used in the medical pharmacopoeia today were originally used by Amerindians" (Dickason, in *Gathering Strength*, Vol. 3: 112).

This record suggests that many non-indigenous people did not clearly understand the knowledge that Amerindians held, but nonetheless, it was understood by some that the (Indian) knowledge was valuable, ancient and precise. Waldram, Herring and Young (1995: 214) state that although both mainstream modern medicine and traditional Aboriginal medicine seek to heal patients, there are fundamental differences in epistemology and philosophy. Aboriginal medicine is based on *tradition*, which is to say that, as a medical system, it accepts that the medicines, techniques, and knowledge of the past were effective because they have been time-tested and, in many instances, shared with humans by the Creator. This medical knowledge exists mainly within the oral tradition. Language, stories, and ceremonies all transmit knowledge that can be utilized for healing in some way, shape or form. The different elements of knowledge and culture are all interconnected for Native people, and this along with the oral mode of transmission, means that knowledge pertaining to health and healing is intertwined with other kinds of knowledge in stories and ceremonies. Today, this interconnection is commonly depicted in terms of the circle of life; also commonly known as the Medicine Wheel. This symbol, once an element of specific Aboriginal cultures, has been broadly accepted in recent years as expressive of central values in Aboriginal life. Figure (1) illustrates fundamentals of the circle: the four directions, sacred colors coinciding with the movement of the sun, stages of life and the gift each stage holds, the four elements and the teachings each brings:

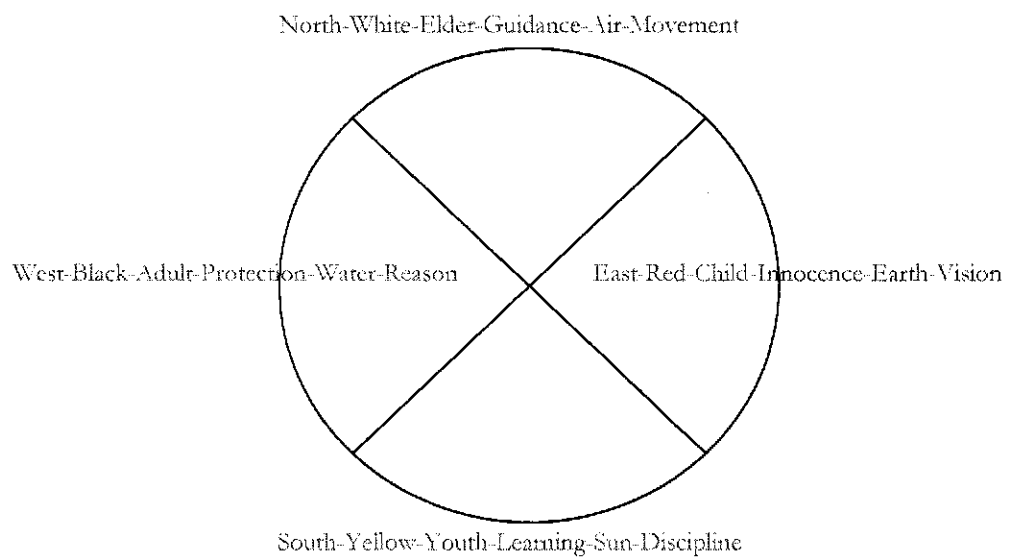


Figure 1 – Circle of Life/Medicine Wheel

(Adapted from: Bopp, Bopp, Brown & Lane, 1984; Coggins, 1990; Dyck, 1996; Gathering Strength, 1996; Hall, 1986; Kakakaway, 2002; and Torgovnick, 1998)

“Health involves much more than the physical...in the imagery common to many Aboriginal cultures, good health is a state of balance and harmony involving body, mind, emotions and spirit” (*Gathering Strength*, 1996: 152). In the worldview on which the Great Circle is based, separation of any element of the circle—for example, the child from parent or elder as a learning vehicle for language, rituals or storytelling, would be harmful to growth and life, and it has been. If you separate or remove from the cycle the sun and study only the air, water and earth, how will you know that without the sun, the grass, food and animals that we live with and that provide us with sustenance, will not develop? Similarly, if you do not allow a child to be a child and flourish within the culture they are born unto, they will grow up angry, resentful and bitter. This is what Indigenous people believe in—the cyclical way of how elements grow, evolve, or unfold.

Time in this way of living it is not linear; creation or origin stories affect each one of us somehow, we are not separated by how long ago something happened, it affects us now. While the Medicine Wheel reflects this philosophy, and guided me in my initial definition of the issues addressed by this research, I found, in the course of my research, that I had to take seriously the fact that several of the elders I interviewed did not define it, or value it, in quite the same way that I did.

These thoughts lead us to ask “How is it important to transmit knowledge intergenerationally, and in what ways does this transmission take place in Aboriginal societies today? What knowledge should be transmitted and by what means? How do we increase our cultural awareness and understanding to strengthen the well-being of individuals, within this specific cultural context?” The effective transmission of traditional cultural knowledge is a priority in keeping traditions, values and beliefs alive.

Health, well-being, and ‘holistic’ methods—traditions

According to Aboriginal traditions, the health and well-being of individuals depends in part on community health and social dynamics (*Gathering Strength*, 1996: 166). Dependence on the collective is a part of how First Nations people lived traditionally, and part of the reason why they struggle with mainstream society today. Contemporary mainstream, European-based societal attitudes drive specific organizational and social priorities communicated through the media and in politics. Some leaders of key social institutions (social services, child welfare), most of whom have not learned about the importance of certain specific values and beliefs to First Nations people, remain unaware of these values and beliefs. The *Namadjì Youth and Elders Project*¹ shares what one social center’s

¹ Namadjì: Youth and Elders Project Report: www.airpi.org/projects

president asked at a forum, “when are American Indians going to leave the old ways of doing things and join the contemporary world?” One is left to wonder how many others share this attitude. It demonstrates that some non-First Nations’ people (who may be presidents of social agencies) do not understand and welcome the knowledge of the traditions held by elders across Turtle Island, nor do they see any place for them in society today.

Johnson and Cremo (1995: 167) state that, for Native Americans, the 1970s marked the beginning of a desire to return to traditional ways and a drive to preserve disappearing languages. Whitehat also talked about the reemergence of Indian languages and traditional values in the last 20 years (www.airpi.org/projects). Indigenous people are recognizing the value of learning and teaching the language and traditions of their various cultures. Historically, Natives and non-Natives alike knew that language was and is the heart of any culture, yet “children in residential schools were harshly punished for speaking their language precisely because language and communication processes lie at the heart of transmitting cultural values and unique worldviews from one generation to the next”(Castellano, Davis and Lahache, 2000: 26). For Native people, the oral tradition had been the main component for the transmission of their culture. However, compulsory schooling robbed Aboriginal people of the traditional intergenerational processes by which language and culture were passed on. Now, the classroom has become the main site within which Aboriginal people are battling to reinstate intergenerational communication of their culture.

Broadly spoken, the oral tradition was the *library of knowledge* for native people in contrast to the dominant culture in which tradition is written and knowledge is transmitted via books, essays, newspapers, journals and other documents. For the Aboriginal people, oral tradition involved the passing on of a culture’s traditions and history verbally, without dependence on print literature (Johnson & Cremo, 1995: 161). Supplementary to oral transmission, pictographs or

hieroglyphics were used to transmit these traditions. Oral tradition is very person oriented because the transmission of information requires interactions with others. On the contrary, when something is written down, it becomes abstract and unchanging, and reading it does not require contact with another person. Aboriginal languages as primarily oral languages, encode unique ways of interpreting the world. When an Aboriginal language dies, a whole way of thinking is lost both to the community and to humanity (Castellano, Davis and Lahache, 2000: 26).

Transmission and communication—educational methods

In traditional First Nations cultures, when learning, one is living: living and learning are the same, and knowledge, judgment and skill are joined. They can never be separated. “The Native way is teaching holistic” (Castellano, Davis and Lahoche, 2000: 118). For example, when a young man is taught to hunt or to be on the land, the technical skills of handling a bow and arrow, gun or harpoon, he is also taught the character skills of courage, respect, determination, persistence and patience. When a young woman is taught to prepare and sew skin or gather herbs or vegetation, she is taught the appropriate character skills along with creativity and intuition. However, the modern, institutional way of learning separates these elements (ibid, 2000: 118). It also tends to downplay non-technical and non-rational aspects of intelligence and learning.

Today, school personnel spend much energy teaching and testing knowledge, yet such knowledge by itself does not necessarily lead to wisdom, independence, or power. Mixed messages are being sent to Aboriginal children when education does not genuinely empower them. “The greatest strength of a nation is the resourcefulness and wisdom of its people and there is concern about the dispiriting effect that schools frequently have on children, about the latter’s dependency and lack of wisdom” (Castellano, et al., 2000: 118). Separating or pulling apart elements of learning; for example, by extracting an element of the

circle of life without reassembling it allowed the residential schools to break a child's spirit. Along with the abuses suffered by the children, this led to a lack of meaning, purpose or feeling and a lack of self-understanding that allowed children to think that these outcomes were their own fault. For intergenerational communication to occur effectively, we must be able to assemble the parts of learning in terms of the circle of life; to know its purpose in order to meet the needs of First Nations people. To do so, we must also understand the present-day circumstances of young people and their elders, as well as seeking to preserve and adapt traditional indigenous knowledge.

Origin stories

One of the most important of the oral traditions consists of telling the origin histories; these are stories that not only describe cultural history but also provide the knowledge necessary for proper behavior, and for conducting healing ceremonies, dances, and prayers. This oral tradition is an important element in the transmission of a culture to the following generations. If it is disrupted or interrupted by other cultural practices or legal prohibitions, then the traditions of that culture will be transmitted or understood only intermittently at best, or not at all, at worst.

The numerous songs and dances that are an integral part of ceremonies and rituals strengthen and guide Native people to sustain their traditions within their culture. Hungry Wolf (1977) has detailed how the knowledge of the Horn Society's songs and ceremonies are known only to specific members (15). There are specific dances performed for specific ceremonies and songs. For example, during the Sundance in the summer months, the dances performed are only performed at this ceremony and the songs that are sung while performing this dance, are only sung for this dance. For instance, some members of the Tribe will ask one of the bundle holders if they may be able to 'dance' with the bundle—this would be for certain prayers for their family (death in the family,

unknown causes of deviant behavior, terminally ill family member). Additionally, for a headdress transfer, the dances and songs are only for this ceremony and are only performed by people who have been given the right to pass the headdress on (i.e., those who have been initiated, inducted and taught the songs and dances). These rituals are taught by the older generation, but with interruptions in the transmission of cultural knowledge, these ceremonies, as practiced today, may not be a faithful or exact replication of what was transmitted, say 100 years ago. Hungry Wolf (1977) states that before the coming of the tape recorder, the only way such songs could be learned is through song ceremonies at gatherings. He adds, "Many songs were lost between the years when the People stopped camping by each other and when songs could finally be recorded. Even now, few people will take the time to listen to these songs as often as it takes to learn them" (15). Cultures may evolve yet still retain certain essential elements. So with each new generation, there may be slight variations in the teachings of song, dance, rituals², and healing practices, but it is the significance, principles, and philosophy that remain invariable. However, even this significance may be lost if only isolated rituals are passed on intermittently, and if intergenerational transmission becomes sporadic.

Thus, one area of importance to understanding the philosophy of Native people is the way in which knowledge was transmitted or known. How did a culture know what to do, how to do it, when to do it, and by whom it should be done? How was this communicated to each new generation? The cultural transmission of this knowledge is researchable through interviews, historical literature, and observation. While all these questions are researchable, to Native Americans, knowledge is sacred and this sacredness is tied to the particular rules governing the oral transmission of culture (Johnson & Cremona, 1995: 162). Knowledge is

² Ritual—a pattern of speech or behavior that is used to create or sustain the sense of connection to a social system; depending on the religion, ritual may make use of prayer, sacrifice, magic, meditation, and other practices (Blackwell Dictionary of Sociology, 2000: 263).

transferred through stories, ceremonies, and daily interactions among the people of the tribe or community. Historically, people knew what to do when an elder shared and taught them specific practices, dances, and songs. Today in many First Nations communities, there is still a percentage of the population who know the appropriate behaviors when in the presence of elders, medicine men and members of a sacred society. Slowly, though, sacred ways, indigenous metaphysics, and non-western ways of learning are disappearing from the daily lives and the educational systems of many Aboriginal peoples. Johnson and Cremona (1995) note that although day schools replaced residential schools, efforts at assimilation continued unabated. Academic achievement has been particularly difficult for children caught between oral and print-based cultures and placed in learning settings that are so foreign to their traditional ways of learning” (166).

Conversely, it has been suggested (Johnson and Cremona 1995: 169; Torgovnick, 1998: 180; Waldram, 1997: 207) that an emergence of traditional healing therapies in healing circles, workshops, and in general community life can strengthen the cultural lives of individuals, families, and communities. This leads us to the purpose of this study, which is to explore an area in which little or no literature is available; intergenerational communication practices relating to well-being in the Blood culture. While literature, research, or programs addressing these topics exists for other nations or communities (e.g., The Namadji Elder and Youth Project), it may not always be specifically relevant to this group. One book important to such a study is *The Blood People*, by Adolph Hungry Wolf (1977). His account of the history, ceremonies, legends, elders, and life of the people of the Blood Tribe was needed at the time and was used for further research and reference. The disadvantage is that Hungry Wolf is non-Native and the book is now 25 years old. In addition, a specific and systematic research project was not conducted in conjunction with his book to address or explore issues of intergenerational communication. More recent studies of the culture of the

Blood Tribe include B. Hungry Wolf, *The ways of my grandmothers* (1980) and B. Bastien, *Blackfoot ways of knowing: the world view of the Siksikaitstapi* (2004). Bastien treats Blackfoot culture not just as something to be known but as a *way of knowing*. She stresses the role of language, and also of responsibility, connection and interdependence, in Blackfoot ways of knowing. She points out that, for the Blackfoot, knowledge is experienced and participated in; it is not just objective “data.” She also begins the task of relating Blackfoot culture to other indigenous cultures and ways of knowing around the world. Further understanding and documentation along these lines will be important to provide the insight needed for the Blood people to continue to relearn and transmit their cultural traditions, history and language.

In addition, comparison with intergenerational communication in other cultures would prove useful. For example, Tarbell (1997) shows how relationships in Korean families are governed by Confucian tradition and by a strict order of generational as well as chronological seniority. Cipywnyk (1997) describes how the traditional Ukrainian family orientation was very strong. Children were required to work as hard as their parents, and seniors as hard as their children. In addition, seniors were responsible for the upbringing of children, ensuring that language, culture and religious values were developed and preserved. There was also great respect for the elderly. Paul (1997) illustrates how, in the traditional Mi'kmaq society, the elders assumed a vital role in all aspects of life. The elders were keepers of the culture and the language. An elder's advice was held in such esteem that young couples were able to solve marital difficulties through the wisdom of those with more life experiences. Elders/grandparents played a major role in promoting traditional child-rearing practices. However, she adds, that the role of elders in Mi'kmaq society has slowly diminished since colonialism and the ensuing assimilation. Colonialism and assimilation are historical experiences of central importance to Aboriginal cultures, but today many cultures, Aboriginal

and non-Aboriginal alike, face growing pressures on family life and intergenerational communication due to the economic, social and technological changes surrounding the development of modern consumer culture, of peer group allegiances among the young, and of a general skepticism of tradition.

Programs for intergenerational communication and well-being in other communities/cultures

A few programs in which intergenerational communication is the focal point of concern do exist and are worth noting. The first example, discussed below, focused on non-Native communities, but it nonetheless indicates some useful lessons for program development in Native communities as well.

1. The *Circle of Helping* program for Illinois communities conducted several meetings to develop strategies for intergenerational communication. Their mission is to promote quality education for all ages through intergenerational contacts and lifelong learning. The Illinois Intergenerational Initiative was set up through a Higher Education Cooperation Act Grant involving state education agencies, as well as organizations concerned with aging issues. The Initiative was proposed in 1985 to involve older adults in education as tutors, mentors, and sharers of life experience. Founding committees include the Illinois Community College Board, the Illinois Department on Aging, the Board of Regents, the Board of Governors, the Illinois State Board of Education and Southern Illinois University. The coalition now includes 32 organizations from various levels: universities, colleges, preschool to high school, aging organizations and community organizations.

One of the best vehicles for improving intergenerational communication is frequent contact so that students and retirees get time to learn about one another. Recommendations to this end from the initiative were gathered from group meetings and questionnaires. They include the following:

- Every school in Illinois, preschool through postsecondary, should produce a plan for involving older adults in the classroom and students in service-learning opportunities.
- Those involved in curriculum development must encourage the use of aging education in the classroom throughout the educational spectrum.
- Communities and neighborhoods are encouraged to develop monthly or bi-monthly forums, socials, or activities involving multi-generations.
- Local governments should consider multigenerational committees for solving community and neighborhood problems and planning for the future.
- Organizations concerned with education, youth and aging must publicize information about model intergenerational programs—their benefits, timeliness, and rewards.

The participants involved stated that younger and older generations are sometimes fearful about interacting with each other and often find it difficult to make conversation at first. They think they have little in common (www.siu.edu/offices); it has taken time to promote and integrate aging education into the classroom for all ages to benefit and learn about. However the communication and interaction is increasing with such programs. Opportunities for significant interaction and improved intergenerational communication involve frequent contact so that students and retirees get time to learn about one another. Elders themselves stated the same concerns when they were interviewed. Several of them suggested that programs could be developed and they would enjoy participating in the transmission of cultural knowledge through such programs.

The underlying motivation is *communication* with younger generations and the objective is *retention* and *survival* of cultural knowledge.

2. The *Namadji Youth and Elders Project* was funded by the Two Feathers Fund (2001) and was developed by the American Indian Policy Center³ (AIPC) to provide a way for traditional Indian elders and youth to “connect”. The project also focused on the need to examine the “disconnection” between the two groups, especially those living in contemporary urban society. One youth interviewed noted:

“These days all the elders are passing on and when they’re gone, there’s nothing left if we don’t learn our language and culture. It’s very important for us to do this.” (Eric Wolf, 17, American Indian youth)

The AIPC is a non-profit organization that serves the Mid-west Indian communities in the United States. The Head Office is in Saint Paul, MN, although founding members are from various cities in the Mid-West. The organization was born out of a decades worth of discussions among American Indian professionals. The AIPC provides a forum for divergent, diverse voices and perspectives to be heard, and for ideas or strategies to be ignited.

The *Namadji Project* was based on a belief that disruption and disconnection of communication between elders and youth has existed for far too long. Intergenerational relationships are seen as a key means to repair the disrupted transmission of cultural knowledge, values, and worldviews. The word *Namadji* means ‘honor, dignity, and respect’. The Anishinabe culture believes that once you have honor, dignity, and respect, not only for everything around you, but also

³ 1463 Hewitt Avenue, Saint Paul, MN 55104, tel: 651-644-1728, fax: 651-644-0740, email: airpi@cpinternet.com, website: <http://www.airpi.org>

for yourself, then you can truly experience love and contribute to the well-being of the culture and the community.

As traditions have changed and European culture and institutions have influenced Indigenous people, the relations of young and old to each other have also changed or weakened. One elder said:

“The elders, in those days, we held in great respect. Whatever they told us, we would listen very carefully, try not to make mistakes when we listened, because we respected them so highly, because they knew so much more than we did...”
(Mary Muktoyuk, Yupiaq Nation)

This perceived lack of respect by youth for elders was echoed in the interviews with elders undertaken for the present project. It is hoped that through the words of the Namadji Project, as well as the present one, we can compare the life-worlds of elders and young today with their perceptions of the history of their culture, and their relations to each other. Whitehat, who was a luncheon speaker at a forum to discuss the program, noted, “Indian elders, as keepers of the languages and traditions that are vital to the survival of Indian cultures, have to find a way to connect with young people to pass this on. This is difficult because many young people have not learned to be respectful of elders” (Namadji Project Report, 2001: 3). Although many communications programs involving Indian elderly are operating with the best of intentions, they exhibit two flaws. The first flaw is the failure to consider and incorporate traditional American Indian cultures and beliefs into these programs and secondly, a failure to consider the role of elders as a vital part of transmitting cultural knowledge and language. The report also states that traditionally, elders are held in high esteem within family

and tribe. Further, the American Indian Research and Policy Institute writes that historically, the elders were important in:

- Caring for children,
- Passing on traditions and culture,
- Acting as religious and political advisors,
- Promoting and encouraging cultural pride and identity among the young,
- Instructing the young.

The concerns expressed by the elders utilized in the project related to the use of language, traditional ways and intergenerational relationships as catalysts to strengthen social programs and tribal governance. However, elders commented on the overwhelming differences between the world of today's youth and the different situations that elders encountered growing up. Different life-worlds equal different solutions and strategies; what worked before may not work today. The development of programs to transmit cultural knowledge is still vital for young people today, but such programs must be attuned to today's concerns. Thus, the following recommendations were offered:

1. Social researchers to undertake broad scale, discovery-oriented research to more fully explore this topic;
2. Social service agencies should begin chipping away at the problems of intergenerational communication by incorporating intergenerational components into existing programs;

3. Program planners, educators, social service agencies, and American Indian leaders should create new, innovative venues for elders and youth to come together;
4. Indian agencies and policy makers should make room at the table for Indian elders when designing and planning programs for the Indian community; and
5. All these groups report their observations and results to the broader community, including policymakers.

Invoking Indian culture is a very important method with which to work with Indian youth. Too many First Nations miss out on the positive experiences of growing up with their culture. We can utilize what the elders and young who participated in *Namadji Project* have stated, and compare their perceptions with what the elders and young people affirm in the current research. The aforementioned projects discussed reinforce that the need for intergenerational communication doesn't exist in one region or culture only. In the current research, elders and youth who were interviewed echoed many of the themes that crop up in the *Namadji Project*. For example, the elders and youth I interviewed spoke about their divergent life-worlds, and the elders I interviewed, like those who spoke to *Namadji Project* interviewers, also complained of lack of respect among the young.

Parameters of project

Within the scope of the topic and the research conducted, we can only address a short list of issues in relation to communication among the people and culture of the Blood Tribe; however, this may open the doors for further interdisciplinary research. The present research seeks to address and examine the role of elders in intergenerational communication with young people, as perceived by a sample of

contemporary elders and off-reserve young people. It seeks to understand how they think such communication might affect the well-being of the Blood members' family and community roles.

Recent statistics

According to the 1996 Census, approximately 800,000 people, 3% of the total population of Canada, identified themselves as Aboriginal people, either North American Indian, Metis, or Inuit (Statistics Canada, 2001⁴). Aboriginal people today are relatively young compared with the overall population (Stats Can, 2001). The average age of people who identified themselves as Aboriginal was 25.5 years compared to the general population of 35.4 years. Children under 15 accounted for 35% of all Aboriginal people compared with 20% of the non-Aboriginal population. The on-reserve population is also moderately young. In 1996, 56% of all reserve residents were under age 25 while seniors (65 and over) accounted for only 4% of the reserve population. These statistics may indicate either a short lifespan or a high birth rate or both. However, regardless of the reason, there are relatively few elders to pass on traditions (compared to the non-native population), and many youth to pass them on to.

A recent article pertaining to the results of the 2002 Aboriginal Peoples Survey (*Lethbridge Herald*, July 10 2004: A8), states that 71 percent of Native children living off-reserve played sports at least once per week, while 34 percent spent time with elders. It also states that 70 percent of Aboriginal children in Canada live off reserve. Participation in sports is crucial and healthy. However, time spent with elders is also beneficial. Programs that encourage children to play sports, take part in cultural events and spend time with elders give off-reserve Aboriginal children a solid grounding in social networks and cultural values.

⁴ Statistics Canada, 2001, Ottawa, Ontario, Catalogue no. 85F0033MIE: www.statcan.ca

For the Blood People, who occupy the largest reserve land area in Canada, capable of producing revenues from many natural resources (oil, gas, farming, precious stones), program development and development of policies and procedures for the financial and cultural benefit of young people is still not adequate. I want my research to assist with the development of programs, policies, and academic institutions for the advancement of First Nations youth, with the aid of elders from our culture; renewing cultural transmission with up-to-date research methods. Action after research can take many forms—healing, learning, guiding, sharing, understanding and uniting. Such action needs to reinforce the collective, not just individuals.

The next section will discuss Sociology of Knowledge; how “true knowledge” may be defined, communicated and evaluated differently in Blood culture than in mainstream, “white” culture or academic culture. In addition I have a foot in two life-worlds—the “white” world and the Blood world (and the Blood life-world is itself, a divided one), and this raises special issues for my research that need to be discussed. How a person ‘learns’ and ‘perceives’ knowledge in a cultural context is key to understanding the transmission of knowledge.

Chapter 2

Sociology Of Knowledge

“We are objects of culture—described, valued, and limited by its ideas about who we are and how we ought to think, feel, and behave. We are also subjects of culture, the ones who believe, who value, who expect, who feel, who use, who write and talk and think and dream. We are creators of culture, part of an endless stream of human experience—sensing, interpreting, choosing, shaping, making. We’re the ones who make culture our own so that we often can’t tell the point where it leaves off and we begin, or if that point exists at all. We are recipients of culture, socialized and enculturated. We are the ones who internalize ideas, taking them inside ourselves where they shape how we participate in social life and thereby make it happen. And this thing we make happen is at the same time the cultural force that shapes us as we happen.” (Johnson, 1997: 155)

“Judith Buggins has lived in two ‘life-worlds’. She was born in the bush on the east arm of the Great Slave Lake in 1915 and there she was raised living off the land. In those times, contact with the white man was almost non-existent. Life was good for her and her family; it was a simple life, but one full of happiness. Through an arranged marriage, Judith married Joachim Buggins and they had 14 children. Unfortunately, they lost 10 children to TB. She and her husband moved to the community to be closer to hospitals; this was a culture shock! Alcohol disease began to destroy the Aboriginal population. Today, Judith Buggins lives in a high rise apartment complex, she has a bank card, she plays TV bingo and yet caribou stew is on the stove, bannock is in the oven and dry meat hangs on poles laid across the tops of the cupboards in her small kitchen. Judith is existing in the white man world, but she is living the traditional way of life” (Bailey, 2001: 14).

This chapter examines issues relating to the *sociology of knowledge*⁵, as they relate to this research. The sociology of knowledge has varying definitions, but foundationally, they address the same concerns. The following definitions come from various sources:

“The branch of sociology that studies the social processes involved in the production of knowledge whereby it is concerned with the understanding and explanation of knowledge in particular cases, and with the relations between the general form(s) of knowledge and social structure, including both the effects of knowledge and any social forces which condition either the form or the content of knowledge... Today the sociology of knowledge is pursued at many levels, in particular in studies in the sociology of science, and in studies of the social construction of everyday knowledge” (Abercrombie, 1980: 588).

“The sociology of knowledge is not a clear subdivision of sociology. Its concern is the relationship of knowledge to a social base—although what is meant by knowledge and social base is likely to vary from author to author... sociological theorists have something to say about this topic, but as an integral part of their theory, not as a separate area of study” (Abercrombie, 1980: 270).

“The relation between knowledge and a social base... this relation is understood causally; social base produces particular kinds of knowledge” (Abercrombie, 1980: 337).

I am exploring, specifically, the social aspects of the transmission of knowledge, as it pertains to the well-being, identity and culture of the Blood people. To understand transmission of that knowledge one must understand how that transmission is socially organized, how the knowledge itself relates to a social context (past or present) and how both the knowledge and its transmission structure identities. Valaskakis (2000: 76) writes:

⁵ The branch of sociology, which studies the relation between thought and society. It is concerned with the social or existential conditions of knowledge; sociology of knowledge attempts to relate the ideas it studies to the sociohistorical settings in which they are produced and received (Coser, 1968: 428-435).

“Culture involves the shared practices and experiences that we construct and express in our social relations and communication. Identity is not formed, then, in internal conceptions of the self, but in the adoption of changing representations and narratives that we generate, experience, and express in our individual and social experience.”

According to Geertz (1973: 56), culture is “the socially established [that is, universally understood by members, and publicly enacted in behavior] structures of meaning in terms of which people engage in social action.” Behavior is important to observe because it is through the flow of behavior, as social action, that culture is articulated. *The Blackwell Dictionary of Sociology* (Johnson, 2000: 73) states that, “culture is the accumulated store of symbols, ideas, and material products associated with a social system, whether it be an entire society or a family”. It further adds that what constitutes nonmaterial cultures includes symbols—from words to musical notation to the symbolic aspects of sacred bundles and sweet grass. The ideas that shape and inform people’s lives in relation to one another, the social systems in which they participate, and the attitudes, beliefs, values, and norms within that culture are inherent and historical for that particular culture. Values are defined as shared ideas about how something is ranked in terms of its relative social desirability, worth, or goodness (Johnson, 2000: 339) or complex belief(s) that reflect a principle, standard, or quality considered by the individual as the most desirable or appropriate (Shiraev & Levy, 2001: 280). The values and beliefs that define the underlying motivations of the Blood people need to be understood, embraced, and reacknowledged for the transmission of traditional cultural knowledge to occur effectively within this specific cultural context.

Gutmann (1997: 193) provides a detailed account of the “components of culture”. These are particular aspects of culture that co-act with individual needs

for community, security, and self-continuity, will include (but are not limited to) the following:

1. *A founding myth*: The legend of special beginnings of a special people, favored by special gods.
2. *Traditions*: Formats of collective ritual, belief, and social action that reflect the ways of the founders, and partake of their sacred nature.
3. *Institutions*: Organized bodies, persisting across generations that represent guard, and enact the myths and traditions. In general, religious institutions are wardens of the founding myth, while secular institutions are wardens of the tradition.
4. *Rituals*: Patterns of stylized action choreographed by religious institutions to be metaphors, enactments of the founding myth. Ritual practices provide encultured individuals with some sense of participation in the mystery, and its powers.
5. *Age grade systems*: Status elevators that reliably move accredited individuals, in their seniority, to the seats of institutional power, and to the gates of the mystery.

Whatever values specific cultures embody, strong cultures meet these criteria. Historically, the Blood culture was a strong culture. The people were encultured. The Blood culture was a daily reality in the life of the people, and its values were securely lodged in the mental life of the typical citizen. These internal certainties constrained individual behavior, thus, the Blood culture was successfully perpetuated from one generation to the next. However, the Blood people now face a situation in which a minority practices the traditional culture, while the majority is left to ask questions. Unfortunately, there are some who have no

cultural self-identity and reside in the alleys, in boarded-up and condemned buildings, and sometimes in makeshift cardboard box “homes”. This is a sad reality that is often frowned upon or overlooked.

The traditions of the Blood people mirror the above classification of Gutmann’s. We have origin stories that serve as “founding myths”; the ceremonies and values embody our “traditions”; the sacred societies parallel the “institutions”; the daily prayers and rituals are congruent with “rituals”; and the elders have their status in terms of “age grade systems”. Gutmann states that the aged are major beneficiaries of an enculturated society; but those who review the status and functions of the elders across cultures will find that the elders are also the most vital supporters of a strong culture, particularly in its mythic or *numinous* (spiritual) aspects (194). A priority for the Blood people today, (because there are still elders alive) is to pass on specific cultural knowledge for the younger generations. What Gutmann has stated reinforces what is exemplified throughout this thesis concerning the role, status, and importance of elders historically; and about the requirements for cultural renewal. The communication between elders and youth is vital for cultural survival. This is a worldwide reality for survival of indigenous cultures.

I want to examine specific questions in relation to the intergenerational transmission of culture. Understanding how cultural knowledge is acquired and transferred could assist both young people and general population of the Blood Tribe in understanding and negotiating the different cultural life-worlds they participate in today. *Mokakin* (Hungry Wolf, 1977: n.p.) states that recording some elements of ceremonies, photographing a number of sacred objects, and sharing these recorded stories, songs and dances, will support young people in their quest to gain and use teachings of both traditional cultural knowledge and the Western worldview. The recording of traditional cultural knowledge has assisted in the transmission of some aspects of the language, stories and daily

lives of First Nations people throughout North America. Beyond recording and making information available, however, we also need to look at how it can best be communicated from person to person.

Language

Knowledge that is transmitted in school, at home, through media, reading books or at ceremonial gatherings influences individuals. Yet, some specific cultural knowledge may be lost if one does not speak, comprehend or write First Nations languages. A word in Blackfoot, for example, sometimes cannot be translated into an exact word in English. The significance and context may be lost if it is translated. Individuals may walk away with no influence or understood meaning when an elder prays in Blackfoot (or any other Indigenous language); the knowledge may not be transmitted as it was intended to be, or the prayer may not be significant as it was intended. Grasping and comprehending the language is only one component of sociology of knowledge for Indigenous people. One elder, Patricia Locke, states that:

“One of the most heartbreaking injustices to which American Indian people were subjected to was the effort by non-Indian authorities and agencies to stop the use of Indian languages, because this was the heart of Indian Identity”(Newsletter of The Indigenous Language Institute, 2002: 2).

Castellano, Davis and Lahache (2000: 25) also discuss the decline of Aboriginal spoken languages. They state that the prohibition of Aboriginal language was part of a project of “civilizing” Indian children. Government administrators and church officials understood well the pivotal role of language in the continuity of Aboriginal identity; however, they imposed the use of English or French upon even the youngest children entering their schools. The decline of Indigenous spoken language signals a decline in identity as a collective; the heart of any

culture utilizes language—scholars, musicians, historians, storytellers, and Indigenous people who pray, sing and communicate in their native tongue.

Origin stories

Traditional culture, transmitted to each succeeding generation, relies on origin stories so as to teach and share the roles, responsibilities, and governance, spirituality and daily life of a particular group of people. Once, not so long ago, these stories were told in the Native tongue of a tribe, unfortunately at present, these legends of origin are often told in English! Hale (1991: 3) writes that except for oral history and traditions handed down from generation to generation, nothing is really known about the early human history of this continent, although, the science of archeology has now allowed scholars to delve into the past in another way. Were it not for oral history and archeology, there would be little known about the early history of North America.

Origin stories are not always accepted as ‘truth’ by non-Indigenous cultures. Deloria (1997: 167) presents three basic concepts,

“which stand in the way of examining the traditions of Indians in a fair and intelligent manner: *myth*, *euhemerism*, and *etiology*. *Myth* is the general name given to the traditions of non-Western peoples and basically means a fiction created and sustained by undeveloped minds. Many scholars will fudge this point, claiming that their definition of myth gives it great respect as the carrier of some super-secret and sacred truth, but in fact the popular meaning is a superstition or fiction which we, as smart modern thinkers, would never in a million years believe.”
“*Euhemerism* is a narrative, which contains some participation of the supernatural that is wholly constructed by primitives, and which they insist is historically true. An *etiological* myth is a narrative made up to explain something which people have observed or which they wish to explain in familiar terms. Looking at various landscapes, in the etiological formal we simply assume that primitive and ancient people would make up a story, based on their knowledge of nature, to account for waterfalls, volcanoes, rivers, and so forth. Most of modern science can also be described as etiological myth,

since we explain fossils, sedimentary deposition, and the causes of glaciations in terms of stories (hypotheses) which stem from what we already know.”

Thus, truth claims of stories of origin for Indigenous people cannot all be ruled out. Deloria further adds,

“that it is possible to separate non-Western traditions from the mainstream of science and keep them comfortably lodged in the fiction classification because most of them contain references to the activities of supernatural causes, and personalities are not phrased in the sterile language of cause and effect. It is unfair to do so, however, when scientific writers have complete license to make up scenarios of their own which arguably could not possibly have taken place and pass them off as science and therefore as superior to other traditions” (1997:168).

Various First Nations legends tell of the origins of this continent. One such legend is the *Turtle Island* legend⁶. Hale adds that the early Greeks also had handed down poems orally, such as *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, for hundreds of years before they were written on paper. Henrich Schliemann, the father of modern archeology, as a boy of eight read the story of the city of Troy. Based on his understanding of these stories⁷, he told his father he was going to find the city; his father assured him it was strictly legendary. When Schliemann was fifty years old, he actually found Troy. Oral tradition and oral history have great value, and certainly the oral history of North American Indians is as valuable as that of other ancient civilizations (Hale, 1991: 3; Knowlton, 1993). However, as Muecke (1983) points out, we should be careful to understand and respect the different

⁶ Turtle Island Legend – Turtle Island encompasses the whole North American continent: Ellesmere Island in the north representing the head, Labrador representing one of the flippers, Florida another flipper, Mexico the tail, California another flipper, Alaska another flipper and then the shell is divided into 13 areas. There is a custodian in each area and we belong to one of them. This area that you are in right now, what we have here is what the water flows off in all directions from this area, which represent the high spot. All these areas, as in the live turtle, are what represents our sacred constitution, the Constitution of Turtle Island (Stan Knowlton, Sik-Ooh-Kotoki Friendship Society, 1993).

⁷ For decades the Trojan War was believed to be a euhemerism until Heinrich Schliemann began to dig tells in Asia Minor and proved the conflict to have a historical basis (Hale, 1991: 3).

rules of oral and written stories, and also be careful not to assume the privilege of the written word by transforming oral narrative into the form of written history and then treating it as “newly recovered” historical fact only when it is in this form. We need to ask, “how was *written* history produced?” “What gives it its privilege?”

Some elders approve of ‘recording’ specific elements of the culture to preserve elements of language use, origin stories, ceremonies, etc. for future generations. Others, however, might frown on such actions. Could recording oral history be seen as a form of “tampering” or “desecration,” or can recording somehow assist rather than displace oral traditions of transmission? My answer to this question comes from two perspectives: First Nations and academic. From an academic research standpoint, recording oral history is needed. The common knowledge such as legends, origin stories, songs/dances performed in public (during powwows, handgames, feathergames, and specific ceremonies) ought to be recorded for our own reference and for use by future generations. However, if you understand and respect the sacredness of specific cultural knowledge, you must not “tamper” with this knowledge in ways that violate its meaning and significance in the culture. Even from an academic standpoint, respecting the culture and people that you are researching is a necessity when collecting data on any aspect of the culture, especially keeping in mind that you may need an insider to assist in this data collection. However, specific aspects of the culture may be kept sacred, therefore secret from the common/lay person or member, and from the researcher. This is where the two life-worlds may clash, depending on who you are and what information you are inquiring about.

General background

The Blood culture and people have existed since time immemorial in this area of Southern Alberta; before Columbus set foot on this continent; before the great flood. However, treaty negotiations with the Her Majesty the Queen (1877)

allotted them a small piece of land, and the following events set the present-day boundaries for the *Blackfoot Confederacy* nations:

The Bloods, along with the Siksika and the T'suu T'ina had a reserve of land designated for them along the Bow River, which was surveyed in 1878, subsequent to the treaty of 1877. However, Chief Red Crow of the Bloods had not been consulted on this and was not in favor of such an arrangement. The Blood Tribe refused to settle on the reserved lands at the Bow River, preferred their own lands, situated further south.

Red Crow selected for the Bloods, the land between the Waterton River and the St Mary's River back to the Rocky Mountains and as far south as the Canada – US International Boundary.

In 1882, J.D. Nelson surveyed a reserve for the Blood Tribe, comprised of 708.4 square miles. The southern boundary was set at 9 miles from the international boundary. However, in 1883, the reserve was resurveyed, without explanation or consultation with the Blood Tribe. As a result, the reserve was reduced to 547.5 square miles. The Blood Tribe has never accepted these adjustments and continues to advance formally their understanding as selected and identified by Chief Red Crow in 1880 and the difference between the 1882 and 1883 surveys. (from www.bloodtribe.org/main)

Knowing that the land area for the Blood Tribe is not what was meant to be, many members today still have ill feelings towards the federal government. Especially for those who attended residential schools, knowledge of the wrongful

boundaries only adds to their frustration, confusion, and anger. However, the Tribe's belief in their spirituality has assisted them to keep specific teachings alive, as well as a sense of their history and the hope that one day, equality and fairness for all people will prevail.

However, some of this traditional knowledge and history is being lost through premature death of its carriers. It is one of the roles of elders who have accumulated reservoirs of personal experience, knowledge, wisdom, or compassionate insight to freely offer this wisdom to living generations of their people in an effort to help them connect harmoniously with their past, present, and future (Suzuki & Knudtson, 1992: 179). Weibel-Orlando (1997) writes that the fear of the loss of identity as a people because of the relentless assimilationist influences of contemporary life leads many ethnic minority members to view their elders as vital cultural resources for their children. In the case of First Nations people, as mentioned in the previous chapter, there are few elders relative to the large number of youth who need them as cultural resources.

Statistics also illustrate that, compared with the general Canadian population; specific native populations have an increased risk of death from alcoholism, homicide, suicide and pneumonia (MacMillan, MacMillan, Offord, and Dingle, 1996⁸). The suicide rates among First Nations people are two to three times higher than among non-First Nations people; suicide rates were highest in Alberta. The mean annual suicide rate among Native youth was five times greater than the rate in the total Canadian youth population (MacMillan, et al, 1996). Can we infer that a lack of communication among generations of First Nations people, leading to further cultural loss, may contribute to these problems?

⁸ From: www.cma.ca/cmaj/vol-155/issue-11/1569

Researching how cultural knowledge was and is transmitted intergenerationally among the Blood people, as a whole is a challenge. However, such research may give insight into whether each group views traditional cultural knowledge as needed and positive, what they know about cultural knowledge, and how traditional cultural knowledge is or should be transmitted. How elders transmit knowledge, and what lessons, values and beliefs we learn from this knowledge, are specific questions only the elders, and those who listen to them, can answer.

The intergenerational bond

This section will discuss an interpretive framework for understanding the intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge within the Blood Tribe, including a review of literature that may help to anticipate issues of participant and researcher experience, bias and common-sense knowledge. The insights of one author, Keiran Bonner, in his book, *A Great Place to Raise Kids* (1997), particularly his understanding of participant life-worlds, will be used to illustrate some contrasting elements of the Blood and academic or research cultures that researchers must keep in mind. Utilizing not only 'knowledge by discovery'⁹ and 'knowledge by interpretation',¹⁰ we may begin to understand how elder members of the Tribe have transmitted cultural knowledge to young people in the past and gain insight into how to pass on this knowledge today.

A primary vehicle for transmission of cultural knowledge for the First Nations people is elders and/or grandparents. Utilizing grandparents, even today, assists in the transmission of specific values and traditions known only to a specific tribe

⁹ This approach assumes that the world is outside the mind of the observer and lies in wait of discovery; knowledge is something you "get" by "observing"; the standard of good knowledge in the discovery mode is objective and accurate observation, making validity the primary criterion of adequacy. (Bonner, 1997: 71).

¹⁰ Knowledge is a transactional product of the knower and the known; different observers will see different things in the stream of events because they assign different meaning to those events and conceptualize them in different ways. What mediates between knower and known, then, is a perspective, and that perspective always colors knowledge. (Bonner, 1997: 71).

or culture. Elders traditionally taught these values and beliefs when the children were young and could be influenced by songs, dances, prayers and soft-spoken words because groups were small. A vital process in Blackfoot life was the transmission of cultural knowledge through telling of myths and legends (Grinnell, 1962; Friesen, 1997). Comments by the elders interviewed indicate that they interacted with their grandparents when they were very young. The majority of them were taught to respect, to work hard and to be responsible. The young people of today, because they have not been in contact with elders on a regular basis may have different perceptions of and responses to cultural norms relating to respect, responsibility and hard work.

Erikson's (1963) theory of life-span personality development supports the cultural importance of the grandparent-grandchild bond and its importance in clinical work. This theory proposes that personal growth occurs as individuals confront successive psychosocial crises. According to Erikson, middle-aged and older individuals experience personal growth through relationships with younger people and these relationships prompt a dynamic balance between tendencies toward generativity or toward stagnation or self-absorption. In other words, the individual must balance contributions to the welfare of succeeding generations with efforts directed toward one's own welfare (Thomas, 1990: 465). The bonds with grandchildren could contribute to personal development as grandparents make affective, spiritual and/or material contributions to their children's parenting, and thereby to their grandchildren's upbringing (ibid, 1990: 465), which is a form of communication and of transmission of knowledge, which leads to well-being.

From a different standpoint, Gutmann (1997: 192) discusses how Erikson (personal communication, 1961) points out that "deprivation *per se* is not psychologically destructive; it is only deprivation without meaning that is psychologically destructive." In this succinct thought, the great psychologist

summed up the essential contribution of culture to the integrity of the psyche, and to its vital system of inner controls. He further adds that,

“by satisfying the hunger for the ideal, culture supplies encultured individuals with the sense of meaning that makes possible—even palatable—the conformities, disciplines, and sacrifices that are required by decent social life and by adequate parenting. Thus, culture functions as the immune system of the social body: by providing individuals with *meaning* in exchange for their controlled, conforming behavior, it protects the social order against anarchy and unbridled, asocial narcissism” (1997:192).

Gutmann further states that “[a] strong culture—an expression of society—sponsors a strong sense of identity at the individual level” (193). This demonstrates how the *loss of culture* might result in the loss of self-identity. Unfortunately, for many Blood people, this has been, and still is, the challenge of everyday life.

Roberto and Stroes (1992: 227-239) examined grandparent-grandchild relationships. Their sample was 142 college students enrolled in introductory gerontology courses. The students were interviewed and asked questions about activities with their grandparents. These activities included phone visits, recreation outside the home, brief visits for conversations, discussions of important topics, religious activities, dinner, exchange of gifts, and help with chores. They were also asked about the impact their grandparents had on their general belief system. There were eight areas in which respondents felt their grandparents influenced them: religious beliefs, sexual beliefs, political beliefs, family ideals, educational beliefs, work ethic, moral beliefs, and personal identity. The results showed that grandchildren participated in more activities with their grandmothers than with their grandfathers. As well, grandmothers were perceived as having greater influence on the development of their grandchildren’s values than grandfathers, although the grandchildren reported that their

grandfathers were more influential in their political beliefs and work ethic. The grandmother's relationship with the grandchild was stronger than the relationship with their grandfather. The respondents also rated grandmothers significantly higher than grandfathers on both the social and personal dimensions of grandparenthood. The results indicate that grandchildren participate in activities with their grandmothers to a greater extent than with their grandfathers. Roberto and Stroes (1992: 237) add that a fundamental task of the family is the transmission of values from one generation to another. Grandparents play a crucial role in this process serving as arbitrators between parents and children concerning values that are central to family continuity and individual enhancement (Bengtson, 1985: 23).

What could also be included in these benefits is the cultural transmission to grandchildren through grandparents witnessing how grandchildren perform specific tasks. These continued cultural responsibilities may leave a profound and lasting effect on the grandparent. These responsibilities include valuing cultural continuity, teaching respect and honor for various aspects of life, and honoring moral values grandparents express throughout their lives. The enriching and satisfying feelings that may be brought to surface while observing and discussing various aspects of their culture can also be beneficial to grandparents. Grandparents look forward to indulging their grandchildren in ways that they were unable to do with their own children. This also influences the grandchild's self-esteem. The grandparent's involvement with the grandchildren and thus their satisfaction depends on a number of factors, including geographical distance, the grandparent's relationship with their grandchild's parents, and the grandparent's physical and mental health (Roberto, Allen, & Blieszner, 1999). All these factors will play an important part in the psychological well-being of grandparents and grandchildren alike and the

grandparents' social interaction with grandchildren and thus benefit their physical and mental health.

These observations demonstrate that grandparents are an integral part of children's lives; not just for Indigenous people, for other cultures as well. In essence, the transmission of knowledge from elders to youth is demonstrated to be important across cultures, and not only by the current research project. But it is especially important in indigenous cultures given the heavy emphasis on oral transmission in such cultures.

Perspective, epistemology and ontology in the study of cultural transmission

In the following, I will seek to explain issues relating to perspective, epistemology and ontology as they concern transmission of cultural knowledge for the Blood people, and how researchers understand such transmission. *Perspective* is a particular way in which you orient yourself to the social world; the particular standpoint from which you act in or think about that world. *Epistemology* is a specific way of knowing things. *Ontology* is something that fundamentally and necessarily determines specific ways of thinking, evaluating, and acting in the world.

To research transmission of knowledge not only generates methodological issues, but also raises three fundamental concerns: seeing (perspective), knowing (epistemology), and being in the world (ontology). These fundamental concerns have not been extensively addressed in research relating to the Blood Tribe, despite the fact that such issues may limit an understanding and interpretation of research results. Specifically, they could affect the interpretation of Blackfoot traditions. Such concerns include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Languages (two different languages spoken in the community: Blackfoot and English) and the challenges of translation. Language is an issue when

interviewing elders because the majority of them are fluent in the Blackfoot language while young people, the researchers, and readers of this research may not be (transcribing and translating were an integral element of the documentation and analysis process; however, translation always involves an element of interpretation).

2. A mixture of religious and spiritual practices (traditional—including sweat lodges and Sundance ceremonies, Roman Catholic, Protestant, and other Christian practices) of which specific elements may or may not be permitted to be recorded and documented. Asking questions that probe into the culture may sometimes lead to a dead end because some knowledge is sacred (or secret) and may not be shared with the general population of the community.
3. A mix of cultural and social-organizational forms: this group of people traditionally were collective¹¹ in culture and social organization, however, they engage in some of the more individualistic practices of their neighbors in today's society. Documenting opinions of this group of people today will reveal a collection of diverse values, beliefs, and opinions as opposed to documentation of their ancestors one hundred or more years ago.
4. The perception(s) that participants have of different elements of their own experience, and their perceptions of researchers and research. This issue relates to the fact that residential schools introduced Blood Tribe elders to conflicting life-worlds. It also relates to disparities between elements of the life-worlds of the Blood people and of the academic life-worlds, which drive research.

5. Distance to surrounding communities, and whether one lives on or off the reserve, may influence how one views the importance of cultural knowledge. For example, Blood Tribe schools utilize elders daily in their education via the teaching of the Blackfoot language, telling stories and partaking in ceremonies, whereas this form of teaching by an elder is not so common in urban areas, unless elders are asked to come into a classroom for a short period of time.
6. For myself, as a member of the Blood community and a member of an academic institution researching this particular topic, the challenge is to gather, interpret and document data in ways that will be acceptable in terms of quite different life-worlds—First Nations and academic. For example, permission to record and document particular elements of Blackfoot culture is thought about quite differently in these different cultural contexts.

Historical and contemporary influences on Blood Tribe people and culture

For the past 130 years, the education system for the Blood people has been under the direction and influence of an unfamiliar political system, defined by Treaties, Settlements, and the Indian Act. This unfamiliarity of government has affected how people perceive traditional knowledge and traditional practices. What an ‘old’ elder says (perhaps 65 and over), may be different from what a ‘younger’ elder might say because the older ones grew up learning values and beliefs in different institutions (mainly residential schools and Christian organizations) and at different times. These differences thus may stem from the different effects of residential school education and media on the children who attended, the parents of these children, and later generations. The loss of language, loss of cultural and

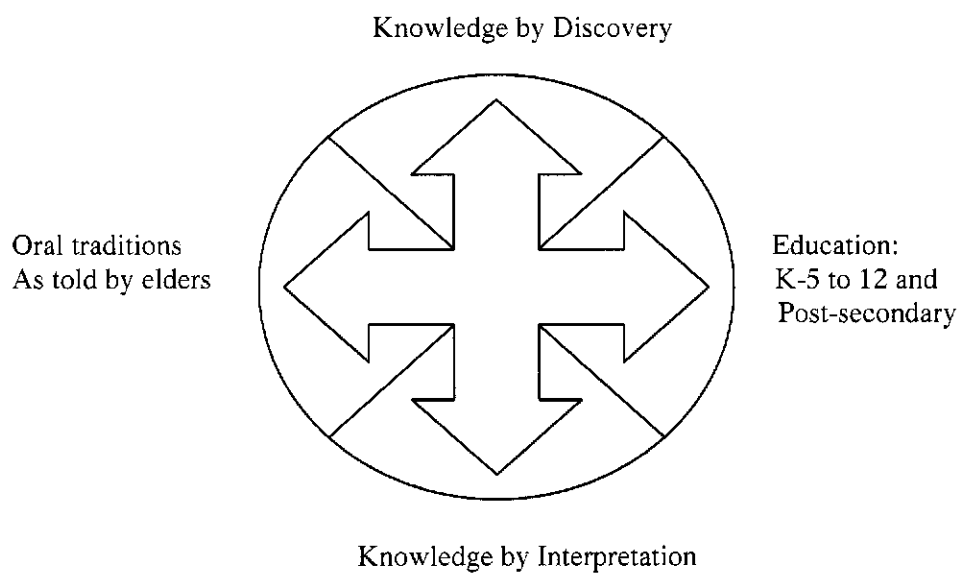
¹¹ Collective: a group; a cooperative unit or organization; of relating to, or denoting a group of individuals considered as a whole (from *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, 1997:159).

individual identity, and loss of some human rights thus would have been experienced differently by different generations. Looking at issues from an epistemological viewpoint, how some members of the Blood Tribe identify “true knowledge” is different than what others may know or recognize to be true, even within the present-day Blackfoot society. Documenting these differences will be complex for the researcher. There will be a range of ‘truths’¹² due to ongoing cultural and political changes. Because perceptions of values and beliefs will be different, data collection and the final analysis must address a spectrum of ‘truths’ guiding the participants; e.g., the belief in a Higher Power and what/who it is for Blood Tribe members, for example, as Catholics and as followers of Native traditions; how members perceive the Blood Reserve today (its political, economic and educational systems); how they view traditions; how these traditions are transmitted; and how they (and I) view my research.

In this thesis, knowledge by interpretation (as defined by Bonner) will be used to increase an understanding of ‘sociology of knowledge’ issues for this tribe. Perceptions and interpretations of what exists, what does not, and of how customs and beliefs in the Blackfoot society are or should be transmitted, raise issues directly linked to spirituality, traditions and participants’ life-worlds. Figure (2) next page, will illustrate an exploratory approach to understanding how knowledge is acquired and transmitted. Both researcher and some Blood Tribe members are now familiar with knowledge by discovery (an objective approach utilizing scientific method, with emphasis on observable data) through their formal education. On the other hand, both the researcher and Blood Tribe members are aware of the need for understanding, along with the dangers of inappropriate interpretation (as addressed in a “knowledge by interpretation” model). Knowledge fostered through an oral tradition emphasizes different ways

¹² Truths – 1) Perception from a traditional First Nations persons’ experience and knowledge; 2) Perception from a modern traditional First Nations persons’ experience and knowledge; and 3) Viewpoint from a modern First Nations persons’ experience and knowledge.

of learning and communicating, such as speaking directly to elders, children and caregivers; ‘word-of-mouth’ announcements and news; and seeking guidance from Healers or Medicine men or women or carriers of sacred bundles.



Both the researcher and informants are situated in the center of the above circle.

Figure 2. Knowledge Paradigm

(Adapted by Fox (2004) from: Bopp, Bopp, Brown & Lane, 1984; Coggins, 1990; Dyck, 1996; Gathering Strength, 1996; Hall, 1986; Kakakaway, 2002; and Torgovnick, 1998)

This approach will assist in documenting perceptions and changing cultural beliefs on the part of elders and young people, and the ways in which transmission of specific knowledge might take place. Because we are gathering data from the Blood people, the perspectives that are realized from the research may be linked to the historical changes this group of people have encountered—residential schools, political structures, and cultural accommodations.

Traditional and modern-traditional

To describe a few examples of the differences between traditional and modern life-worlds in relation to transmission of culture for the Blood people, we can look at some specific beliefs and practices. Traditionally, the Blood people believed in 'Creator' rather than 'God'; they lived on and roamed the path of the buffalo rather than being bound or restricted by the parameters of a 'reserve' or house; they did not use money to purchase food, clothing and shelter to survive as contrasted to today's lifestyles (purchasing or renting a home; purchasing or leasing a vehicle and purchasing store-bought foods) and sharing was valued, rather than accumulation. Today, the majority of the Blood people live with a mixture of traditional and modern beliefs and lifestyles. They believe in 'Creator' along with a belief in God¹³; they may live on the reserve (though many live off) but utilize services off the reserve (education, employment, and grocery/clothing stores); and they purchase vehicles and/or homes.

For the purposes of this research, I define "traditional" in relation to what Ferdinand Tonnies describes as *gemeinschaft*¹⁴. This term refers in part to "roots in family life" (Bonner, 1997: 21) in a society focused on establishing and nurturing common bonds and unity between people based on collective continuities in values, beliefs, customs and language. *Gemeinschaft* is also often related to a rural setting; therefore, applying this to the research makes the Blood Reserve a primary candidate, though the term can also be applied to some urban settings as well. The term '*modern traditional*' is defined here as a life-world in which the teachings of elders are still respected, but by people who also have an occupation, drive vehicles (whether luxurious or not), engage in modern political processes

¹³ The members do not necessarily see "Creator" or "God" as opposed terms; some use the two terms interchangeably to mean the same thing.

¹⁴ *Gemeinschaft* – (or community) relations are based on a relatively homogeneous culture and tend to be intimate, informal, cooperative, and imbued with a sense of moral obligation to the group most often associated with kinship ties; typical of hunter-gatherer, horticultural and other relatively small preindustrial societies.

and who can afford (and who value) material possessions. The latter term, I will relate in part to *gesellschaft*¹⁵ (Johnson, 2000: 131) because it rests “on a union of rational wills” (Bonner, 1997: 21) and relies on relations of commodity exchange in goods and services. A First Nations reserve today has one or two centers of business where administration, health, police, and schools, are located. The members drive to such centers to purchase convenient foods, visit the doctor or attend school. Family relations are still close in most cases, in part because many rely on each other (because of lack of vehicles) for transportation, the care giving of grandparents or older relatives or car-pooling children to school (in case they miss the school bus). Therefore *gesellschaft* only partly applies to the life-world and social arrangements that I call *modern traditional*. Some members do not live on the reserve, but remain close to family and friends who reside on the reserve. Although they choose to reside off the reserve, they may continue to work on the reserve to assist in its operations where applicable. In this situation, they may work with family members, but adhere to the formalities of what Tonnies calls the “rational will” (for example, addressing co-workers in professional matters as co-workers and not as ‘auntie’, ‘cousin’ or ‘sister’) during working hours. After work they remain close to family members regardless of their place of employment. The term “modern-traditional” can be applied to the lives of First Nations people living both on and off reserves.

I also want to explore the ontological implications of these modern-traditional aspects of reserve life; keeping in mind that ontology involves a set of basic presuppositions on which our thoughts and actions necessarily depend. To give an example, there is currently a medicine man and a handful of elders living both on and off the reserve who do not occupy a 9 to 5 job, nor do they spend excess amount of money on material possessions; however, they do buy groceries and

¹⁵ Gesellschaft – Social relations that are formal, goal-oriented, heterogeneous, and based on individual self-interest, competition, and a complex division of labor. These are the kinds of relationships found most often in advanced Agrarian and Industrial societies.

pay electricity bills! They mention that their basic purpose in life is to guide people in their spirituality, well-being, and traditional knowledge. Their spirituality guides them daily, not just weekly, monthly or yearly in both their traditional healing activities and their participation in modern life. In modern cultures, Christian ministers parallel and share many of the same purposes as those of healers/medicine men and elders. They are humble people with an abundance of knowledge to share. However, Christian ministers typically are paid and regulated by a bureaucratic organization (a “church”), while healers, medicine men and elders are not.

This research is a personal challenge because of the dual life-worlds in which I am living—I believe in Creator (traditional spirituality), but I also believe in the God of Christianity. I reside off the reserve (limiting access to community elders), I am a student completing a Masters degree (according to the norms of formal education and academic research), and I am part of the Blood Tribe and believe in many of the traditional cultural values and beliefs that my grandparents (and a few others) have transmitted to me orally. The question of which culture I am a part of arises—the Blood, academic, urban, modern or postmodern cultures? I participate in all the aforementioned cultural life-worlds on any given day, and sometimes these worlds may clash. The participation in different life-worlds (whether I am aware of it or not) will limit or have an impact on some of my research. From the perspective of a First Nations person and as a student living off the reserve, these life-worlds differ, and at times, limit how I interpret or understand others’ life-worlds. Some of what I view and understand from a scientific angle I believe as a student (a participant in an academic life-world), such as the validity of formal research methodologies and mathematics, whereas as a member of the Blackfoot culture, I believe that Creator has guided me on the path I am walking and that medicine men can heal without explanation.

Examining this issue from an epistemological standpoint, what exists in some areas of traditional life may be questioned from a scientific perspective, even though the participants will vow that these things are the 'truth' with no questions asked as to why things are a specific way (for example, in spiritual matters). Thus, a '*knowledge by discovery*' approach (objective data collection and scientific analysis of results), which emphasizes objective observation, can be used to explore certain observable features of this culture and community but some members may not view such an approach as 'positive' or effective. There are various ways of observing and documenting cultural beliefs and practices; however scientific detachment and analysis is part of the non-First Nations life-world. Writing books and keeping formal systems of records about history and social structure has been primarily the way in which the mainstream society conveys valid knowledge. Members may view such documentation as potentially positive but question its use: who benefits or what do they get in return (the word positive here means 'necessary' or part of the lives of the people.) Others may not have a response to the research at all. First Nations people had a different system of transmitting knowledge through stories, legends, and song and dance rather than written documentation. This form of knowledge transmission is more compatible with a '*knowledge by interpretation*' approach to cultural learning, but only a handful of people from the Blood culture are familiar with this term and may view it today as just another approach being 'pushed' onto them. Yellowhorn (2000: 87) explains, "The low regard Native people hold for scientific research may be symptomatic of a long history of conflict between two cultures, and between two systems of knowledge". On the other hand, employing a scientific method *can* broaden the meaning of traditional knowledge for Native people, and introduce new avenues of investigations for Native students. Relatively few Native people understand or trust these scientific concepts—but the number of people who do understand is increasing.

Utilization of specific terms—context and importance

Using terms that are key to this research—communication¹⁶, intergenerational¹⁷, well-being¹⁸, traditions¹⁹, and beliefs²⁰ is also a challenge in terms of how they are perceived, used and heard differently by elders, young people and the researcher. In addition, how readers outside the Blood culture ‘interpret’ and view the above terms in relation to the Blood people and culture could be an issue in relation to program development. My interpretation and understanding of these traditions may differ from the elder’s because of the different life-worlds we are a part of. Individual differences are present in any society, such as how many rooms one prefers in one’s home, the make/year of one’s vehicle, foods preferred, how much one spends on entertainment/bills, etc. However, individual preference is not the issue here, but rather differences between past and present forms of communication and cultural understanding among the Blood people, and the differences between their ideas and those of non-native cultures.

Individualism and collectivism are important cultural variables in relation to the history of the Blood people from the time of colonization to the present day. The majority of people on the Blood Reserve live on Social Assistance, which positions them in relation to a common experience that they share (namely a

¹⁶ Communication (structure) – A pattern of interaction: who communicates with whom, how often, and in what manner (language, song, dance) – that exists in every social system.

¹⁷ Intergenerational – Communication from one generation to another, usually from parent to child to grandchild(ren), and so forth.

¹⁸ Well-being – The state of being ‘healthy’: mind, body, spirit; of being connected with one’s thoughts, words and behaviors.

¹⁹ Tradition – Refers to a cultural practice or structural arrangement that is regarded as part of a common inheritance in a social system; provides a sense of unquestioned continuity with a shared perception of the past.

²⁰ Belief – Is any statement or part of a statement that purports to describe some aspect of collective reality; all culturally based descriptions of reality are beliefs. Cultural beliefs are important because it is from them that we construct what we take to be the reality of everyday life as well as not-so-everyday matters such as spirituality and cosmology. From a sociological perspective, all knowledge is socially constructed and beliefs of all sorts lie at the heart of that construction.

Social Assistance life-world?). However, they receive social assistance as individuals. *Individual* here is defined as a single person, but “individuals” are typically defined within a European culture and life-world of individualism. But individuality and collectivity may be heard and defined in different ways by the Blood people because, traditionally, all members of the community or clan were equal and they all helped one another with teepee raising, hunting, cooking, etc. Thus their identities were quite different compared to their postmodern relatives today.

Reflexivity and knowledge by interpretation

Before, during, and after the data were collected, I was obligated to be reflexive²¹ in examining what I say and how I interpret and document the interview data. Thus, the “art of interpretation is involved at every stage of the research—conceptualization of the research project, lived experience of the researcher, methodology, interviewing, analysis of the field material, and so on” (Bonner, 1997: 98). Because I am a Native person, having resided on the reserve until adulthood, and off-reserve since, and having chosen to attain an education that may assist my family to be self-sufficient (in the modern, mainstream society), my interpretations will need to be reflexive at every stage of the analysis, as, “reflexivity is not only a facet of reasoning, it is a recurrent fact of everyday social life (i.e. talk itself is reflexive)” (Mehan & Wood, 1975: 31). I do not want to misinterpret any participant’s data; however, I cannot totally separate myself from some aspects of the culture I am studying because I too, will be a part of certain life-worlds as are the participants. I do not want to misinterpret what an elder says with what I think about how things are, or how I remember my

²¹ Reflexivity/reflexive - The process of referring back to oneself, and it is applied both to theory and to people. A reflexive theory is one that refers to itself. As applied to people, reflexivity refers to the human ability to think of and refer to ourselves as if we were someone else, i.e. “I like myself”. Reflexivity is a crucial human ability that, according to symbolic interactionism, makes possible the development of the self and the ability to participate in social life in relation to others. (Johnson, 2000: 255).

grandparents talking to me. What one elder's point of view is (or any other participant) will be part of the research in two senses: 1) What a particular elder says and does, as I observe objectively (knowledge by discovery), and 2) My interpretation of what the elder says and does based on the dialogue between us (knowledge by interpretation) and my own reflexive understanding of my participation in that dialogue.

Possible effects and outcomes of research: participant reflexivity

This research may have an effect on the people or of the community of the Blood Reserve, uncovering or clarifying the implicit opinions or viewpoints people have about themselves, their culture, and the community. Ideas, topics and beliefs may begin to surface as issues open for discussion on a daily basis thereafter. Such developments may lead community members to ask others how they know what they know; why it is important or of value to them; and how or if they have transmitted these values, beliefs and traditions to young people. Thus, they may become more 'reflexive' (p. 15) in terms of reflecting on what they know and how or where they gained this knowledge. They may even change the way they think about that knowledge. In terms of how they define or understand what intergenerational communication means, they may stop to reflect on *why* they think a certain way or *how* they came to answer a question or define a concept during the interview. What will result from the interviews, hopefully, is a working definition of intergenerational communication and well-being from and for participants. They may become mindful of the different 'life-worlds' (First Nations, parental, individual, modern, and traditional) they participate in and experience, and become more aware of how others share these life-worlds or don't. This awareness of life-worlds led some to ask me, the researcher, how I came to want to research this topic. I tried to answer the question honestly and to become an active participant in dialogue during this stage of the interview, thus allowing the conversation to become fully interactive (perhaps straying from the

interview questions a little), and to be directed by our dialogue. One advantage of this development is that the research process became dynamic and we 'fed off' of one another; asking questions, giving answers, gaining knowledge by mutual understanding.

Another element to the dialogue was a concern on the part of both interviewer and interviewees with how traditions can be restored. The issue of the restoration of traditions will provide support to participants in considering not only the *knowledge* of traditions, but what's more, *solutions* for the issues faced by young people today. The traditional interactive and oral attitude toward knowledge, especially by elders, is particularly important for interactive research because the "knowledge that will be shared is not something that is acquired as a possession, but rather it is what emerges through participation in a social process" (Bonner, 1997: 98). 'Interpretation' will be based on how I describe, define, and analyze what the participants are saying and doing based on our dialogue as well as what I have learned from the research literature.

A key issue this research brought to the surface when the 'conversation' was in progress was how the participants viewed and defined 'traditional' life in comparison with what I have called 'modern traditional' life. I am referring to a lifestyle that ended approximately 75 years ago when I use the term 'traditional' (i.e., death of the last elders to remember and practice the culture as it existed before the residential school era). At this time, there were few Blood Tribe members who attended academic institutions outside of the residential boarding schools (grades one through to twelve). This formal education may have already started to alter descriptions of traditions and who actually practiced them. Ceremonial practices were still experienced by a large majority of Blood Tribe members and few people owned vehicles or lived a lavish lifestyle.

During the interviews, an agenda of specific questions was proposed regarding intergenerational communication and well-being within the community, however “the art of questioning is that of being able to go on asking questions, i.e. the art of thinking. It is called *dialectic*, for it is the art of conducting a real conversation--research conversation” (Bonner, from Gadamer, 1975). The conversation between the participant and the researcher was dialectical because I was probing into certain aspects of the culture concerning communication and well-being, and they (the participants) answered in terms of what they saw as important. The participants sometimes also took the opportunity to check out what I knew about Blood culture. In other words, the interview agenda was a loose guide that I modified as the situation warranted. I prefer the term *research conversation* to interview; I think participants liked the idea of having a 'conversation' instead of being 'interviewed'. This may have changed how they communicated specific aspects of the culture and terms they used during the conversation. If, for example, they discussed legends or stories that were told by grandparents to the children long ago, to teach the young people lessons about sharing or listening, I would ask specifically how they knew this and who shared this knowledge with them. But they might also ask me questions about myself, my own cultural knowledge, or why I was doing this research. In addition, from previous experience, some parts of the ‘visits’ were not documented because this was my time to visit with them before the actual interview. It is customary in the Blood Tribe culture to feed people that visit and offer tea or coffee. It gives both the host and guest a chance to ask how things are with family, friends, school, or life in general. It is out of respect for the host and guest to become reacquainted with each other’s life.

How the people view my status as a researcher may effect how they react to this method of gaining knowledge. Questions could be looked upon as an *intrusion* on Native peoples’ personal lives and/or traditions. I made contact with the

participants prior to the interview to inform them that I had chosen them to partake in the research if they consented; in addition to discuss my interest (thesis field research) in the interview and to address any questions before I went to their home or to a mutually agreed upon place for the interview. This aided in gaining trust and becoming mindful of the social and cultural dynamics of doing research on this specific issue.

Possible effects and outcomes of research: tools used to gain knowledge

The method that was predominantly used for gathering data was the personal interview conducted (as described in Methodology chapter) by myself with, if needed, a Blackfoot speaking person as translator (mainly for elder interviews rather than for youth interviews). The personal interview gave me interpretive knowledge based both on what participants said and also how they responded to questions. If you were to meet a person who had attended residential school, they may not look into your eyes or they may not ask questions. This is partly because the Blood culture believes that eye contact is a sign of disrespect; but it is also because many were ridiculed or punished at boarding schools when they did ask questions. Johnson (2000: 159) states that for some cultures, a sign of paying attention in a conversation is looking at the other person's eyes from time to time, yet in other cultures, this is considered a sign of disrespect. I relate this behavior, in part to the residential school 'syndrome' where the Blackfoot language (in this case) was forbidden, hair was to be short, and clothing and identity was numbered. Some still perceive that asking questions is not looked upon as a 'good' thing. You did not want to answer questions at boarding school for fear of being wrong and laughed at. This attitude was not only reflected in how people talked and interacted; it may also have been reflected in what some of them said about topics like "respect" and "discipline". I wonder how some people's mindsets even today are that they do not ask questions, they simply follow directions or orders given by someone else.

I do see myself in a radical interpretive sociological paradigm. To conduct research within this paradigm involves acknowledging that the researcher is of necessity more than a mouthpiece for the member's understanding and that the researcher evaluates members' understandings in a quest for clarity, consistency and truth. (Bonner, 1997: 142). I want to be a mouthpiece yes, and I also wanted to be trusted when conducting the interviews in order for the dialogue to proceed smoothly and become a conversation as opposed to an interview. However, I have a vested interest in this research. This interest is to gain and evaluate traditional cultural knowledge from elders (and in some way, I feel it is my obligation to gain this knowledge) and to transmit this knowledge to my children in ways that will benefit them by sharing with them legends, stories, values and beliefs. Secondly, I want to document, from a First Nations perspective, a modest element of the lives of the Blood people and culture for them. Third, I also want to understand what has gone wrong in elder-youth communication and how to make that communication work. I want to be part of the 'academic' and the 'First Nations' life-world at the same time. I want to look for clues and details and dig into areas where more cultural knowledge is needed. But, for this to occur, reflexivity on both parts is the key, which is to say, we must learn to look at ourselves as selves with greater awareness and insight than before (Johnson, 1997: 12). If I want to understand this aspect of 'social life' and what happens to people in it, I would have to understand what it is that I'm participating in and how I participate in it. "It's like the forest and the trees and how they're related to one another; you cannot have a forest without trees" (Johnson, 1997: 13).

The time has come for First Nations people to conduct their own research, especially if it involves topics pertaining to their tribes' health, social, political, familial, educational, and historical aspects. Increasingly, governments and funding agencies are becoming more sensitive to the need for community-based

and participatory research; an example being the CIHR's new "Rural and Northern Health Research" initiative (www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca). It is time that I, as a researcher and Blood person, in my endeavors to improve and assist in transferring and transmitting knowledge in relation to the conditions of First Nations people, expand and strengthen my skills and understanding both academically and traditionally, to achieve these endeavors. Engaging in human science research reflexively is to engage in a project of 'developing one's intuitions,' or even 'more radically,' to 'change oneself'. I think as both I and the participants from the Blood Tribe grow in understanding from our discussions, this *change of ourselves* will unfold. "By using the discipline of sociology to investigate the research, the practice of it always takes us toward the vital and difficult truth that everything is related in one way or another to everything else. It's what makes the practice so challenging. It's also what gives it such great promise" (Johnson, 1997: 98).

In the next chapter, I discuss the methods I used to engage in reflexive and respectful research interviews to locate and approach my research participants, and to understand and interpret the interview material.

Chapter 3

Methodology

"I am an Aboriginal woman and I belong to a culture known by many as the Metis. I am a mother of three sons, now grown to be men. I come from a very large family whose history spans many centuries of living on this particular land, history made long before books were written or educational institutions built. Our family stories tell of Cree and Anishnabe roots, grandmothers from whom I am descended. Others of my family speak of earlier life in Red River. On quiet evenings, when I sit with my mother in her kitchen, she tells me such things...if I walk back through my life and reflect on my education, I find I have always been in school. My family and the land from which I was born were my first teachers. Then walls were built that kept my family and the land away. Within these structures, I came to be schooled in a "formal" way, and, twenty-two years later, I have returned to my mother's kitchen and my father's armchair to learn again as a child. I have completed a master's degree in educational foundations, and I work as faculty in a Native teacher education program in Saskatchewan...I will share some of what I have learned throughout both my formal and family education, knowing that my words are both an echo of those before me and an extension of my own being." (Hodgson-Smith, 2000: 157).

"In Aboriginal cultures our Elders are our source of wisdom. They have a long-term view of things and a deep understanding of the cycles and changes of life. In our past it was very easy to see whether a person had wisdom or not. Living on the land required high levels of independent judgment, initiative, and skill. The challenges were real and immediate, and it was very obvious to everyone when someone did not yet know what they were doing." (Watt-Cloutier, 2000: 119).

The research was designed to utilize various sources of knowledge pertaining to intergenerational communication and well-being. However, the study primarily relies on qualitative data from interviews, and a literature review of current programming related to elder-youth communication, in addition to book and journal articles.

The literature review was used as a form of triangulation in order to situate the data generated by the interviews, and to provide it with context. Because this study is exploratory, triangulation²² is an appropriate approach considering that interviews are the sole source of data. Triangulating interview data with conclusions from the literature can give a clearer perspective on the topic. Berg (2001) points out that Borman, LeCompte, and Goetz (1986) stress how triangulation allows researchers to offer perspectives other than their own (5). In this case, triangulation involves utilizing evidence from the existing literature dealing with other First Nations as well as non-First Nations culture, in addition to the interview material from Blood Tribe members. The strength of triangulation is the possibility of uncovering complexities in the interview data and literature reviews. Triangulation (Berg, 2001: 5) provides researchers with varieties of data, investigators, theories, and methods; thus it is used for exploratory purposes in an attempt to examine a range of intergenerational communication techniques and perspectives.

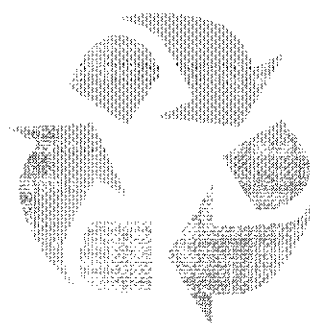
Triangulation was significant in this study because “the important feature of it is not the simple combination of different kinds of data but the attempt to relate them so as to counteract the threats to validity²³ identified in each” (Berg, 2001:

²² Triangulation – A term used in the social sciences as a metaphor describing a form of multiple operationalism or convergence validation (Berg, 2001). Goetz and LeCompte (1984) describe its use as a means of refining, broadening, and strengthening conceptual linkages.

²³ Validity – The degree to which a measurement instrument is reliably used. Without a definitive answer to questions about how data are produced and evaluated, the validity of a particular measurement instrument

5). Specific threats to validity or to trustworthiness of data in this study related to the understanding of traditional cultural elder-youth communication and interaction, traditional definitions and methods relating to cultural well-being, and traditional cultural perspectives of elder and youth roles. These may be seen as threats to scientific validity because science does not normally view tradition as an acceptable source of knowledge. An exploratory diagram (below) of triangulation helps to visually explain how it works. Data from one source may contradict other sources; this is not necessarily a failure, as ‘real’ life research situations are inevitably complex. As stated earlier, a strength of triangulation is the uncovering of complexity and the opportunity to reflect on different views or perspectives on the subject matter.

1) Literature (books, reports, & articles)



2) Programs (what’s being done to enhance intergenerational communication)

3) Interviews (Oral tradition)

Figure 3 – Triangulation

(Berg, 2001)

is in doubt. What answers mean to respondents – as distinct from what they mean to researchers – thus

Why use qualitative methodology? Berg (2001: 2-3) points out, “the notion of quality is essential to the nature of things and refers to the what, how, when, and where of a thing—its essence and ambience. . . . qualitative research thus refers to the meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions of things”. The essence of culture as understood by the Blood people needs to be communicated; thus, utilizing in-depth interviews to get a sense of what members wish to share and why, or how they use concepts and what metaphors they employ, in addition to how they perceive and make sense of their world, are all central to this research. Utilizing what qualitative research data suggests in relation to a specific cultural tradition will be essential to incorporating this tradition into programs or models to promote intergenerational communication and well-being in aboriginal life.

The literature review included works that provide descriptions of specific rituals or ceremonies (Hungry Wolf, 1977; Hungry Wolf, 1980; Dempsey, 1998; Castellano, Davis & Lahache, 2000) and research on how oral tradition and Indigenous culture is utilized in prisons and hospitals (Waldram, 1997) and how roles and styles of grandparenting assist in transmitting cultural knowledge (Weibel-Orlando, 1997), as well as literature on oral history and transmission (Hungry Wolf, 1977; Hale, 1991). The use of such literature, in relation to qualitative research assists in the explanation and interpretation of specific cultural traditions as well as concepts and ideas apparent in the interviews. The interviews replicate the traditional ‘practice’ of the importance of oral transmission to identify specific cultural knowledge in relation to intergenerational communication among the Blood people, while gaining understanding of indigenous definitions of healing, well-being, communication, knowledge and understanding. Thus, I attempted to locate myself not simply as an outside researcher, but as both researcher and community member. This had

becomes a critical issue (Johnson, 2000: 339).

the advantage of ensuring trust and respect, but it also meant that on some occasions I had to discuss and negotiate my self-definition and those of the people I interviewed. This is a necessary feature of participatory research²⁴ (Dickson & Green, 2001; O'Neil, 2002). In addition, the *Council for the Advancement of Native Development Officers*, has provided the following definitions of community based research methods which work interchangeably with qualitative research methodologies:

- *Community based research* is a process that begins with a concern that is rooted in the community's experience. The research process consists of planning to gather information, actually doing the work (i.e. designing and conducting surveys and interviews), and making sense of the findings. The researcher is also in a process of self-reflection because he/she is one of the participants in the process of creating knowledge. These *methods are important* because they fill the void in the need for accurate information for decision-making. This void is exacerbated by out of date census data, and Statistics Canada information that is generally focused at the national, provincial, or regional level. There is a need for relevant local community data (www.edo.ca/certification/taed/13.htm).
- Community based research is a form of research whereby Aboriginal community collaboration, direction, participation and commitment are essential. The goal is to develop culturally-appropriate and methodologically-sound research, analysis, and dissemination strategies

²⁴ Participatory-action-research – 1) Explicit aim of PAR is to foster empowerment (Maguire, 1987; Tandon, 1985; Cancian & Armstead, 1990; Fals-Border & Rahman, 1991; Park, 1993; Smith et al, 1997). 2) An inquiry by ordinary people acting as researcher(s) to explore questions in their daily lives, to recognize their own resources, and to produce knowledge and take action to overcome inequalities, often in solidarity with external supporters (Dickson & Green, 2001).

that are beneficial and empowering for the participating communities and stakeholders (www.edo.ca/certification/taed/13.htm).

Yet, Salmond (1985) notes, "...the process of opening Western knowledge to traditional rationalities has hardly yet begun." Hence, respectful attention to traditional cultural knowledge is necessary both for the continuity of specific cultures, and for developing appropriate ways of researching these cultures. Striving to understand the meaning of this knowledge is just as important throughout the whole process of attaining it.

Sample

The interviewing process was started in August of 2003 and ended in the early part of February 2004. The participants for this research were recruited from the Blood Reserve. All participants were informed that participation was voluntary and a form was to be signed in accordance with university policies on research with human subjects (Informed Consent form). I explained that their names would be kept confidential and only I (and possibly my supervisor) would know their names.

I am a member of the Blood Tribe, and the interviews presented an opportunity for me to increase my awareness and understanding of the culture, and specifically the topic at hand, in addition to documenting some of the knowledge the elders²⁵ and young people²⁶ have. The participants were not randomly selected; the elders were chosen for their knowledge of the culture and their

²⁵ Elder – refers to an older person who is knowledgeable in the Blood culture, history and traditions. In addition, people recognize them in the community as an elder; they possess specific life experiences and tend to be held in high regard.

²⁶ Young people – refers to a young person (under 18) today.

recollections of how things were before²⁷, during and after residential schools (one interview question was related to how residential schools affected elder roles).

The sample was partly chosen through convenience sampling. Convenience sampling, also referred to as *accidental* or *availability* sample, relies on the availability of subjects—those who are close at hand or easily accessible (Berg, 2001: 32). It is sometimes the best way to locate subjects with certain attributes or characteristics necessary in a study (e.g. possessing cultural knowledge) (Berg, 2001: 33). The convenience sampling also reflects an important feature of reserve life. On the reserve, personal relations and face-to-face communication are still important. Reserve residents are less concerned with what your “official” position is than with whom you know and what family you are part of. The recollections of elders, either through lived experience, or from communication with earlier generations, were one of the reasons they were selected. Thus, beyond a convenience sample, elders were chosen who potentially had something to communicate to younger generations. Definitions of what constitutes elders was provided by the participants themselves—an elder is someone you respect and who has cultural knowledge and wisdom. An elder is also someone old enough to have a significant amount of life experience and to remember significant changes in the society and culture of the Blood people. They reside both on and off the reserve. The common criteria they met were:

1. They were all members of the Blood Reserve;
2. However, some resided on the reserve and others off-reserve. They did not have to reside on or off—the important issue for this research was

²⁷ Residential schools were already in existence when many of the elders interviewed were infants, however, many of their parents and grandparents were still alive and were able to transmit specific cultural knowledge to these elders without the influence of the schools or the technology (media, computers, TV) that affects young people in today's society.

that they had, and were recognized by their peers as having, cultural knowledge and life experience;

3. There was an equal representation of males and females;
4. They had a variety of beliefs in relation to cultural knowledge;
5. They did not have to hold any certificate or degree because traditionally, and as noted in some academic publications, elders were the ‘professors’ and ‘teachers’ of specific cultural knowledge; and
6. They were Blood members who could describe how residential schools affected them and/or the culture, how the people and culture changed after the imposition of residential schools, and how they themselves view the people and culture today.

The youth selected met specific criteria to be participants for the research, but were also initially chosen through a convenience sample. The researcher contacted youth who were available and willing to participate and who were known to the researcher or referred to her:

1. They were all between the ages of 12 and 18;
2. They were all members of the Blood Reserve;
3. They constituted an equal representation of males and females; and
4. They all resided off the reserve (at the time of the interviews). Residing off the reserve was a constant analysis factor—non-resident Blood Tribe members.

I chose young people who live off-reserve for three main reasons. The first is that there is a major demographic shift happening today such that young First Nations people increasingly live in urban areas. Secondly, such young people are the ones most likely to lose contact with elders, especially elders who still speak the indigenous language, as these elders most often still live on-reserve. Thirdly, I myself am the parent of young First Nations people who live off-reserve, and thus I have a personal interest in their welfare and the shaping of their identity. It would be useful to do similar research with a sample of on-reserve youth; however, this is beyond the scope of the present project. However, I would suggest that on-reserve youth are subject to many of the same influences as off-reserve youth, and thus some of the same issues of cultural loss and impaired communication might exist.

The ratio of females to males was 4:4 for both the elders and young people, and total participants numbered 16. This number was limited to provide a manageable sample for interviewing, transcribing, analyzing and documenting findings from in-depth qualitative interviews. The female to male ratio gave an opportunity for the researcher to examine or control for the possibility of gendered perspectives from both age groups.

The elders were chosen, as mentioned above, because they held cultural knowledge and I (or Sheldon²⁸) knew how to get in contact with them to request their participation. I knew all the elders; though some were more acquainted with me than others. The ones that I did not know so well, my partner knew very well. Once contacted (by telephone), the elders showed interest and were anxious to be interviewed. As a member of the Tribe, I felt excited and honored that they accepted my request. Appropriate cultural norms had to be respected

²⁸ Sheldon Day Chief – assisted in the majority of the initial elder contacts; he speaks fluent Blackfoot and assisted where applicable some of the translation process.

when approaching elders. Once they agreed to participate, I purchased gifts for them, in addition to a budgeted \$25²⁹ payment, which each elder received. The gifts were various items such as blankets, dishcloths, toiletry baskets, and in a few instances, lunch—for their time, effort and willingness to participate in the interviews. It is a custom in the Blood culture to give what you can in return for advice, healing or cultural knowledge. You will not be penalized for not giving something, but it will rest upon the researcher or individual's conscience if nothing is given. The gift is given primarily out of respect for the elder who is assisting in some way. In the Blood culture, it is a norm to give gifts or money when asking for advice or for requesting traditional rituals (name-giving ceremonies, headdress transfers, guidance or prayers).

The youth interviews were different, however. I did not know all of them personally,³⁰ until I contacted them for an interview. Again, they were chosen through a 'convenience' sample procedure and chosen because they met common criteria (see p. 51). I personally contacted six of the eight participants (again by telephone) and scheduled the interviews at their discretion; the remaining participants were recruited through St. Francis Junior High School, where the Native Liaison³¹ assisted in contacting and scheduling for interviews during lunch hours (so as to not interfere with regular classes).

The exact ages of the participants in the elders' group, and their occupations, were not asked because it was their knowledge, opinion, and wisdom in relation to the topic at hand that was of importance, and also because it would have been regarded as rude. Age range of the youth participants was 12 to 17 years. There

²⁹ The payments and gifts for the elders were funded by the Center for Health Management at the University of Lethbridge, from which the researcher received a grant to assist financially in conducting the fieldwork.

³⁰ I knew of the youth participants from their involvement with sports, pow-wows or through my son. They in turn knew my partner or I in some way, but not always so formally.

³¹ Thank you to Leroy Crazy Boy (Native Liaison) from St. Francis Jr. High who assisted in the recruitment of two participants during the final stage of fieldwork.

was no payment made to the youth, however, as the research budget was limited and it is not necessarily customary to provide gifts or payments to youth.

Confidentiality and ethics

All participants were made aware of the Informed Consent form (Appendix A), the monetary payment (for elders only), and were asked to voice any concerns or questions they may have before the interview was started. If they did have questions, these were answered in advance of the actual interview. It is still not common in the life of the Blood people that a researcher is conducting interviews or seeking knowledge about the culture. The elders did not mind if their names were used in the final paper; however, I did stress that I would keep all names confidential, but that if I did choose to use names, I would give them a call to get their verbal consent again. I informed them that the consent form was a part of the procedures mandated by the University of Lethbridge Human Subjects Research Guidelines. It is worth noting that while these measures were necessary to meet the University's ethical guidelines for research, they can seem to go against the kind of face-to-face or personal knowledge that is common in reserve communities. In such communities, it is important to know *who* people are in order to judge *what* they know.

Procedure

Some of the elder interviews required the assistance of an interpreter to translate Blackfoot words or phrases that needed clarification. I also utilized the assistance of a translator for several transcription tapes. In addition to translation, some of the Blackfoot terminology needed to be explained in detail, in such a way so as to grasp the contextual meaning and use of certain words or phrases.

Each participant was familiarized with the topic and given a short summary as to why specific issues and aspects of the culture were being explored. Before the elder interviews, we chatted about how each other were and how family members were (to break the ice more or less). Before the youth interviews, I informed participants that their answers would not be judged right or wrong; I was seeking their perspectives and opinions more than anything else. I asked each participant if they would like to be a part of this research; all said yes. Because I phoned their parents prior to interviewing them, their parents also provided me with a verbal acceptance. For three of the young people, one of their parents (mothers) signed the form. For the two youth interviews conducted at St. Francis Junior High, the Liaison informed the Principal and relayed information regarding the interviews, consent form, and who the researcher was; the Liaison contacted me when the proposed interview was approved (the same day I requested his assistance).

All interviews were recorded using a hand-held audio recorder (except one emailed interview with an elder who lives in Vancouver). The participants all agreed to the use of the tape-recorder, as I mentioned to them that it was easier for me to transcribe the interview at a later time and it would help the conversation flow.

I had a set of interview questions for the youth and the elders; however, different words at times were used to simplify the question in order for some to understand. I initially wanted to follow the interview guide closely, but when it came to some of the interviews, especially the elder interviews, we followed the guidelines more loosely (for example because of the way in which a story was being told). I was guided by the participants' answers, keying into how eager (or not) they were when specific questions arose (especially the question of residential school experiences and how such experiences had affected them and the community). Waiting for their response was my challenge; one elder had tears because of what was shared! Being sensitive to my respondents in this way

was an ethical priority. As Atkinson (2001) observes, “the researcher, an Aboriginal woman working within her community, understands responsibility of her actions with fidelity and ethical clarity to meet Aboriginal community needs in the research she is undertaking.” Atkinson also describes the principles and functions of *dadirri*³² which include, “the knowledge and consideration of community and the diversity and unique nature that each individual brings to community; ways of relating and acting within community; a non-intrusive observation, or quietly aware watching; a deep listening and hearing with more than the ears; a reflective non-judgmental consideration of what is being seen and heard.” Extracting data from the stories, opinions, and perspectives of the participants was not an easy task. It required the researcher to become the reflective non-judgmental other who took into consideration what was being seen and heard, equally. For example, being guided by body language allowed me to perceive what was a stop sign to end one question and go on to the next.

Setting

The majority of the interviews took place in the homes of the participants. One elder interview was emailed from Vancouver and two youth interviews took place at St. Francis Junior High School (Lethbridge) in the office of the Native Liaison (Mr. L. Crazy Boy) but the Liaison was not present for the interview. The youth were a challenge to recruit because young people are more shy about being interviewed than they are at filling out a survey form; this led to a few instances where the researcher was left to wait for parental consent (several days) or to ensure that scheduling of interviews was convenient for the participants as well as for the researcher. Giving the Native Liaison a call, and arranging for youth to be selected at his discretion as long as they met the criteria, remedied this. However

³² Dadirri – a special quality; a unique gift of the Australian Aboriginal peoples’ inner deep listening, and quite still awareness; something like what is called “contemplation” in mainstream culture.

this process took several weeks because some recruits were a no-show³³, while still others were being recruited. However, the Liaison helpfully made the arrangements for parental consent and the setting for the interview, and provided us with lunch at no charge. I traveled to the Blood Reserve to conduct approximately half of the elder interviews; however, the majority took place in Lethbridge. One of the elders resides a few minutes from where my parents stay; I felt a sense of familiarity when I traveled that route and prayed, as I did with all the interviews, that I would conduct the interview in a ‘good and respectable’ manner. I was given a bite to eat after a handful of the interviews, which was always a treat for me (anticipation of bannock, fry bread or other traditional meals!).

Conduct of interviews

The interviews were conducted, as far as possible, in terms of an awareness of the proper cultural protocol to be respectful when speaking to elders. There were cultural dimensions relating to approach, time and behavior. When approaching elders for something (e.g. advice, guidance) one does not just come out and ask bluntly. One must ask in a manner that respects the person and culture. As already noted, gifts, i.e. blankets, household items and a small honorarium were provided for all elders. One elder stated, “If you offer a name, blanket or other to a person, you don’t have to pay for it because it was offered or given to you. On the other hand, if you request or ask for a name (Blackfoot name), advice or other, you have to pay for it; that’s just proper in our culture.” This particular elder offered me a blanket for my semi-formal visit; I was appreciative and honored.

³³ The Liaison mentioned that the interviewees that initially agreed to be interviewed said they “forgot” or that the noon-hour interview “contradicted” with the school activities, such as intramurals.

As noted earlier, I informed participants that I would tape-record the interview, as this would allow flow with minimal interruptions; I did not want to stop and write, stop and write. This would not have been productive and meaningful, and would have interfered with the personal connection with, and respect for the interviewee³⁴.

Questions used for interview

The elders were asked approximately twenty or more questions, depending on what the elder was willing to share and how one question related to another. The youth interviews were structured around fourteen questions and for all interviews, an outline with an order in which questions were asked, was followed. See Appendix B (elder questions) and Appendix C (youth questions).

The questions were devised to gain an understanding of how elders and youth thought about intergenerational communication, what they thought about each other, and what they wanted to be communicated in relation to cultural and personal well-being and specific historical developments affecting the Blood people. The questions were loosely followed with elders, because in many instances, they would share stories and would already give answers to questions not yet asked. I did not repeat questions in such cases. Or in the case of one elder, he said he would tell of experiences when he was young, how it was in residential school and how he views the culture and people today. On the other hand, the answers given by the young people followed the interview questions closely. Their answers were not as long or detailed; therefore, I felt I should ask each specific question to provide guidance. In some cases, I also offered explanations of the questions to encourage the youth respondents. In all instances, I was directed by the participant; reading their body language and

³⁴ The translator, where applicable, was also appreciative that the interview was being recorded, as this assisted in the transcribing procedure; minimizing errors when translating Blackfoot to English and vice versa.

'mood' during the interview. For example, when the young people appeared unsure of how to answer one question, I repeated the question in a different way or explained it, or let them know they could pass to the next question. With the elders, when the interview exceeded an hour or two, I did suggest a short break to have refreshments or to relax. The interview process utilized a significant amount of energy for both the participant and myself; after leaving each elder interview, I did feel 'drained'.

Transcription methods

Almost all qualitative studies involve some degree of transcription – the data may be tape-recorded interviews, recordings of focus groups, video recordings, or handwritten field notes. For this research, tape-recorded interviews and field notes written after interviews were utilized; some notes were written while driving away, and some notes were written during the evening (with the exception of the emailed interview). Each recorded interview was transcribed onto computer and printed. Transcription lasted anywhere from 1 hour to 15 hours; the elder interviews consumed a lot of time in transcription. Assistance from a transcriber was utilized; she was also fluent in Blackfoot.

Language issues & how they were dealt with

Fluency in the Blackfoot language today is not as common as it was 30, 40 or 50 years ago. The average use of Blackfoot for all the interviews was approximately fifty percent (with the exception of the emailed interview). When Blackfoot was spoken, a translator was present to assist in translation. The translator was a fluent English and Blackfoot speaker, and could also translate some English words into Blackfoot as needed. I can read and write the Blackfoot language, however my comprehension is approximately 70% and speech about 50%.

ELDER INTERVIEWS

All except one of the elders were interviewed in their homes; one interview was emailed from Vancouver, after contact was made by telephone. This particular elder (Elder C) was raised knowing and participating in the Sundance and she also is presently a carrier of a sacred bundle. She is an author and co-author of books, specifically about elders, tribes and customs of tribal culture and people³⁵. The remaining elders reside both on the reserve and in the city of Lethbridge. By chance, the male elder participants all reside on the reserve while all the female participants reside off the reserve—one in Vancouver and three in Lethbridge. In addition, three of the female elders were widows and one of the male elders was a widower.

Two female elders (elders A and B) were interviewed together at one of their homes (in the city of Lethbridge); they were sisters-in-law and both are widowed, so they felt comfortable being interviewed together. It was the first interview I conducted for the research, so I felt nervous, excited and unsure of how it would flow, but knowing them prior to initial contact gave me an advantage. I was with my three daughters during that particular interview and it was an honor that they could be present and listen to some of the stories these two grandmothers shared with me; talk about oral tradition! This particular interview was approximately

³⁵ This elder is the author/co-author of: *The ways of my Grandmothers* (1980), *Daughters of the Buffalo Women* (1996) and *Indian Tribes of the Northern Rockies* (1989). Contact with her was made by telephone and we chatted for a short while, catching up on how each other was as much as we could before I starting asking her if she would be a participant. Her answer was yes and discussion of how she would receive the questions and how I would receive her answers were arranged. It was early September when these arrangements were made; I received her answers via email a few days later. She is a special woman who is a passageway to hear stories and recollections of how my grandmother (Poonah) lived many years ago; my grandmother taught her many rituals and ceremonies while she was still alive. She is a teacher, author, mother and transmitter of cultural knowledge. I have known her for most of my life, but it was not until my adult years that I began to ask questions in relation to specific features of our culture; she has shared stories of how my grandmother was many, many years ago. She added, when we were almost through with our conversation, that my grandmother was a very intelligent and revered woman. I am honored that we can share and listen to each other at these times.

four hours in length, and even though it was energy and time consuming, I would do it all over again. No translator was used for this interview; they both translated any words that they thought I would not understand while the interview was being conducted. One of the two has passed on. I would like to make special mention, out of respect, this particular elder, who passed away a few months after being interviewed. She will always remain special to me and I am truly grateful for the knowledge I acquired from her. I knew her for an extended time prior to asking her to be a participant. This is one of the main reasons why I conducted the research; many elders are passing away without transmitting the cultural knowledge the young people of today need and desire. I knew these two elders some time ago but had not spoken to or learned from them extensively. When it came time to conduct the interviews, however, they both shared an abundance of knowledge in relation to the topic, as well as many other things such as traditional roles of men and women, specific protocols, and their personal stories.

Elder D - The final female elder interviewed was *old*, yet she still remains alert and willing to share what she can to assist young people today.³⁶ Contact was made with her approximately two days prior to the actual interview and at that time, she said that she was usually home; she just asked that I give her a call before traveling to her home. This elder has emphysema; she uses an oxygen tank daily; so there was no question of where she would feel most relaxed, at ease and comfortable. The length of the interview was approximately three hours and it was conducted in her home (in the city of Lethbridge). We stopped for a few minutes about mid-way in order for her to relax, have a drink of water and take a breather. She has a keen memory, as she recollected events from her childhood. Some were fun filled and positive; others, especially when she was diagnosed with

³⁶ Her exact age is 85; she is my partner's aunt and she has been assisting me with questions and answers I have about our culture. I am appreciative of all the traditional cultural knowledge she, and the other elders have transmitted to me

TB while at residential school, (which she says almost killed her), were not so pleasant.

The interviews with male elders will be something to remember for many years. I will forever value what I learned about how male elders view specific aspects of the Blood culture, and how it has enlightened me to view things from 'the other's eyes', if you will. It gave me an understanding of how female and male viewpoints are different in traditional culture, yet, as the discussion in the results section confirm, the underlying message is the same: to pray, to respect and to learn the language.

Elder E - I conducted the first interview with a male elder in early September. I admired this elder; he has been my neighbor since I can remember (we lived approximately 6 minutes down the road from him located at the southwest area on the Blood Reserve; I now live in Lethbridge). When I lived with my parents, however I didn't really speak with him about anything.³⁷ I just knew to respect elders as my grandparents taught me. He knows my parents and my partner well; he has visited my parents on a number of occasions and he has advised my partner on political issues. The interview was approximately four hours in length and was conducted in his home. The elder's spouse served a light lunch with coffee. His spouse was not a direct participant in the interview; however, she provided some interesting comments alongside her husband on residential schools, communication and love. She mentioned that her father, a hereditary Chief of the Blood Tribe (who passed away a few years ago) transmitted his knowledge of the culture to her; unfortunately, when she attended residential

³⁷ We might already propose the notion of problems of intergenerational communication with my own peers and essentially, with my own life history.

schools, she was caught between her traditional cultural knowledge and the influence of western knowledge and thought³⁸.

Elder F – Some elders are fluent in both the English and Blackfoot languages. The second male elder interviewed was fluent in both; however, his preference was Blackfoot, especially when he reminisced about the ‘old days’. He said that he had learned at a young age to work hard, to practice respect, to honor his parents, and to be humble. In addition, he noted that he is invited to many ceremonies, pow-wows and other cultural gatherings because he was a member of the Horn Society (since age 9); he was a founding member of the “Old Agency Singers” and he is known by many for his knowledge about many aspects of the culture—traditions, customs, values and beliefs. The interview was approximately three hours in length and was conducted in his home in the community of Standoff, on the Blood Reserve (approximately 45 minutes from Lethbridge). Here, again, his spouse was not a direct participant, but she sat in on the conversation and spoke of some of her recollections of residential school and some cultural traditions. I was served refreshments and a sandwich after.³⁹

Elder G – This interview was conducted in October 2003. He was a fluent Blackfoot speaker, however, his interview was spoken in English and was not difficult for him to do. It was conducted in his home on the reserve a few miles from Standoff. It did not take as long as the others (it last approximately two hours); however, all the questions were answered as detailed as he could and he

³⁸ Many elders still feel ‘rangled’ between both cultures (Blackfoot and Western); some feel that because of the imposition of western culture, it is a challenge for them to be ‘completely’ a Blood person, in all its contexts. Their recollections of childhood memories and realization of some of their practices today, has made them aware that it is difficult to completely be ‘traditional’; non-traditional influences are challenges in their efforts to maintain their cultural knowledge and to practice different specific rituals and traditions.

³⁹ I was given a blanket to my surprise; I could have cried at that moment. I was appreciative of what they both shared; however, they in turn appreciated my visit (even if it was for a formal purpose) and the purpose of the visit.

did not rush. I did not know this particular elder until adulthood, however, it was a pleasure to interview him and to gain his perspective on this topic.

Elder H – The last male interview took place mid-October, 2003. This elder, again, shared in detail what he could, however, it lasted approximately 90 minutes. This was relatively short compared to the others, but, nonetheless, an abundance of knowledge was gained from his interview (and quite similar to what the other elders stated). The interview was conducted in his home on the reserve. Perhaps not knowing this elder throughout my childhood years may have been a factor in a “short” interview. However, there was no rush or discomfort during this interview.

YOUTH INTERVIEWS

Most of the youth interviews occurred during the evening, with the exceptions of the two interviewed during their lunch hour. The youth interviews were fun; however, I was, at times, nervous. Unlike the elder interviews, these interviews did not last long, roughly between thirty and sixty minutes. I learned a great deal from the youth participants with reference to how life is for young people in our society today. I appreciated the sharing of their perspectives and the sincerity they portrayed during the interviews. I will briefly discuss how the youth interviews were conducted, in the order in which they were done, to allow the reader to be aware of how the interview process developed over time.

Youth A - The first male youth interview took place in mid-September, during the evening, because I wanted to accommodate his schedule and arrange the most convenient time for him. With the permission of his mother, the interview took place in his home, in Lethbridge, where he and his family have resided for approximately eight years. He is the oldest child in his family and resides with his mother, stepfather and three sisters. He dreams of playing hockey in the big

leagues (NHL) someday, and he's quite positive he'll go into a medical profession (chiropractic or physiotherapy). He is very close to his maternal grandparents who reside on-reserve. He did say that he knew his grandparents attended residential schools. He was straightforward and sincere during the interview. He was shy, but not so much as to give only 'yes' or 'no' answers. It took approximately 40 minutes to interview him, and I felt pleased with what he shared.

Youth D & G - The second interview conducted was mid-October. It was an evening interview to accommodate the participants, a male and female, who were interviewed together. I contacted their mother, via telephone, a few days prior to the interview. They were shy and not very conversational, but what they shared was interesting, nonetheless. They reside with their mother, stepfather and younger sister. They are both in junior high and play basketball and volleyball. Before the interview, we spent some time getting to know each other; (their mother signed the Informed Consent Form). The interview itself was approximately 60 minutes; however, I did chat with their mother before and after the interview (she served me supper with a cup of tea after the interview). I knew their mother, which allowed me to be relaxed and comfortable as a researcher; this may have assisted the young people to feel comfortable as well. These two youth at times 'bounced off' one another when sharing their opinions and thoughts. Their mother attends the University of Lethbridge; she realizes that interviewing Indigenous people is not an easy task because the formalities involved in interviewing are not a part of the culture (however, in recent years, they are becoming more familiar because of research conducted for statistics, journals and program development).

The notion of interviewing these two participants together was sparked by a few factors: they are siblings and of the opposite gender. Recruiting was a challenge, and when I spoke with their mother over the phone, she suggested interviewing

them together (she is a busy mother). She was present during the interview; however, she did not provide the answers for them. She made a few comments to them when they were stuck on giving their answers and reminded them of a few things in relation to some of the cultural practices they are aware of. She remained neutral to their answers, as she is a student herself who has conducted fieldwork, thus, she allowed her children's answers to be from their own perspective and opinion.

Youth B - The oldest youth participant was a male who is in his graduating year at Catholic Central High School. He was 17 at the time of the interview; he lives with his mother, stepfather and two brothers. He is a relative of mine. He has an older sister who resides in Calgary. He moved to Lethbridge from the Blood Reserve approximately five years ago to attend school in the city. He was contacted a few weeks prior to the initial interview. I asked him if he would like to participate and in turn, he asked his mother. We scheduled the interview for the evening at my house. He presented himself politely and respectfully. He was straightforward with his answers. The interview lasted approximately 45 minutes. The interview did not appear to be affected by the fact that we are related. The questions were straightforward, and he provided detailed answers when he could.

Youth C - The last male youth interview was conducted at the end of November. I did not know of this young person at all. I met his mom approximately seven days prior to the interview. I asked her at the time of meeting if she had children, where they lived and if they would at all be interested in being a part of my research. She said she had a son and that he was 14 years old and they resided in Lethbridge. She then agreed for him to be interviewed. I called her a few days prior to the interview and we mutually agreed on a time and date. Before the interview, we had a cup of mint tea and became acquainted (they are extended family through marriage). She signed the Consent Form and we began the interview. This interviewee plays football and is known to be fierce on the field;

he was not so fierce at the kitchen table. He was shy, but with his mother there, he was able to answer the questions with confidence. The interview was approximately 60 minutes in length and was conducted in their home in the city. The mother provided some information when he did not answer; reminding the researcher that they were Full Gospel and thus that he would not have knowledge relating to some questions because of this. We laughed at one of the questions regarding what places do elders and youth get-together when he replied Band Distributions and Bingo. However, he answered the majority of the questions in as much detail as he could.

Youth E - The oldest female participant among the youth was interviewed in late-November. She was a sister of my son's friend, so I knew of her in that capacity. She was contacted over the phone; I spoke to her mother to request her permission. The interview was conducted a day later and in the evening at her home (in Lethbridge). She signed the Informed Consent form herself, though her mother was aware the interview. She was energetic and curious as to why someone would ask her to share her opinions, regardless of the topic. The interview took approximately 60 minutes. She asked questions of me at the end of the formal interview, more than any of the other youth participants, which was a change of pace for me. I am honored when I can share my thoughts with young people on issues that youth, and First Nations people in general, face today.

The final two interviews took place in January; I was running out of personal contacts for young people who resided in Lethbridge and I turned to the schools for assistance. Fortunately, I was able to utilize the Native Liaison at St. Francis Junior High School to assist in setting up the final two interviews. The interviews took place during the participants' school lunch break, and the Liaison provided lunch for us. Prior to both interviews, I gave the Liaison a copy of the consent form and he in turn had both participants sign, or bring it home to be signed by a

parent (both of the participants' parents were contacted by phone before the interviews were conducted).

Youth F - The first of these two interviews was with a grade nine student who played basketball and volleyball; was a track star and had five sisters. She was candid and eager with her answers. As mentioned, the interview was during lunch hour, so while we both wanted to be thorough, a 'time-limited' interview had to be conducted. She said she wanted to be a Physical Education teacher and her athleticism reinforced this. She was cheerful and courteous. The interview lasted approximately thirty minutes. The lunch hour interview was not rushed; she gave answers in as much detail as she could. The Liaison provided lunch for us and we had time to eat before the afternoon classes started.

Youth H - The second interview conducted at the Junior High School was with the youngest of all the youth. She was in grade 7 and she had moved from Cardston to Lethbridge within the previous months. I knew this particular young lady from the pow-wow trail. She is a Jingle Dress dancer and has won numerous competitions. She at times has been a buddy with my two daughters, who also dance within the pow-wow circle as Fancy Shawl dancers. I suggested to her that there was no 'right' or 'wrong' answer, and to be as comfortable as possible. I said there was no time limit, but she appeared to be a studious person and was aware of the time when the interview was completed. It took approximately 25 minutes. Her answers were not shorter; she just answered concisely and quickly. This young female participant provided some answers that I did not expect; such as her wanting elders to share of the "old days", and how "silly" elders were!

Methods for analyzing data

In this section, I will discuss the methods utilized in the analysis process: how material was chosen to include in findings, and how the selected material was of significance.

Applied to people, reflexivity refers to the human ability to think of and refer to ourselves as if we were someone else and to incorporate such reflection into our thought and action. I did utilize reflexivity throughout the analysis procedure, and it assisted by keeping me focused on my own place in the research. As a member of this tribe, I share an identity with the participants. Their answers ignited specific aspects of the culture that I would think about (and have thought about) within myself, as both a member and researcher. In a few instances where the participants and I were related (because we usually speak to each other informally and our visits are by chance at times), the interview was a learning experience for me; I understood and became more aware of these participants' perspectives as I practiced my academic skills (such as interviewing techniques, clueing into specific words, phrases, even body movements). At some points, this shift felt a bit uncomfortable for me, and I was sometimes anxious that someone would shy away. As a result of this "unfamiliarity" of being "the other" (researcher), I hoped that I would not cross any uncomfortable boundaries that might affect either the interview or my ongoing informal relationship with them.

There were times, while transcribing and analyzing, that I stopped to reflect on (and sometimes cried about) what I had just read, transcribed and decided to use in the findings. Many say that tears cleanse and heal; that tears strengthen and motivate; or that tears are for sadness and joy. The tears were for all of the above. Listening to and reading what the elders said, and shedding tears assisted me as a researcher to identify with the elders' perspectives, and not mine solely. To depict how it was for them to the best of my ability required switching

between how I perceived answers as a researcher and a Blood Tribe member, and at times the process was frustrating, yet it was an awesome learning experience.

Content analysis

The interview material included in the findings was most often chosen because it answered the question asked in a straightforward manner. In going through interview material, I also looked for words and sometimes phrases that appeared consistently both within individual interviews, or across interviews. However, I also paid attention to words, phrases and answers that were unique. As the *Results* chapter will illustrate, certain words and phrases were emphasized during the interviews—and I paid special attention to these. Elders answered many questions straightforwardly, but there were a few exceptions, like the elder who said he would tell stories of how life was like for him as a young person, what elders told him, and how he views the people and culture today. Consequently, in few instances, particularly with the elder responses, I did ‘search’ for answers. When one elder said he would tell his story, the answers were in the story and my task was to sift through and pinpoint which statements answered the interview questions. However, I also used the shape of the story itself as a guide. It is important to note that storytelling is a traditional way to give information and advice. Telling a story that the listener must pay attention to and reflect on personally involves that listener in a learning process that is respectful. In approaching the interview material in this way, I sought to follow what Martin and Mirraoopa (2001) call,

“an Aboriginal research paradigm through which our knowledges, laws and activities serve as constructs . . . : Ways of knowing, Ways of Being, and Ways of Doing. They are embedded within our worldviews (ontology) and provide a framework upon which research programs, and particularly their methods, are respectful and rightfully Indigenist.”

Because I believe in the culture, and see myself as a member of it, I believe that certain beliefs I hold (and belief in the validity of the culture as a way of knowing is one of these), that I am able to recognize and choose data from the interviews in a way that respects the Blood culture.

I did play a dual-role, researcher and member, in choosing what would be appropriate as it related to the question. I, as a member of the Blood culture, felt fortunate to know the people who could relate to issues, especially when the topic is related to residential schools. Knowing this provided me with the advantage most other researchers do not and could not have. However, being a member could also be a disadvantage because, in every culture, it too has its blind spots, and “outsiders” are often better at pinpointing them. I kept in mind my personal experiences and the cultural knowledge that I have learned to select what comments would be utilized for this particular analysis. The elder’s pre and post-interview conversations aided in the selection and analysis of appropriate material.

As noted above, in cases where elders said many things in relation to a particular question, I chose words or phrases that were emphasized and repeated; and in some cases, these same words or phrases were answers for another question. I also did include material that was unexpected, such as that concerning traditional roles of men and women, as provided by a few elders. I also did not expect the majority of the elders to be unfamiliar with the medicine wheel; this I thought is something that elders’ would know and provide.

If, at any time during the interview, a respondent felt they could not answer a specific question or if they felt I was crossing a boundary, they, or I, would ask the other if more sensitivity was needed. Because I am a member of the Blood culture, I have grown to respect specific teachings and traditions, therefore, when

I proceeded with both interviews and later with data analysis, my judgment was not just my own, it was and has been guided by the elders.

The youth responses were plainspoken; all answered the questions, with a few exceptions (some did not understand the question, therefore made no response). They often provided only a short sentence or two, or a paragraph, and thus selecting the material for the findings and analysis was more straightforward than it was for the elder responses.

Some things that were mentioned were significant because only a select few gave these particular answers. One in particular was prayer; only one youth said he wanted elders to 'pray for him'. The significance of this response is that even though, he lives in an urban setting, plays sports, and attends a school where there is a mixture of all ethnic groups, he still believes that prayer is important in his life; and prayer was one of the most important things the elders wanted young people to practice. This is significant to me, as both a researcher and a Band member because it give me hope about how young people think and feel and what they want from elders. I found it significant that even one young person would mention prayer. One comment repeated by several youth respondents was that they wanted to learn the Blackfoot language from the elders specifically. They felt that elders knew much of the language (and culture); therefore, they wanted to learn about these from the elders.

Discourse analysis

I did not conduct a full, detailed discourse analysis of the interview transcripts, as my main interest was in *what* was said rather than *how* it was said. However, I did need to keep in mind that "stories" follow specific discursive rules, and that the lessons that stories teach are not always spelled out explicitly. Thus, in "finding" lessons and meanings, I was both participating in a shared culture that understands stories and storytelling, and, in a sense, "completing" the meaning of

the stories. I tried to be aware of patterns in language use; for example, elders' use of the present tense to talk about certain past events. I also tried to be aware of patterns in the ways in which topics or ideas were connected or placed in relation to each other; for example, how elders linked discipline and learning, or the ways in which they switched from past to present. I also looked for what Malcolm and Sharifian (2002) call "cultural schemas," culturally-specific ways of using, emphasizing and combining concepts to frame and interpret experience; for example, what some of the participants said about prayer in relation to understanding and wise living. For the elder interviews, as stated above, reflexivity assisted me in selecting what was significant from the material in relation to the question asked, and in becoming aware of my own responses to that material.

The "Findings" section (Ch. 4), gives details both of what participants said and the contexts in which it was said. During the interviews and while listening to the audiotapes, I also made myself aware of how certain words and phrases were said, how often, and what emotions, if any, the elders expressed while saying them. This indicated what was significant and meaningful to them; therefore, significant to mention in the *Findings* section. When the question of program development arose, the elders all provided different ideas; this was significant because it gives an array of different perspectives and opinions on how to attract and involve young people, but also how elders themselves could be involved in communicating with the young people. Thus I included several different responses, including some extended quotes, to give a sense of the variety of responses.

A few statements were worth mentioning because they shed light on perspectives of some respondents as opposed to others. There was a response made in

relation to a question about the occasions on which young people and elders meet. The female respondent answered with in the “malls”. Further to this, she answered another question with, “I think they (elders) judge young people by the clothes they wear.” This indicates that appearance for this particular young person is important, and regardless of what she chooses to wear, she does not want judgment made on her. On the other hand, one elder in particular said that when she was young, her father was “the law”. Back then, she said, parents gave “tough love”. I gather this to mean that you did not get away with much; in fact, you probably faced serious consequences if you did not help with chores around the house. From these two responses, we may imply that the perspectives of elders and youth are very different; not just their opinions. What is important and a priority for some is not for others. Further, young people and elders expressed their opinions in quite different ways. This brings us to the purpose of the research—to gain insight into communication between the two groups, what has changed, and how we might regain some techniques, if not all. For the youth, there were instances where they stopped and took a few minutes to answer a few questions. Most were nervous because they were being interviewed; therefore, not much emotion was portrayed (just when either one of us would crack a joke to break the ice).

As mentioned, having a dual role in this process provided me with an added advantage, even as it presented a few added challenges. Utilizing what I am learning, from a formal learning institution, assisted in the execution of the methodology, while being a member of the Blood Tribe and having grown up with learning and knowing specific cultural protocols helped through all phases of the research. Hopefully, in the end, reflexivity has assisted in the validity of the methodology and the project.

Chapter 4

Findings

The tribal religions had one great benefit other religions did not and could not have. They had no religious controversy within their communities, because everyone shared a common historical experience, and cultural identity was not separated into religious, economic, sociological, political and military spheres. It was never a case, therefore, of having to believe in certain things to sustain a tribal religion. One simply believes the stories of the elders, because the stories had been passed down to them from their elders (Deloria, 1973: 114).

Investigate any skill, any profession...and you will discover that the root of them all is revelation (An Ancient Dream: The Origins of the Western World-CD, Kingsley, 2003).

When asked who he considers the greatest Canadian of all time, one 16-year-old who attends school on a reserve in Western Canada gave the award jointly to 'my grandma and grandpa' (Bibby, 2003: 56).

Themes, topics and issues

In this chapter, I will present findings from the youth interviews first, followed by interviews with the elders, and a comparative discussion at the end.

YOUTH DATA

Language, history and identity are all directly or indirectly mentioned in the youth interviews. A total of fourteen questions were used to structure the interviews, and I will present responses in the order in which the questions were asked. I allowed respondents to answer as they chose, and I will present what they said directly, as it provides an idea of how they use the English language (sometimes using slang), as this is how the young people communicate with others even during a formal interview. I asked them to be themselves, telling them that there was no 'right' or 'wrong' answer and that it was their perceptions, opinions, and ideas that I was interested in (not proper grammar or English). The youth responses were considerably shorter than the elders', however; they were usually straight to the point with no circular or off-the-topic answers. This short and straight to the point approach on the part of young people may be an indication of shyness, but it could also relate to other factors:

1. The young people do not communicate regularly with older people about their culture, except for teachers in school, therefore their answers are brief.
2. The young people communicate with their peers more often than any other age group; therefore, they have learned a different communication style from that of their elders, and perhaps also a different set of perspectives and concerns.

DO YOU SEE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN GENERATIONS OF BLOOD TRIBE MEMBERS AS HAVING BEEN HINDERED OR TARNISHED?

This question did not appear to be easy to comprehend when asked the first time; the interviewer explained or simplified the question in many cases. As mentioned above, the young people indicated that they did not often speak with elders or older people of the Blood community, and the ways in which they spoke were quite different from the elders. The need for simplification or clarification of questions asked indicate a relative lack of awareness on the part of young people that communication with elders had been impaired for specific reasons. It is possible that the way I put the question may also have led them to search for negative aspects of elder-youth communication. The responses given below are direct quotes from the interviews:

Youth A - "Yes, a little bit because Europeans came and put us on reserves, they made little cities where we could barely do anything; communication was affected by the fact that young Natives were taught English instead of being able to speak Blackfoot." (This young male has lived both on and off the reserve; his knowledge of residential schools and reserves stems from both grandparents and his mother)

Youths D & G - "Communication was worse."

Youth B - "I don't really know how communication was before residential schools, but I'd say it's been tarnished because our culture has been lost and a lot of young people don't know it, so I'd say it's been tarnished." (This older male may mean "lost" in a general sense, not totally; however, he does note that the language and some of the specific traditional ways are deteriorating)

Youth E - "I don't know; people only communicate with elders if they are their grandparents; if you read to them⁴⁰."

Youth F - "If you see a member of the Tribe in the mall, you don't even try to say 'hi'. Young people are shy or scared to speak with them; I talk with my grandmother, but she doesn't know what to say. With my friends and their parents, I say hi—with elders, I don't."

Youth C - "I don't know."

Youth H - "I like listening to the old people 'cause they share stories of how it was in the old days; you learn more about the culture."

As portrayed in this section, most young people do see communication as having been 'tarnished' in some way. However, they do attest to wanting to have contact with elders to learn the culture, especially the language. Youth F, a female respondent, has lived away from the reserve for an extended period of time and her awareness may indicate lack of involvement with elders and a lack of confidence about ways to talk to them. The final response, Youth H above, shows a different perspective on communication with elders. This female respondent was the youngest of the group and may communicate with elders more than the others; however, she did not express an awareness of how residential schools had affected communication between generations of Blood Tribe members. She likes listening to stories of when elders were young, but she did not refer to the separation of children from parents when they attended residential schools. From Youth F, we can observe a possible narrowing of

⁴⁰ There is a program within some of the schools, which provides the opportunity for young people to read to seniors at a Seniors Center/Lodge. This program is to promote contact, awareness and understanding for young people and seniors (not necessarily Native elders, though). The students are invited to attend on a certain morning and read to the seniors a poem, short story, or other reading material of their choice. Many of the seniors have minimal hearing or vision. *This implies a one-way rather than two-way communication.

community ties to more immediate family members. This narrowing of intergenerational communication to the nuclear family points to limitations on what young people *can* know in relation to specific cultural traditions, and it indicates the opposite of what “family” was traditionally for the Blood people—extended family was integral to the social organization of this group of people, historically.

The difficulties in talking to elders mentioned by Youth F may also relate to influences that have shaped different life-worlds. The youth life-world today may include computers, peers, malls, and fashion; however, within the elder life-world, the priority put on going to malls and hanging out with peers doesn’t fit the picture. The elders are concerned with respect and knowledge of traditions, as will be seen in their responses. If this is so, it begs the question, again, “how do we link the two life-worlds without building walls?”

WHAT OPPORTUNITIES FOR COMMUNICATION DO YOU KNOW OF THAT PRESENTLY EXIST FOR ELDERS AND YOUNG PEOPLE?

The following quotes illustrate the youth responses:

Youth A and B - “I do not know one.”

Youth E - “No.”

Youth F, G, C, and D - “No, I don’t know any.”

Youth H - “Pow-wows.” (was viewed as a program or model by this youth).

The youth who referred to pow-wows as an opportunity for communication may have answered accordingly because she has traveled most of her life on the ‘pow-wow trail’ (she was 12 years old at the time of being interviewed).

The others who answered that they didn't know of any existing opportunities may have perceived the question as referring to formal programs, such as Headstart, Big Brothers & Big Sisters and Girl Guides/Boy Scouts. If I had asked if they viewed specific programs such as these as legitimate types of programs for interaction between younger people and older adults, their responses may have been different. The majority of the responses were "I don't know"; this may reflect the possibility that young people's interaction with older members has been minimal, as well as the possibility that sharing their opinion(s) is not something they are comfortable with.

WHAT TYPES OF PROGRAMS WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE DEVELOPED?
Some answered that they would like to see Blackfoot classes offered; not just in school, and that they would like a common place for elders and young people to meet and interact. All respondents answered that they could not speak Blackfoot. Typical responses concerning specific types of programs were as follows:

Youth E - "Young people reading to them and asking questions about before, like a long time ago."

Youth B - "Probably a place where there are elders and where young people could ask them questions, I don't know what you would call it, but a place like that."

The responses appear to indicate that young people are curious to learn of the culture and eager to learn from the elders. However, it does appear this type of interaction would be new to most of the young people, and that they did not have a specific or detailed sense of what kind of "place" for interaction might be developed.

WHAT IS AN ELDER?

The following are typical responses indicating what young people feel are characteristics of elders:

Youth B – “An elder is not necessarily old, but respected and knowledgeable and wise.”

Youth A – “An elder is an old native person who knows a lot about our culture.”

Youth F – “Someone who is wise and knows a lot.”

Youth G – “Someone who is older and has knowledge of the old ways.”

Youth D – “Someone that is older.”

Youth C – “Someone who knows a lot about their culture and someone who you look up to.”

Youth E – “Someone old; someone that gets a lot of respect.”

Youth H – “Someone that I respect and that I can sit and listen to.”

The youngest respondent answered that an elder is someone that she respects, but added the personal note that an elder is also someone she can sit and listen to. It appears that the young people interviewed did respect elders, and felt they knew or ‘should’ know about the culture, and should be respected for their knowledge and wisdom. As answers to previous questions indicate, however, these expectations or perceptions of elders do not appear to have helped the young people to feel at ease with elders.

One way of categorizing “elders”, from both the Native and non-native culture, is as those who have grandchildren, who have reached a phase different from parenthood and who are ‘reproductively successful’ because their genes have reached another generation. However, how one perceives elders within Native culture and ‘who’ can be an elder is widely and differently labeled within the Native culture too. Thus, the next question was not easy to answer for the young people who were interviewed.

WHO IS AN ELDER?

Most of the young people stated that grandparents are elders; several had no response; two gave specific names of Tribal elders; one stated ‘mom ‘cause she’s wise’, and great-grandparents were mentioned a few times (most likely because not too many people today have great grandparents).

A few specific responses given below show how respondents tended to define elders in terms of personal relations rather than particular characteristics:

Youth B – “Grandparents and I always hear her name: A’daan (Margaret Hind Man), well her too.”

Youth F – “My grandma, my great-grandma and grandpa”,

Youth A – “My grandparents, older people. I don’t know; an elder is someone older than me”.

Defining what and who elders are is a challenge both for Native people, and more for the general population. Many of us, in our everyday life, say things like:

- Go ask an elder;
- Ask an elder to say an opening prayer;

- Have an elder come in to share stories;
- Ask an elder to teach beadwork; or
- Ask an elder to cook fry bread/bannock.

But, we have not clearly and specifically defined who can be an elder or what characteristics constitute being an elder. It may be that there are no strict definitions of elders historically among the people of the Blood Tribe, but the term was and still is given to older people who are knowledgeable in cultural ways, wise and respected by the people and members of the tribe. As a researcher, I have heard and read several definitions (Metatawabin, 2003; Lepani, 2001; Kumik: Council of Elders⁴¹); these definitions may have intertwined and become one general definition for First Nations people to use when referring to 'elders'. However, as the above answers indicate, such definitions are operationalized (put into practice) within specific personal relationships.

WHAT DO YOU SEE AS THE ROLE OF ELDERS, TRADITIONALLY?

It was interesting to hear the variety of responses to this question. The following are good illustrations of what was offered:

Youth F – “Telling stories of the past, beading, crafts, teaching us (the young people).”

Youth C and G – “I don’t know.”

⁴¹ “The definition of an Elder varies from nation to nation. For example, the Six Nations’ definitions of their Elders include: Faith Keepers, Clan Mothers, Hereditary Chiefs and Spiritual Leaders. The Algonquin Nation in their teachings an Elder is defined as someone who possesses spiritual leadership, which is given by one’s cultural and traditional knowledge. This knowledge is found in the teachings and responsibilities associated with sacred entities such as the Pipe, Wampum belt, Drum and Medicine People. In addition to the spiritual recognition given by the Creator and the Spirit World, an elder is given the title and recognition as elder by other elder of hi/her respective community and nation...their function is basically the same: to

Youth D – “To teach.”

Youth E – “A teacher for young people—teach about life; how to take responsibility.”

Youth B – “Probably as equivalent to what a teacher is now; to carry on our traditions.”

Youth A – “They teach us how to hunt, to cook; they taught us about the medicines.”

Youth H – “To pass on stuff, stories.”

In addition, these young people pictured the traditional roles of elders as positive (they were directly asked in the interviews how they perceived elders’ roles prior to the residential school era).

The researcher did not ask specifically if they read books, listened to or watched audio/visual materials or listened to their grandparents (and other elders) tell about how traditional life was before residential schools. It would be an interesting question to pursue: where do they receive their information about ‘traditional’ roles of elders, and how are their sources reflected in what they do and do not say?

WHAT ARE THE ELDER ROLES TODAY?

Several respondents did not have clear and definite answers for this question (actual responses are provided):

Youth F – “I don’t know their role, but may be to share stories.”

ensure that traditional values, principles and other teachings are passed along, and to provide instruction to help individuals live in the right way.” See http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ai/aw/kumik_e.html

Youth E – “It has changed a lot because elders don’t really talk to young kids unless they are related.”

Youth C – “They give advice to young people to keep them on the right track.”

Youth A – “Really nothing, except to teach young kids, or try to.”

Such responses may indicate, as suggested earlier, that many young people today are not in contact with elders beyond their grandparents; therefore they do not know what to expect from the elders. It may also be that elders are not so visible in urban areas. From the last response above, the words “or try to” may indicate that some young people have a sense that the roles of elders are nothing like they *used* to be or how some *would like* them to be. However, this young Blood member did still want interaction with elders, he is only implying that the elders are not visible and further, not called upon (except for prayers or for cooking traditional foods).

Youth E above, echoes a perception expressed by other youth in answer to some of the earlier questions. This is that elders are involved with and in contact with their own grandchildren. Again, this may indicate that the revered role of elders has dwindled to the confined boundary of the nuclear family; no longer the whole community. While we can say this appears to be true within First Nations communities, we might also suggest this to be true for the broader, more general population. We might also speculate how the modern mainstream culture’s devaluation of older people in general (ageism⁴²) may be seeping into other cultures, specifically in this case, the Blood culture. One author (Gutmann, 1997: 200) writes that the “influences of modernization or urbanization, particularly in

combination, act so as to degrade culture and gerontocracy⁴³”. Gutmann also states that stable, insular, usually rural societies are the best setting for strong cultures. However, he adds that only so long as traditional beliefs and values flourish in their own niche, and maintain themselves in the face of alternate worldviews, will they avoid the fate of being relativized and called into question.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE OF THE ROLE OF ELDERS BEFORE AND TODAY?

The young people interviewed did not appear to have strong, knowledgeable answers to this question; nor did their answers converge. Nonetheless, the diversity of answers is telling:

Youth B – “Their role was on a larger scale before; today, it’s on a smaller scale, but it’s still the same.”

Youth H – “They don’t tell us a lot of stories nowadays, so it has changed.”

Youth C – “No, I don’t see a difference.”

Youth F – “I think it’s the children, they don’t have an interest or they don’t care.”

⁴² Ageism is prejudice based on differences in age. Unlike most other forms of prejudice, ageism affects everyone at one time or another since everyone spends time in both subordinate (such as childhood) and dominant (such as middle-age) age categories (Johnson, 2000: 6).

⁴³ Gerontocracy is a social system dominated by elderly people in positions of authority, especially political. Most national leaders are elderly, for example, as are most of those in the highest positions of major social institutions such as churches, universities, and courts. That powerful people tend to be elderly does not mean that the elderly are particularly powerful as a whole; nor does it mean that the institutions dominated by elderly leaders are run in ways that tend to favor the elderly and their interest. Indeed, most elderly people in industrial societies suffer a decline in both authority and standards of living when they retire from paid employment (Johnson, 2000: 133).

Youth E – “Before everyone was really close (geographically), and today, we’re all over the place.”

Most respondents agreed that the roles of elders had changed (with one exception!). But the details of their responses varied. Ideas about what the Blood culture was like prior to reserves and even about the impact of residential schools are widespread among young people. At the same time, these ideas remain general, and respondents gave few details about them. This lack of specific knowledge means that ideas about how to get involved in cultural change or renewal remain a gray area for many. Some do appear to be frustrated at not knowing the answers to their questions, however, such frustration may open an avenue for them to actually go and ask elders about specifics. Furthermore, from the spectrum of responses, we might say that many young people today, especially those living off the reserve, have learned, and put into practice, an array of ideologies different from the Blood cultural traditions. These ideologies may relate to, but are not limited to the following categories: religious, political, educational and familial.

HOW DO YOU FEEL THE ROLE OF ELDERS HAS BEEN AFFECTED BY THE FACT THAT MANY OF THEM WENT TO RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS?
The following quotes exemplify the responses to this question.

Youth H – “Some of the culture got taken away and they forgot it, so it affected them.”

Youth F – “Well, like in Blackfoot class, we did a project where we chose an elder to research (name, when married, etc); most of them said they could not speak Blackfoot when in school; even to pray in Blackfoot was forbidden.”
“That’s why I think, when you don’t practice, you forget how, so it affected

them because they didn't practice." (Note: this youth took Blackfoot in the Catholic School system in Lethbridge).

Youth E – "It affected them because elders of long ago didn't attend boarding schools; elders today did. Elders lost their language; they have bad memories of how they were treated, so it affected them. The stories they share of how they were treated; if they spoke their language the teachers would say they are speaking to the devil, this affected them."

Youth C – "Yeah, it affected them; they remember being beaten for speaking their language; this will stay with them for the rest of their lives."

Youth B – "They probably resent what they went through."

Youth D and G – "Yes it affected them."

Youth A – "They didn't learn many (cultural) ways because they went to boarding schools. It affects them today somehow."

The personal experiences of people who attended residential schools is not a subject that is taught today in the educational system (K-12) either in on- or off-reserve schools. Further, even the Canadian government and some of the churches are still reluctant to deal with the consequences of this specific era. The exception to the silence about these experiences is when someone is invited into the class to share their story; but this is still not practiced very often. Still, young people of First Nations heritage can tell of the stories that an elder, grandparent, parent or other experienced while attending residential schools.

The most detailed answer above came from the youth who took Blackfoot in school; the others answered with what their grandparents or other elders may have shared with them or perhaps what they have heard in the media. It is

significant that this one individual actually did some research and spoke to elders. This may indicate that doing research on elders' lives is one avenue young people can take to gain specific knowledge pertaining to the history, culture and traditions of their heritage; however, it also appears that learning the language is a powerful incentive in itself.

During one interview (with Youth E), the researcher commented, "I can't imagine that a teacher or priest/nun would tell a young person they are talking to the devil because they speak a different language." My comment was not intentionally made to influence the youth in any manner; it was made because in today's society, if any comment or action such as this were to be made, these actions and words would have detrimental affects on the teacher's career. The interviewee agreed that this type of comment made in the residential schools to Native children was racist and unwarranted.

DO YOU WANT THE OPPORTUNITY TO COMMUNICATE WITH ELDERS?

All respondents answered YES without hesitation. In addition, when asked what sort of activities such communication might involve, they responded as follows:

Youth A – "So they could teach me stuff. They could teach me Blackfoot; well more of it. They could teach me about our history. They could tell me how it was in the old days."

Youth D and G – "So I could learn the history."

Youth E – "Yeah, not only my grandparents, I already know what they went through. I want to see if it's different for other people. When we see an elder we think that they are really mean or scary like if you see them in the mall. I want to get to know them so we won't be so scared; we could talk to them."

Youth B – “To know how we interacted with our surroundings; what our culture was like in daily life.”

Youth F – “Learn about life and stuff.”

Youth C – “Yeah, I guess to hear what they have to say.”

Youth H – “Because they are interesting...learn more of the culture; what they did back then; how it is so different.”

The young people interviewed wanted the opportunity to learn about an array of topics: language, history, differences between then and now, and ‘old ways’. On the other hand, many young people today live fast-paced lives loaded with school and extra-curricular activities (sports, drama, peers, malls), as mentioned in pre-interview conversations. Within the city of Lethbridge, elders today are utilized as mediators with Opokaasin Early Intervention Society, Child Welfare Services and within some school districts. Will a program, if developed specifically to foster communication with elders, language renewal and cultural learning entice the young people to participate? Is there possibly a gap between what kids think they *should* learn or do, and what *actually* draws their attention?

HOW WOULD THIS INTERACTION OR COMMUNICATION ASSIST YOU?

The following items were typical in answers to this question:

Youth B – “A greater understanding of our people’s history and culture.”

Youth C – “There would be someone I could look to for help when I am in trouble or to just talk with, I guess.”

Youth A – “It would make me feel good about who I am. And so that I am aware of it. And when someone says something I will know if it’s not true; I could tell them, if they are native or not.”

Youth E – “I think I would understand more about how it was before.”

Youth F – “I think it would help me know more and if I knew, I could tell other people.”

Youth H – “I could pass it on; I think it would be better if I just knew more of my culture.”

Youth G – “It would help me feel good about myself and it would bring young people and elders closer together.”

Youth D – “It would help me feel good.”

Some of the responses, i.e. “I think” and “I guess”, suggest that a few youth were not sure of what communication with elders would do for them, or perhaps hadn’t thought about the question before. Their answers seemed more to give the interviewer something rather than providing a well thought out answer. However, a number answered that they would increase their self-esteem, their identity and their cultural knowledge if communication with elders occurred on a regular basis. This may suggest they have thought about or had experience with issues relating to identity or self-esteem prior to being interviewed, or that they are in contact with elders who have raised these issues. In particular, the number of respondents who answered, “feeling good” about themselves is noteworthy.

ON WHAT OCCASIONS DO YOUNG PEOPLE AND ELDERS GET TOGETHER?

The following occasions were most commonly given in the youth responses:

Youth B – “Probably at the Sundance and Indian Days; those are the two main ones.”

Youth H- “Lodges, sweats, pow-wows.”

Youth F – “I think pow-wows and Sundance.”

Youth A – “Sweats, night lodges, ceremonies, and pow-wows.”

Youth C – “Pow-wows, distributions.”

Youth D and E – “Pow-wows.”

Youth G – “Ceremonies.”

The above are the obvious ‘places’ in which youth and elders would meet; however, the youth respondents may have thought that the usual family celebrations were not targeted by this question (e.g. birthdays, Christmas, weddings). I did not ask “how often” youth and elders did get together at the above venues, but sweat and night lodges do take place more often than the annual Indian Days Celebrations, band distributions and specific cultural ceremonies. The places most commonly mentioned were pow-wows and sweat lodges. The youth themselves may partake in these specific events but the researcher did not ask specifically if they did. Some other places that could have been mentioned where people of all ages meet are at weekly church services and during school hours. As mentioned, the young people may not have perceived some places as occasions for youth-elder get-togethers.

DO YOU FEEL ELDERS DO OR DON’T UNDERSTAND YOUTH TODAY?
These are some of the answers young people provided to this question:

Youth A – “I don’t think they do—maybe some of them don’t know that much English.”

Youth G – “I don’t know. Generations are different.”

Youth C – “No, I don’t think so, that’s probably not how they were when they were young.”

Youth E – “I don’t think they understand young people; I think they judge them by looking at them.”

Youth B – “They do—but they don’t say it unless you ask...some think they are naïve, but they aren’t.”

Youth D – “Yeah, a bit.”

Youth H – “I think they do.”

Youth F – “I don’t know.”

From the answers given, it appears that young people may see language and generational differences as being factors in not understanding young people. In addition, one youth commented she views elders as being judgmental towards youth today. This claim may be worth exploring in light of some of the judgments made by some elder respondents in their comments about young people.

DO YOU FEEL YOUNG PEOPLE DO OR DON’T UNDERSTAND ELDERS TODAY?

This was the converse to the previous question. Most responded with some version of:

- “I don’t think they do.”
- “Language is the barrier—elders speak Blackfoot.”

The previous questions brought to surface the language barrier that could be an underlying factor in a communication gap between elders and youth. One youth (Youth A) answered, “No, I don’t think so unless they know our language.” This use of the wording, “don’t think so,” indicates that they are speculating. However, the perception of a language barrier could inhibit communication as effectively as a real barrier.

IF YOU COULD ASK AN ELDER TO TEACH, ADVISE, OR DO SOMETHING FOR YOU, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

The following illustrate typical responses to this question:

Youth A – “Teach Blackfoot, tell me some legends and stories. Pray for me.”

Youth D – “Teach me the history.”

Youth G – “Teach me the language.”

Youth B – “Teach how we acted when something was troubling us.”

Youth C – “Ask advice about someone who’s giving me trouble.”

Youth E and F – “I would ask an elder to teach me Blackfoot.”

Youth H – “Share stories of the old days.”

The responses may look like the youth respondents have *romanticized* ideas of what the youth would like elders to teach, advise or share with them. However, they do ask for specific things from the elders. Four asked for instruction in the

language, while three asked specifically for more personal guidance or help. Given the elders' emphasis on prayer, it is also interesting to note the one response here asking for prayer. This was neither an obvious nor an expected response, but it may be a significant one.

WHAT STRATEGIES IN COMMUNICATING TO, TEACHING AND ADVISING CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS HAVE WORKED, OR DO YOU THINK MIGHT WORK, IN ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES STRUGGLING TO RECOVER FROM THE RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL EXPERIENCE?

This question elicited the following responses:

Youth A – “Blackfoot classes (an optional summer class).”

Youth D, F and G – “None.”

Youth B – “Christmas dinners and get-togethers.”

Youth C – “I don't know any.”

Youth E – “Pow-wows.”

Youth H – “Elders come to our school to pray, we had music and had a pow-wow.”

It appears that young people defined *strategies* as events, or get-togethers such as Christmas dinners and pow-wows. The youngest participant responded with, “Yeah, last year, when I went to Cardston (school), we had elders come and pray; we had music; we had a pow-wow.”

Another response from the youngest male participant was “Blackfoot classes in school.” Partaking in such a class would be worthwhile to all young people; however, would they (the youth) view this as a priority, before their peers and

going to the malls? Like anything else, providing such programs would take time for the general population to test. This type of program would need to be monitored, assessed and reviewed to see if it increases interaction among the youth and elders.

The other responses seem to be grasping at straws; perhaps a result of not knowing exactly what was meant by “strategy”. However, these answers do indicate that there is little awareness among young people of any systematic or planned strategy to bring young people and elders together. As yet, this is indeed the case: young people and elders get together at particular events, but many do not interact regularly or institutionally.

In traditional culture, healing and well-being were connected with intergenerational communication as a part of life in community:

“Health involves much more than the physical...in the imagery common to many Aboriginal cultures, good health is a state of balance and harmony involving body, mind, emotions and spirit”
(Gathering Strength, 1996: 152).

The next few questions ask young people how they perceive healing and how they identify specific elements of healing.

HOW DO YOU DEFINE HEALING?

There was an assortment of answers to this question. The following items illustrate the range of responses.

Youth H – “To get better—utilizing a medicine man.”

Youth E – “Recovering.”

Youth B – “Probably though ceremonies and believing in the power of those ceremonies is a big part.”

Youth A – “Going to sweat lodges and night lodges—the medicine man will tell you to pray.”

Youth F – “Traditional healing is different than Western medicine—I don’t know how or what the difference is, though.”

Youth G – “Helping; teaching. Praying is part of it.”

Youth D – “I see praying and sweats as part of it.”

Youth C – “Probably a medicine man, I guess.”

From the responses given, it was clear that some young people were practicing certain traditional ‘healing’ methods, while others knew of them but did not practice. This may be related to a lack of interaction with elders, and perhaps to cultural knowledge not being transmitted. The young male who answered it was a function of elders “to pray” also answered that he would like elders to “pray for him”; likely not a coincidence. A few other respondents indicated that “Praying is part of it”, and “I see praying and sweats as part of it”. (Again, this mention of prayer gains significance in light of the elders’ responses). However, they did not mention what the other “part(s)” are, if any. They do have some notion of how to define healing but exactly how to explain and put words to it is another story. A few thought about their response before answering, and this tells me as a researcher they may not have been asked this specific question before.

When certain respondents answered with “get better” and “recover” as definitions of healing, my interpretation of their responses is they equate healing with an illness, therefore, after an illness of some sort; you usually get better or

recover. They may not know or realize that some of the methods used traditionally for specific ailments, such as boiling mint or sage to drink, were also intended to maintain good health as a means of cleansing your body.

WHAT ASPECTS OF HEALING AND WELL-BEING NEED TO BE IDENTIFIED OR STRENGTHENED?

Answers given were as follows:

Youth A – “It needs to happen more often because if they are really sick all the time and the doctor is just giving them pills; I think they should go to sweats and night lodges.”

Youth D and G – “Ceremonies, sweats and prayer—talk to them.”

Youth C – “I’d like to know more of how they make medicines, I guess. I’d like to know of plants and animals.”

Youth F and H – “I don’t know.”

One male, in particular, practices a Christian faith and strongly believes in that faith. His mother mentioned that he does not practice specific elements of the traditional culture because he grew up practicing a Western faith: “The reason he can’t answer all these is because that’s not our tradition; we are Full Gospel, we don’t practice these and what he does know is just hearsay from friends and from stories from grandfathers” (Blood Tribe female; November 4th, 2003). The oldest respondent (Youth B) answered with, “Yeah, we should (strengthen aspects) and make it understandable to young people so we pay attention to them.” Does his answer indicate a perception that the young people don’t understand certain aspects of the culture? It might appear as such; however, it should be noted that the youth respondents were able to provide fairly specific answers to this

question. It is also worth noting that two respondents specifically mentioned “prayer.”

DO YOU KNOW OF SACRED RITUALS AND THE MEDICINE WHEEL?
The medicine wheel is a new concept to many young people, however sacred rituals are not; the following comments depict the range of responses:

Rituals

Youth F – “I’ve heard of smudging, but I don’t practice or know a lot about it.”

Youth A – “We smudge at home; we go to sweats and night lodges.”

Youth E – “Smudging, praying.”

Youth D and G – “Ceremonial face painting.”

Youth B – “Medicine pipe bundles—opened after the first thunder.”

Medicine wheel

Youth C and H – “Not really.”

Youth D and G – “I don’t know anything of it.”

Youth F – “I don’t know anything of the medicine wheel.”

Youth E – “Is that the circle with four colors and directions? It represents animals.”

Youth A – “I know the colors of the medicine wheel.”

Youth B – “I know it has four colors and directions.”

As illustrated, some of the youth respondents did know of (and sometimes practiced) specific traditional Blackfoot cultural rituals that have been time tested and annually practiced. One portrayed his involvement with specific rituals, “We smudge at home, we go to sweats and night lodges.” On the other hand, the medicine wheel appears not to be common knowledge; of the responses above, three answered that they knew “nothing,” and two answered with “not really.” What does this indicate? The medicine wheel is not part of their popular culture; it is not part of traditional Blackfoot culture; and it is taught today by specific organizations in specific training courses (i.e. correctional institutions and Medicine Wheel Facilitator Training), which are only offered to adults. A couple of the youth responded with, “I know the colors of the medicine wheel; we smudge at home; we go to sweats and night lodges”; and, “The medicine wheel has four directions and colors; that’s about it. The other one I know of is the medicine pipe bundles; which are opened after the first thunder.” These two individuals, both male, do know of and practice some of the traditional Blackfoot rituals, and have some knowledge of the medicine wheel, even if it is limited. On the other hand, “Ceremonial face painting,” was what one female respondent knew of and practiced; however she added, “I don’t know anything of it”, in response to the question about the medicine wheel.

IS THERE A QUESTION THAT I DID NOT ASK THAT I SHOULD BE ASKING? **AND** DO YOU HAVE QUESTIONS YOU WOULD LIKE TO ASK ME?

These final questions provoked a NO response from most participants; however, a few asked questions such as the following:

Youth D – What specifically is your research about?

Youth B – What is the medicine wheel?

Youth E – You did not ask if something was developed and there was a center utilized for interaction with elders, if young people would actually attend or partake?

Youth H – How many young ‘kids’ are you interviewing?

These questions to the researcher were an indication of their curiosity about the questions they were asked, and about their fellow respondents. For instance, the interest in the number of other ‘kids’ being interviewed suggests for one participant, a curiosity about other ‘kids’ answers, rather than about intergenerational communication. However, one respondent did ask about programs or a center for elder-youth interaction. One respondent asked specifically what the medicine wheel was. The medicine wheel is utilized in some correctional institutions as an aid to a ‘holistic’ way of being and healing. It may be something to promote for young people to utilize in their daily lives. It may also assist them to understand the different life-worlds they partake in. However, its use in intergenerational communication may be limited, given the nature of both the youths’ and the elders’ responses to it.

Summary

The term “life-world” is useful for understanding the above answers. The youth answered that elders don’t understand them today; and they don’t understand the elders in turn. This may be an indication of the different life-worlds they participate in. The language barrier stands out, and it may be both a real and an imagined factor in life-world disparity (in other words, it is a real barrier to communication, but young people may assume it to be a barrier even when specific elders are comfortable in English). Their perception of the communication gap is evident, but they most earnestly want to interact with elders and to learn Blackfoot if such a program was developed and made available. Characteristics given for what constitutes an elder were: older,

knowledgeable, wise, and respected. Their idea of elders does not appear much different from the researchers'. From the answers, it is clear that young people's knowledge of their traditions is surprisingly specific on some points, but fragmentary on others, and that communication with elders beyond family is no longer a systematic part of their life. Several of the youth seemed to have a realistic view of their relations to elders, generally speaking. They stated that they knew elders; they also stated that interaction and communication is lacking.

ELDERS' DATA

When one asks an elder for information, the response given is often in the form of a story and one has to read between the lines of the story for an answer. From the interviews I received an incredible amount of information; a great deal of it was in the form of stories.

The elder interviews were thus much lengthier than the youth interviews. However, the interview format followed was much the same as the youth interviews, and the findings are given below in a similar fashion. However, I have taken the opportunity to quote extensively from elders' answers in order to give a sense of how they answered questions and how they contextualized the points they made.

DO YOU SEE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN ELDERS AND YOUNG PEOPLE AS HAVING BEEN HINDERED OR TARNISHED?

The answers given straightforwardly by all of the elders was 'YES', as illustrated by the comments below:

Elder A – "Today, there's no communication. In the old days, I think the kids are told once. You know, the dos and the don'ts—like the kids, the boys and girls, they knew their role."

Elder F – “In my time we don’t fight.”

Elder E – “We know our roles and responsibilities.”

Elder B – “There’s no communication, especially with our elders. There was communication back then.”

Elder D – “There was communication back then. The youth were disciplined back then. Today, maybe a few, but not too many.”

Elder C – “It’s been hindered and tarnished by separation; parents and children were forced to separate by boarding school.”

Elder F – “There’s no communication. When the teepee disappeared, that’s when the young people didn’t listen anymore; they learned love from the teepee.”

Elder E – “No communication; lack of communication.”

Elder G – “No communication.”

The elders gave specific reasons for communication problems. The following quotes will illustrate how they made sense of these problems:

Elder A – “Since the white man, that communication was lost, when the kids were sent to boarding schools, the parents weren’t there to guide their kids. That’s the gap—not having their parents to teach them things about the culture.”

Elder B – “My dad was the law, the judge. There was tough love; they had patience back then. The love from our parents, it was taken away; today the parents have no time for their kids.”

Elder G – “The media influences kids today, they learn ‘bad’ things.”

Elder C – “Because of separation—children were forced to go to boarding school. Our people lost their parenting skills and the young lost their trust in older people. The media (TV) further ruined it.”

Elder F – “There were no bathrooms, TV, couches or coffee tables, nothing like today. We camped; there was a spot for sweetgrass or sweetpine. Today, our people do not know the ways of back then. Culture is not being taught. In my time, everybody respected everything; we don’t waste. There was no drugs or liquor.”

Elder E – “They haven’t learned our way of life from *Napii* (the Blood people), from generation to generation. And I told them, I guess it’s not your culture—the young generation, that nobody told you and I blame myself, that’s the elders having too much work.”

Elder H – “The young people don’t have time.”

Elder D – “We don’t talk to each other; it was strict, that’s how I remember the boarding school. We were separated.”

From the answers above it is clear that the elders do feel there is impaired communication with younger generations of Blood members, especially young people in their teens. As a consequence, they believe that young people do not know their roles. They believe that Western influences have found a way into the lives of the young people, and into the lives of the Blood people and culture. Their answers also indicate that such influences are at work in their own thoughts and perceptions. For example, the majority of elders speak of *discipline*, *knowing your role*, and *the law*; ideas that sound like the old-fashioned Roman Catholicism as taught in the residential schools of, say, 50 years ago. However, they also give

recollections (from parents, grandparents and their own experience) of how it was prior to residential schools (and even while these schools were introduced, some members continued to practice traditional rituals). Communication or contact with elders, grandparents and parents was still part of their daily routine. The elders' emphasis on "respect" and "role" also reflects traditional Blackfoot culture as much as it does an older version of Roman Catholicism or Anglicanism. In the case of this emphasis, they may be adapting Catholic and traditional ideas to each other. The elders also give various explanations of modern-day influences on youth—technology (TV, computers, games), media (advertisements), alcohol, drugs, and a fast-paced lifestyle (extra-curricular activities, malls, peers). It is clear from their answers that they are strongly aware of a gap in both lifestyle and communication.

WHAT OPPORTUNITIES FOR COMMUNICATION EXIST TODAY BETWEEN ELDERS AND YOUNG PEOPLE AND WHAT KIND OF OPPORTUNITIES WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE DEVELOPED?

Opportunities for communication – specific style or specific program:

Among the answers given by elders were the following comments.

Elder E – "There is a communication (meetings), but only a few are allowed/asked to these meetings; most are not allowed; it is all political these days. There are two types of communication: left and right. The 'left' communication hoards everything (and money); the 'right' communication receives very little, if anything at all."

Elder C – "A *Parenting Program* and *Early Intervention Program for Young Girls*."

Elder B – "They have programs about the youth; marriage, you name it."

Elder A – "*Cultural program; HIV awareness*."

Elder D – “No, I don’t remember anything back then or of a building to be used for this sort of thing.”

Suggested ways to communicate and/or program development:

Elder E – “The elders pray before they start anything; then they’ll feed them, they didn’t need much money; they had soup and bannock, that’s all (maybe I’m hungry). The boys, the girls, the middle-agers; someone may be becoming an elder; then they start communicating; there will be lots of questions. The elders, they are going to speak, they are going to communicate to these people, then after, the elders finish communicating in that area, in that time, the elders would ask the people, “Is there any questions here, bring out your questions.” There are some younger generations; they keep it here (pointing to chest). They get hurt, too long, if they can’t spit it out, if you can’t tell anybody, you just get hurt, that truth starts working it comes to your mind, who could I talk to, that’s their purpose to that, to tell the elders, well this is my problem and the elders will have an answer, you will feel good. I didn’t know how to go about this. So that’s my view on that.”

Elder A – “Discipline the kids, as you grow up, they’ll (parents/grandparents) start telling you all the things you’re not supposed to do.”

Elder C – “You could develop parenting programs with an elder, i.e., Adopt a grandparent.”

Elder G – “Utilize elders in a respectful, traditional way; use positive role models.”

Elder B – “Recruit positive role models who know the traditional cultural ways; not just anybody to run programs.”

Elder F – “Get elders together and ask them specific questions—see how many ways they answer, i.e. one will say a word, another will answer and in the context it should or could be used; no English words will be used for this. My personal advice—start teaching Blackfoot at 4 years old, start with simple everyday words and build from there. Develop a whole series of the Blackfoot language where they can use these at home even before they go to school (preschool). About 90% listened back then (youth); today about 10% listen.”

Elder E – “I have a video camera—we can video tape these sessions and use them in classrooms or as resource for community—especially for ‘old’ Blackfoot words or numbers.”

Elder D – “What I would like to see is to have a building for meetings and activities; to share stories; to hold pow-wows and other gatherings. It should be free for all members to use. Today, we are the biggest reserve in Canada. How is our dance arbor looking to the visitors? I am ashamed of this. It should look like Siksika’s new building for pow-wows and community gatherings.”

Elder F and H – “When you go to school—pray so that you will learn, pray after school that you hold onto what you learned.”

Elder G – “Develop something like APTN (Aboriginal Peoples Television Network) where an elder is sitting down and sharing stories and the people will be watching—people today like to watch TV, especially young people.”

As some elders noted, the need for formal “opportunities” for intergenerational communication is new: they recalled that in the past such communication took the form of daily ways of teaching the young.

Not surprisingly though, there were many programs suggested that could be developed and implemented within the home, school and community (no distinction was made whether they felt these proposed programs or opportunities would be for on- or off-reserve). The elders have ideas that they are eager to share, and it is worth noting that a number of them were positive about using new media to share those ideas, and about recording traditional knowledge, echoing what Mokakin said a generation earlier.

In answering the first part of the question, the elders mentioned several programs for communicating and interacting with the youth; however, one elder mentioned that it is *all political today*. This elder may see a problem with how the reserve's funds are spent and who benefits. From my personal knowledge of this particular elder, I know that he has been active politically for a number of years, both as a Band Councilor and as a concerned individual (when not in office). Few go into detail about what political circumstances are *really* like on the reserve: who is hired and fired (and criteria for both), who receives the 'extras', and who doesn't. This elder's response to many of the questions was quite in-depth. Others mentioned existing programs on the reserve. These receive annual funding from certain agencies to provide awareness of different issues, e.g. parenting and health. There are elders which most, if not all, of the agencies on the reserve utilize as board members or as elder advisers.

In answering the latter half of the question, many suggest ways in which utilization of story telling would be beneficial to the youth to assist with teaching specific cultural knowledge. It is difficult to picture teenagers sitting and listening to elders. This is one issue that needs to be addressed in the development of programs. One elder appeared to note this issue by calling for televised information because "people today like to watch TV". The question that needs to be asked, though, is whether something is lost when elders are present only as TV images. On the other hand, video technology may allow the transmission of

information that might otherwise be lost. And perhaps televised images are better than nothing, and may feed a hunger for personal contact.

DO YOU KNOW OF ANY MODELS THAT EXIST FOR THIS COMMUNICATION TO OCCUR?

It may appear this question repeats the previous one; however the former question asked about ‘opportunities’, while the latter was intended to uncover ‘models’. As noted, however, some elders gave specific models in answer to the previous question.

Elder C – “The only model that I know of that works is talking constantly with your child. Grandparents should be utilized more in childrearing as it was done in the old days.”

Elder D – “No, there is nothing today.”

Elder E – “The young generation, they don’t have time for things like that; for teachings by elders—they have education (formal); which I am all for that. The kids need to take time to ‘observe’ and visit with parents/grandparents to be shown ways in which they can learn and help themselves—how to sew, how to dry meat, how to clean, how to care for home, etc.”

Elder F – “Part of the problem is today’s media, gambling—the TV corrupts your mind. We didn’t have these before, we knew our roles as young people, and the elders and grandparents/parents taught us. We knew to respect and to pray.”

The above responses are explicit about both “what works” (in one case) and about why things “aren’t working” for intergenerational communication today. One of the suggestions was to utilize grandparents more in childrearing because that is how it was in the old days. This is an excellent idea; unfortunately, many

families do not reside close to each other; as it was prior to boarding schools. One issue today is inadequate housing on First Nations reserves; this leads to many living in surrounding communities. Further to this, the number of adults attending academic institutions and who are in the work force is slowly but steadily increasing. Also, the number of First Nations people who choose to live off-reserve is on the rise. This implies that many are separated from grandparents and elders who do live on the reserve.

WHAT IS AN ELDER? WHO IS AN ELDER?

The majority of answers to these two questions were consistent. The following paraphrases illustrate characteristic elements of the elders' responses:

Criteria for being an elder:

Elders B & E - You went through life.

Elder C - Learned about life; pass on good advice.

Elder A - Relate things from the past.

Elder D - Have lived a long time.

Elder E - They will tell you the dos and don'ts—protocol of culture.

Elder E - They share stories (learn lessons); are concerned.

Elders C & E - Guide you; are there for help.

Elder A - They pray.

Elder F - They teach specific cultural knowledge.

Elders E & G - They are role models.

Elder H - They have knowledge.

Elder D - They have experience to share.

Elder B - They are humble; some are humble with knowledge.

Elder A - They sacrifice.

Elder B - Everyone is an elder—no matter what kind of person they are.

The following extended quotes give a sense of how elders answered this question:

Elder E – “The elder to me, before you are an elder, you went through life. You can say anything about being 12 years old; you have to like to be 12 years old. You can make up your mind to all these, but some, you get stuck, you go to your parents, you tell them they teach you how to, before you went through any major commitments, you came to ask us what you are going to do. We will tell you, we used to talk to grandparents and we know it was the LAW. We could ask first before we do anything. So before you go anywhere, they will tell you do this and don’t do that; the elders are always telling us to be careful; they guide you, they tell you everything that is good; they tell you what is dangerous—that is what elders do.”

Elder F – “They are old, elders are around 80 and over, for example, the old ladies, my sister Rosic. Back in the old days, people lived over 100. I won’t consider myself an elder, but others may consider me to be. When I was young I was an elder (Horn Society member), today, I don’t consider myself to be. In my time, we don’t fight; we know our roles and responsibilities.”

Elder C – “An elder is someone who has learned about life and can pass on good advice. Then there are spiritual elders who have transfers and can do specific blessings. The role of an elder traditionally was someone you went to for guidance, blessings, support and someone to model your life after. In the past an elder knew exactly where their place was. Today, some of our elders are just as lost as our young people again because of boarding school.”

As can be observed, there are many ‘criteria’ the elders felt were important in defining an elder and who can be considered an elder. Several of the main responses referred to going through life, living a long life and gaining life experiences. This implies that these specific elders believe that life experiences do provide elders with specific knowledge of life skills, and not just general cultural knowledge. This is similar to some of the young people’s responses as well. Another common set of responses referred to spiritual matters, prayer, blessings, and sacrifice. An inference can be made that spirituality is seen as an important characteristic of an elder. The elders also felt that guidance, support, and concern for the young were part of what constitutes an elder. This may also be characteristic of non-aboriginal elders. However, one specific characteristic emphasized by two elders was cultural knowledge. Even some of these elders who referred more generally to the importance of life experience and spirituality talked about these in the context of cultural knowledge. Also important to elders was the giving of respect to those who have the role of elder. From the data gathered, young and old appear to believe that the requirement of cultural knowledge is important to being *labeled* as an elder.

WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE ROLE OF AN ELDER BEFORE AND TODAY?

The following items illustrate answers given by the elders:

Before...

Elder E – “The early days, the elders were very *humble*; they are not going to mentioned what they believe, that’s religion; that’s what we have between the Creator and us. The elders, they know all about this. When you come, the elder will talk very slow, that was number one. They did not interfere with politics. They spoke from the heart, mind and soul.”

Elder C – “You went to them for guidance, blessings and support.”

Elder D – “When the boarding schools first opened here and our people started attending them, they learned some discipline because it was really strict at these schools. Today, I can honestly say that I don’t know how much the boys suffered at these schools, but for the girls, I could tell you of how some, including myself, suffered in boarding school. Even when we were sick, I caught TB in school along with others; we didn’t get the care we needed. We had a nurse, she never did her job—we would lie in bed all day without one single visit from her. Today, I can remember how I lost some of my friends from being sick in the boarding schools. Even today, the government of Canada and the churches still don’t want to pay anything for our suffering. They should take responsibility for their doings to us. Most of the elders that really suffered in these schools that made a claim have left us, yet it’s still not being dealt with. Maybe the government is waiting for us too die off.”

Elder C – “They knew exactly where their place was within the culture.”

Elder F – “They knew protocol.”

Elder B – “Everyone respected elders and what they said.”

Elder A – “They were included and needed in all aspects of the culture.”

Elder G – “They taught by way of example.”

Today...

Elder E – “Number two, what the difference is today, the elders go into separation; they talk about this, the way I believe and this is the way—we need money before I pray for you. Some need money before they start to pray. Politics interferes with some elders.”

Elder A – “Religion is combined with money (for some).”

Elder C – “Some are just as lost as our young people (because of boarding school).”

Elder B – “Alcohol and drugs are used in today’s society—interferes with some elders.”

Elder G – “There is corruption with some.”

Elder D – “Young people don’t always listen to elders or have respect. Visible only minimally in today’s society.”

Elder A – “Someone who does not drink.”

Elder H – “Encourage young people to pray.”

As demonstrated above, the elders thought that there were clear guidelines for elder roles’ in the past and these guidelines were reinforced by respect. Elders taught by example or gave “guidance” rather than becoming involved in politics. Some view these roles as being continuous with elders’ roles today; however, several view the roles of today’s elders as having been corrupted by money and

politics—which some feel leads to corruption within the culture and for the people.

Traditionally, elders were said to be humble and gentle, and this was part of their teaching by way of example, which reinforced their leadership. For some, however, elders were strict and disciplinary. What jumps out of the elders' responses about the roles of elders today is that they give only a handful of positive characteristics: someone who does not drink and who encourages young people to pray. What does this imply for how the Blood people perceive elders and their roles within the community? The different influences on the Blood culture, such as alcohol, drugs, boarding schools, even formal education, have changed people's perceptions, as well as their actions and forms of governance and authority, and how they structure their political, cultural and spiritual ways. One question not often asked is how do people today know what traditional belief systems are, and whether they are utilizing these systems properly in their lives today? How do these specific elders know for sure that what they are providing for answers pertaining to the Blood culture is traditional, in the sense of having been true and practiced generation after generation; and how can the young people know that what they do know today is part of that traditional cultural knowledge? As a researcher, I raise these questions, as this is what formal education has taught me; however, as a member of the Blood Tribe, it feels as if I am breaking a law within the Blood culture because I am bringing to light such questions. This dilemma and being a part of two life-worlds has been a challenge. I must remember though, the words of my grandfather, Mokakin, and what he stated about recording specific cultural knowledge; in that it is both positive and needed. Inspired by words, I will move forward and create an uncomfortable *change*, however uneasy I may feel. Asking such questions is not a taboo action to take, but they do test boundaries having to do with respect for elders in the Blood culture. Asking questions about what constitutes valid tradition or cultural

continuity may be difficult, but discussion of these issues may help members of the Tribe begin to regain both self- and cultural-identity; and a sense of belonging. One elder who was not part of this research, shared his perception of the role of traditional “societies” (e.g. Horn Society). He stated that the continuity of the culture over the generations has been maintained because of these societies. He noted that it is the elders’ faith that as long as the land is there and the people are on the land, the old knowledge will be there.

WHAT WAS THE ROLE OF YOUNG PEOPLE BEFORE?

As mentioned above, elders tended to share stories rather than respond directly and concisely to the researcher, which sometimes led to the researcher *digging* for the pertinent data to answer the question(s) during the analysis phase.

Nonetheless, the following quotes appeared to indicate what the elders thought were appropriate roles for young people in relation to elders.

Elder E – “In the early days, elders are very important; they are the foundation. You know foundation is solid; you cannot move it—you cannot break it; it stays solid. Them days, all teenagers work; they didn’t touch alcohol; they looked for food.”

Elder F – “The kids were disciplined. Elders will tell the young all the things you’re not supposed to do. When I was young, I was an elder (Horn Society member at 9-years-old). We respected everything—nature, people, people’s belongings; they didn’t waste. When we were young, we were told to respect everything, especially the elders and the older people; I have a lot of respect for them. And young people, I can relate to them. The things that we were told, whatever you are involved with, do it right, especially when it involves people (if you don’t you will be shy of them), so do things right. When I was young, even in the mornings, I’ll be enjoying my mornings, when someone calls me to go take care of the horses. I don’t just sit and lay there. John

Many Chiefs, he's got a mean voice, he'll call me and say, "Get up and go for your horses for your dad". I always thank John for getting me up and doing things right, maybe I wouldn't be the way I am."

Elder H – "There were no TV, bathrooms, couches, etc, no outside influence."

Elder C – "They were to learn about life; to support the elders; and bring pride to tribe. Some young people think the world of elders and treat them accordingly; I hear one young man say elders are magic. On the other hand, some young people think they know better than the elder's and in a lot of cases they have no faith in our elders."

Elder D – "They learned about culture; parents/grandparents taught them; young men's role was to hunt for the tribe; young women's role was to find food, take the teepee down, pack and go; they look for firewood. They (young women) would tan hides and bead."

Elder A – "When I was young we just stayed home; our parents taught us; the young people did not use alcohol or would scarcely use tobacco."

From the information provided, it appears there was little use of alcohol before the change to the **Indian Act** (1867)⁴⁴ in 1951 that stated, "Consumption of liquor in public places permitted." While we do not know to what extent young people consumed alcohol before 1951, we do know that alcohol consumption on the reserve was banned until 1951, which made it difficult to purchase and take on to the reserve. This may be why some elders state that there was little to no use of alcohol when they were younger.

⁴⁴ This information was taken from www.shannonthunderbird.com/indian_act.htm

The young people did not use tobacco recreationally, they had specific roles and they were taught to respect—everything and everyone, but especially elders. All elders stressed respect, learning our role correctly, and many emphasized discipline and hard work. Some of the emphasis on discipline and hard work may have come from the kind of training favored by Catholic and Anglican boarding schools. If so, this shows how complicated the legacy of these schools has been. They robbed generations of Blood people of their culture and family organization, but they also instilled certain attitudes and values, which have persisted.

HOW DO YOU THINK THE ROLE OF ELDERS HAS BEEN AFFECTED BY THE FACT THAT MANY OF TODAY'S ELDERS WENT TO RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL AS CHILDREN?

School experiences (outside of residential school) for the majority of young people today are pleasurable and sociable—hang out with peers and eat lunch at nearby fast-food outlets; outside of the learning and information processing purpose of school. However, especially if they went to residential schools, many older people today recollect their experiences as negative. One male elder answered,

“The stories I told you, that was paradise; the time with my dad, my mom and grandparents—nothing to worry about. I always had a saddle and pony; happy as a canary, but then, I went to school.” (Elder E)

The following excerpts indicate what the elders had to say about the effects of residential schools. These excerpts are divided into four categories: experiences of residential schools, individual effects on person interviewed, effects on others, and their opinions of recent changes within the culture.

Experiences of residential schools...

Elder E – “I was forced to go to school.”

Elder F – “They would grab me by my ear and twist.”

Elder B – “The nuns didn’t know how to love—they had no kids to love.”

Elder E – “Maybe they will pinch me. We had to steal food because we were hungry; you get mentally sick because we were hungry. We cry. We pity ourselves. Maybe they will hit me with a bunch of keys—then I’ll see stars.”

Elder D – “When I went to school, I was lonely—residential school separated us from our parents.”

Elder G – “The way you pray, they say, that is Satan’s way; you are worshipping the devil; they (nuns, priests) told us our culture was a devil’s way of life.”

Elder C – “We weren’t raised around our traditional elders; their spirits have been disturbed (elders who went to residential school).”

Elder A – “Your mind does not function because you got hurt (mental, physical, sexual, spiritual).”

Elder E – “In residential school, there are bullies; they thrived.”

Elder D – “Kids were dragged to residential school.”

Elder A – “We lost that love from our parents.”

Elder F – “I learned a lot from residential schools. We learned to work—when you’re young you work inside, when you are older, you work outside.

You get up at 6:00 am, make your bed, and put your clothes on. Some kids later on run away from school. They tie sheets together and go out the window. Later on the supervisor would make us leave our shoes downstairs so we don't run away. We put our shoes back on before we go to bed (some kids run away without shoes). Then we got work to do: sweep the bedrooms or stairways or the bathroom. We have a work list and it changes every two weeks. I worked for Mrs. Milton for two years; I would milk the cows and sweep sidewalks. This is what we learned; the girls worked in the kitchen; they cleaned and cooked. They teach us to respect. If we don't respect; we'll get a strapping or a slap. I didn't listen one time, and the (teacher) strapped me with my own belt. Today, you can't touch the students."

Experiences after residential school (effects)...

Elder E – "You get mentally sick; we're hungry, we cry, we pity ourselves—that time I went to school. Back home, my dad told me when I was 16, you come home, you are brainwashed. The things you are taught in school, when you come home you just sat there and you would think about the times you got slapped, that time you get hit with the keys. You would start thinking of those times. I would see the older boys rape some of the young boys, and then you start thinking, yes, that time. So your mom and dad will tell you "let's eat, just eat nice bannock and nice homemade food." They are not going to listen, you close your mind and you know those were not from the reserve, its not from your area, not from your house; it comes from the boarding school, ran by the government—they hired those people. You just think about those times. Today, that's what is functioning, some of the people, they got right down hurt. They still feel in their mind, heart and soul, especially those boys that got raped. So that's your mind not functioning; you get sick thinking this way."

Elder G – “I was bitter and ornery—I hate that residential school. I couldn’t hug my kids—it was dirty; some find it hard to show love.”

Elder H – “That’s where the dirty mind and how to treat people badly came from—boarding school.”

Descriptions of after residential school—effects in others...

Elder G – “Today, some elders are really stubborn; that’s how boarding school brainwashed them; how the elders today were brainwashed from boarding school—we walk out of the boarding school with that mentality.”

Elder E – “Some are angry, scared and live in fear.”

Elder F – “Today, many elders gamble.”

Elder D – “Some elders are leaving us—they suffered a lot in boarding school.”

Recent changes within the Blood culture...

Elder A – “We’re starting to get our ways back.”

Elder D – “We’re starting to respect again.”

Elder G – “We are getting our self-respect back.”

Elder E – “It’s starting to change. These people that are telling their children and the young, they have to listen to the elders. The young generation today is hungry in their mind, soul and heart. They are starting to ask the elders of how it used to be. They are starting to get back to feeding the elders, which is

good; just like you are doing today. You are searching and researching your culture through this interview and how we used to believe in our way of life.”

What elders said about effects of boarding schools was disturbing. They showed extreme emotion relating to the experiences they recollected. For example, some used the present tense “we cry”, “hit me”, and “we pity” when they answered this question. This provides the researcher and readers a sense of how some elders still feel anger, frustration and hurt when discussing their experiences of residential school. The attitude of the day among government officials was to assimilate all First Nations people: they used the Indian Act to achieve this (Milloy, 1999). An example of this attitude is the statement by the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs (1920), Duncan Campbell Scott, who commented:

“Our object is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic, and there is no Indian question, and no Indian department.”⁴⁵

This history is unfortunate, and as a member of the culture, it was a challenge for me to keep an objective perspective during this part of the interviews. During the transcription and analysis stage, listening to the tapes and reading over the interviews, I was able to express my emotions, and yes, to cry at what these elders shared.

Some elders commented on how they were ‘forced’ to go to school and how the separation from parents and culture affected them immediately, and still today. Others described the loneliness they felt, while one adds that they feel ‘hatred’ towards the government/church run schools. One described how their behavior/attitude was after leaving boarding schools—ornery and bitter.

⁴⁵ Information from: www.bloorstreet.com

Another described how they could not hug or kiss their children; they still had the mentality that it was not allowed or 'dirty'. These may be possible barriers to communication with young people today, of which we need to be aware. When awareness is developed, the healing journey for many can start, which may forecast positive influences on young people. Then the hugs can occur without the 'dirty' mentality that is still felt among some people today. What some elders viewed as positive 'touch' between parent and child when they were at home; turned 'dirty' because of the sexual abuse that took place in residential schools. This is illustrated in the documentary film, "Where The Spirit Lives," which was filmed on and around the Blood Reserve. It depicts how children were treated, abused and taught at the St. Paul residential school (see also Milloy, 1999; Chrisjohn & Young, 1997). Responses to these abuses are finally being established. *The Healing Fund* was originally established by the General Council of the United Church of Canada in 1994 as a five-year fund-raising and educational campaign (1995-1999) to address the impacts of residential schools on Aboriginal people. It now continues as one facet of the United Church's ongoing reconciliation work with Aboriginal people (see www.united-church.ca/healing).

A few of the common responses by elders concerning residential school included statements about being "forced to go to school", about "separation from parents", and the "loneliness felt" at these schools. This may be why some feel there are barriers to communication; they may not have dealt with these experiences and emotions. As one elder mentioned, some elders today "are just as lost as our young people."

One of the most often described themes concerned abuse and bullying. Government officials and church-run schools sought to wipe out Native culture, in part by allowing such abuse and bullying to occur. Some commented that this is still happening today on reserves. However, some also replied that a sense of respect is trickling back into the culture. One of the elders appeared to have

come away from the residential school with what he described as positive experiences: the learning of respect, discipline and hard work, which became, for him, a basis for self-esteem. One elder emphasized that it is good to go to ask elders for help in researching our culture and the traditional ways.

WHAT MAKES IT DIFFICULT FOR YOU TO FULFILL THE ROLE OF ELDER?

What are illustrated below are some characteristic elder viewpoints on the above question:

Elder F – “There are many things I don’t agree with; Creator didn’t want us to live in space. He made us to be on the earth. But today, the white people are going too fast with our life, that’s why today it’s this way. Back in my time, time was slow. So you can do a lot in one day; today, you hardly accomplish much. In the 30s and 40s, we used to haul 2 loads of hay/straw. Early in the morning, we would take the first load around 9:00 am, and then we go right back and load up again. By the time we get back we take it to town, we still have time to shop (in Magrath). Today, you can’t do that; time is too fast. I thought because I was getting old, that it was like that, but one guy said, “No, it’s the time today.” If you were in my time, you would know the difference. Like I say, everybody had respect. Today, no respect; too much jealousy. Back in my time, when somebody tells you, “don’t do this or that,” they’ll respect you. Today, they will say, “What business do you have?”

Elder G – “Alcohol and drugs ruin people’s lives today; people don’t pray.”

Elder C – “I do not have trouble communicating to young people; I’m not judgmental and I can come down and speak at their level.”

Elder C – “We are divided because of boarding school; some have boarding school attitude.”

Elder E – “Many elders were brainwashed; they are confused and caught between traditional cultural spirituality and the Roman Catholic/Anglican faith; we felt we served a long prison term while attending (boarding school).”

Elder B – “Today, at this age, it’s the kids, they don’t listen. Some don’t have grandparents, they are not taught the ways. Like they say they have youth programs but they don’t bring in the elders.”

Elder C – “There is also the other side where a lot of young people abuse their elders; taking money away from them and dumping grandchildren on them. Traditionally, this would not have happened. Children always had the security of being close to mom or grandma; a child was always watched physically, mentally, spiritually and emotionally. Further, young people are very observant and they see today’s elders behaving in ways they preach against and the result is no respect. When young men hear their elders bragging how many wives they’ve had, what can we say to our young people after that?”

Elder A – “The school district (#51) promised they were going to use us, they never did. We got funding for them because we are elders. That was last year up to June; they didn’t call us. They just used our experience and knowledge. An elder doesn’t have to be educated, it is the experience and knowledge they have; what happened to them in life, how things changed. They have that as counseling skills. I cannot understand how you can counsel somebody without experiencing that.”

Elder C – “We were scared in boarding school; we are not supposed to scare young children in our culture—we want them to be brave. Boarding school taught us to be scared.”

Elder G – “Most people today were brainwashed in the boarding school; today they can’t think for themselves. What is right and good? The churches were involved in this brainwash; they ruined our lives—genocide—I was told by this elder before that he was brought to the boarding school and the first thing they took from him was his incense, sweetgrass and prayers. He was told the only thing that he will believe in is the cross. Before in the past, an elder would be asked to pray for children so that they will live a long happy life. So the elder will ask his wife to make him a beaded bracelet so he will see and remember that this elder prayed for him to live a good, long happy life. Those were one of the first things that the priests and nuns took away from him and then threw them away; in exchange they gave him rosaries, and these are what you pray with, they told him.”

The above quotes name a number of factors that hinder elders from fulfilling what they see as their roles today. Alcohol, drugs, technology, attitudes, and abuse (towards elders) are all mentioned. However, the attitudes of judgmentalism, anger, authoritarianism, and jealousy are also mentioned in the majority of the answers. The elders clearly relate these attitudes to what some called a ‘boarding school mentality’. One mentioned how young children were scared while attending boarding schools and this is not part of the culture: young people should be taught to be brave. Today, fear, confusion, division and judgmentalism are seen as consequences of the residential school experience.

WHAT MAKES IT DIFFICULT AND/OR EASY FOR YOU TO COMMUNICATE WITH YOUNG PEOPLE?

The elders’ responses to the above question were as follows:

Difficult

Elder H – “Some young people do not have the respect like they did back then.”

Elder G – “Some young people do not know our ways.”

Elder E – “Lack of resources to reach young people (meeting place—hall, center).”

Elder A – “To me, these kids that are not brought up, those parents that never talk to them, those are the ones that are difficult. They make ‘fun’ of people that try to correct them. No matter what your parents are like, you still have to respect them. I think a lot of them have lost respect for their parents and elders. They are too much into themselves. They don’t like authority.”

Elder E – “Some have no discipline—they get away with a lot.”

Elder B – “Some have no respect for elders.”

Elder D – “Yes, I find it difficult—I cannot speak English very well and young people do not know Blackfoot very well; some have lost the language.”

Easy

Elder C – “Some young people view elders as sacred, mystical and holy.”

Elder F – “I have no trouble communicating with young people. I get along with young people—they always shake my hand.”

Elder D – “I speak to them in a gentle manner about prayers, to speak the truth and to not steal.”

Elder H – “They listen when you use a gentle, loving voice.”

The above comments indicate that elders believe that it is now more difficult to communicate with young people because of loss of language, lack of opportunity, and a perception that young people lack interest and respect. A significant number of elders mentioned attitudinal problems—a perceived lack of respect by young people. This is worth comparing to young peoples’ comments that elders sometimes seemed intimidating. It is worth asking if there are problems of “first impressions” on both sides of the communication gap. A specific ‘meeting place’ where stories, life-experiences and cultural ways can be taught to young people on a consistent basis was mentioned, and is a great idea—at least it would be a start in overcoming the distance that breeds false impressions. In addition, some elders recommended ways of teaching, e.g. by speaking to young people in a gentle, loving manner. This particular suggestion contrasts with other elders’ references to “discipline” and “authority” and may indicate clashing perspectives on the part of different elders.

WHAT ARE THE OCCASIONS ON WHICH YOUNG PEOPLE AND ELDERS TEND TO GET TOGETHER TODAY?

The following paraphrases illustrate the typical answers:

- They don’t meet anymore (Elder E)
- Maybe just at funerals (Elders C & E)
- Pow-wows (Elders C & D)
- Church (Elder C)

- Family dinners (Elder C)
- Picnics (Elder A)
- Holiday vacations (Elder A)
- Christmas (Elder D)
- Birthdays (Elders D & G)
- Rodcos/horse races (Elder E)

The elders did give a spectrum of times and places where they meet young people; however, these were not necessarily specific to teaching cultural knowledge. The categories in order of frequency are 1) family events, 2) rodeos, horse races and pow-wows, and 3) church. What were not mentioned were specific cultural gatherings i.e. Sundance, sacred bundle-openings, and sweatlodes; or school functions or gatherings, i.e. Blackfoot classes or specific rituals that would utilize elders to pray before the function got started. It is worth noting that the elders, like the youth, tended to emphasize family events as the main occasions for meeting today.

DO YOU THINK ELDERS DO OR DON'T UNDERSTAND YOUNG PEOPLE TODAY?

It is a challenge in our society today to figure out what young people want, like, dislike, and dream. It is especially challenging for elders today to understand young people because of rapid changes in language use, culture, education, technology and residence along with the development of peer groups and peer-oriented media culture. Nonetheless, as illustrated below, at least some elders claim to understand or get along with young people:

Elder F – “I get along with young people.”

Elder E – “Yes, we understand young people. We help them through our prayers—to protect them and they succeed in their education.”

Elder C – “They don’t fully understand the youth of today; one reason is that life is so fast. While the elders are trying to get used to one idea, the youth are on to the next idea. One other reason is that some of our elders just know that a lot of our old traditions just work; they’ve worked for countless years so they don’t even question the reason they want things done that way. Our young people feel the ideas and ways are too out-dated. Some view old people as old fashioned. An example is wrapping babies; bundling them. White doctors have now said wrapping babies are very beneficial to newborns because the wrappings give a sense of security to the child. Hardly any of our young people practice this anymore. Alcohol has really messed up and further damaged what was done in boarding school; creating a very different society than the elders are used to.”

Elder D – “Elders don’t understand the youth because they don’t speak Blackfoot (language barrier).”

Elder B – “There is a communication gap; we don’t speak proper English and they don’t speak Blackfoot—therefore we cannot fully understand them.”

Elder H – “Yes, I understand—many do not have respect for other people.”

Elder A – “They don’t listen.”

As revealed above, there is an array of different answers signifying a difference of opinions and experiences that each elder possesses. Several felt that the language

issue (the youth not speaking Blackfoot and elders not speaking proper English) is a barrier in understanding young people. Some gave answers that imply they get along with young people. This may be attributed to several reasons, one being that they do go out of their way to speak with and be involved with functions that involve young people, and another that this may be their genuine interest, to be kind and friendly to young people. Other elders answered this question not by addressing their own understanding (or lack of understanding), but by blaming young people for perceived “lack of respect” or an inability to “listen”. Such comments were repeated a number of times in answer to different questions.

DO YOU THINK YOUNG PEOPLE UNDERSTAND ELDERS TODAY?

The following quotes illustrate elders’ perceptions of young peoples’ attitudes toward them:

Elder A – “I think there is very few that understand and respect the elders; because of alcohol and drugs (that are used by both young and old), the youth today have lost most of their respect.”

Elder B – “They speak English; they do not know our language—they can’t understand the elders.”

Elder C – “I feel some young people have a pretty good understanding of elders; especially if they are raised around them.”

Elder D – “They may not understand, but they respect the elders.”

Elder E – “Life is changed and it’s really hard to go back to our life back in those days; there’s no way. You’re trying to talk to the kids and they think you are telling a lie; they think you have no experience.”

Elder F – “Back in the old days, your uncle and aunt will tell you, “This is how life goes, you have to follow what you’re told, don’t ever talk back to the people”. So today, you tell a young person, they will tell you, “You have no business; why should I listen?”

Elder G – “They have no more respect; they don’t listen—that’s how it is today, it’s pitiful.”

The above responses reflect what was stressed in the last question; however, disagreement among the elders appears sharper here—some feel the youth understand and respect them, others don’t. Many Blood youth today are raised in a home where only their mother and father (at best) are present; there are no teepees and not as much immediate contact with extended family. Aunts, uncles and grandparents live elsewhere, with the majority residing on the reserve. The importance of extended family is still emphasized today; however, the imposition of “mainstream society” housing patterns makes it harder for extended family members to be part of each other’s daily lives. The elders see this contact with extended family as positive and needed. How can young people be influenced and taught the ‘old ways’ if their contact is minimal and the communication (as evidenced by both the youth and elder responses) is limited? It makes it challenging for anyone to understand the other age group.

A few questions can be proposed in relation to the “lack of respect” answers. Firstly, do the elders sense a diminished sense of ‘authority’ in relation to being teachers for the young people; and secondly, do the elders sense less opportunity for contact that is meaningful and ongoing? Is there also a sense that today, money, peers and popular culture have more authority and influence over the young people than the elders themselves? It appears from the answers above that this is true. However, an article in the *Globe and Mail* (Saturday, July 10: A8), indicates that programs can be successfully developed to counter these trends:

“A new report finds that among Canada’s 227 000 aboriginal children who are under the age of 14 and live away from reserves, most are healthy, and many are involved in education programs and participate in extracurricular activities. At Toronto Council Fire, a downtown aboriginal cultural center, family programs focus on teaching urban children and their parents about nutrition, including traditional forms of healthy eating. The Aboriginal Head Start program also gives non-reserve youngsters a chance to learn about their culture in a community of other aboriginal children.” (Conway-Smith, 2004: A8).

The implication of this article is that programs which allow young people to be exposed to cultural traditions, language and elders give youth a higher success rate in activities key to living healthy, happy lives today: education, sports, and culture. Finally, it is important to note that elders’ comments about a lack of respect on the part of young people echo what older people in the mainstream culture often claim. However, “respect” in First Nations culture has very specific meanings and nuances relating to the roles of the different generations and the protocols around asking for advice, prayer or other kinds of help.

IF THERE WERE ONE THING YOU COULD TELL A YOUNG PERSON TODAY, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

Elder G – “People don’t pray—I would tell them to pray.”

Elder A – “Spiritually—learn prayer.”

Elder E – “The elder is very important; we will know the young generation by looking at them. Spiritually, we can tell if that young person is not doing well, if they are forgetting about something. If they are forgetting about the

Creator; if they are forgetting where they are from, their culture (Niitsitapi). We will know if they are; they may act too smart or not really believe in Niitsitapi way. We will say, “my child, come over here, sit down, let’s talk this out.”

Elder C – “Learn true kindness—live it in your communities.”

Elder B – “Pray—their spiritual part always comes first.”

Elder D – “I’d like to see the younger ones to learn our language so you can communicate to elders and other members.”

Elder H – “I would tell them to try hard and pray.”

Elder F – “What I have observed is that people don’t pray. When you go to school—pray, so that you will learn something. Pray after school that you will hold onto what you learned. Meetings; you open them with prayers to avoid a lot of misunderstandings and conflicts.”

It is striking that so many of the elder’s responses to this question emphasize spiritual matters. As illustrated, many elders would like to urge the young people of today to pray; pray in all facets of life. It does provide evidence that the elders, when they were young, were taught to pray. However, they did not state if they preferred the youth to pray from the traditional ways of the Blood culture or from a Christian faith. There was no question or comment that led the researcher to believe these elders were recommending a Protestant, Roman Catholic, or Traditional path. However, one male elder stated,

“I went to St. Paul’s school when I was young. I was in three religions: the Indian way, then Anglican and now Catholic. I read the Bible when I was in the sanatorium. That’s when I learned about how things are today. It says, don’t go back to one religion; that’s why I am Catholic. I can do minor things, but not become a member or reveal how things are conducted. I had my days when I was young.” (Elder F, September, 2003)

What the researcher senses is that the elders are implying that no matter whether you follow Christian or Traditional ways, prayer is an important element in your upbringing and in your daily life. Why the emphasis on “prayer”? I took the opportunity to follow up this question with one of the elders, and phoned her to ask this question after completing the interviews for this project. She responded,

“The spiritual part of who we are is very important to the Blood people. When we need help, we go to an elder and they will pray with us. We also offer thanks to Creator for what we have; we ask for strength in our life and to be patient. You see, humans are limited; the Higher Power will help us—it’s very easy to ask for help. It does not mean life is easy. Some quit praying when they get what they want; that’s not right. For Native people, we still pray in spite of all the atrocities; we’re still here.” (Elder A, July 26, 2004).

HOW DO YOU DEFINE HEALING IN OUR CULTURE?

Not all elders answered this question. My speculation is that healing may not be easy to describe or to put into words; it may be that some were not comfortable answering this question: they may have respected, silently, cultural rules about what can and cannot be shared. There may be cultural prohibitions that do not allow for certain ideas or rituals to be shared and that keep sacred or secret knowledge for specific members to know. Some shared stories; while others answered directly in the way they understood the question. What does follow is what was given:

Elder B – “A person has to let their true feelings, what has hurt them—they have to talk about it with a person they trust—they have to be honest.”

Elder A – “Even if they have the highest rated psychiatrist, they don’t spend the time with them. The person sharing will take longer; it costs dollars. With an elder, they open up with them, it just takes a few minutes.”

Elder D – “An elder will pray for all good things.”

Elder B – “Tears, laughter, it’s healing.”

Elder E – “Communicate.”

Elder C – “In the old days, healing meant taking care of a physical ailment.”

Elder A – “If a loved one passed away, the whole family would help that person.”

Elder H – “If someone did not want help, someone would take that person to a healer—they may receive medicine.”

Elder D – “The Creator and prayers really help us to feel or get better.”

Elder C – “Many go to the Horn Society members to ask for help and prayers.”

Elder G – “Grandparents taught us to respect our sweetgrass, incense and smudge—they taught us the smudge bowl. We always prayed.”

Elder F – “Pray before and after school; pray before meetings to avoid misunderstanding and conflict. Some things are sacred (secret), I can only share briefly about ceremonies. In my time, we had a spot for sweetgrass or sweetpine—sweetgrass can be used for anything.”

Elder C – “In the past, we had healers; there were a lot of them—they used herbs (that is what the Creator gave to us). Not just anyone can heal; it will come to a person in a dream or a spirit would go to him—if they are humble, they would accept this gift. A healer would select people to drum and sing for him and he would show them specific songs to sing. He would have certain herbs and use them in specific ways—they were powerful, mystical.”

These responses indicate that prayer is obviously a major factor in the healing ways of the Blood people and culture. One elder noted specifically that healers do not go to school for years to attain specific degrees; healers are chosen by Creator. One answered that healing was for physical ailments; while another answered some ‘healing’ ceremonies are sacred, therefore secret to the general population. I did expect that elders would bring up prayer and ceremony for this question; however, one answer did surprise me, “In former times, the only healing that I heard of was done for physical ailments.” I pictured and was taught that mind, body, and spirit are all connected. If you had a physical ailment that is connected to the other two aspects, what happened then if only one aspect was tended to? However, this elder goes on to say,

“Mental illnesses were few and far between. We had our very strong religious practices that governed every part of our lives. Spiritually, we just knew what worked; it still exists today. Many people still go to the Sundance for those blessings and get healed. We were guided by our dreams and shown through our dreams how we had to live our lives. Because of the magical and mystical things that the people of those times grew up with, they learned at a very early age to have respect for everything.” (Elder C, September 2003).

A different elder (September 1999) reinforced this when the researcher was gathering traditional cultural knowledge in relation to schizophrenia. The elder stated that disease of the mind was next to nil; there were few cases of epilepsy and deaf infants, but no mental illnesses.

WHAT STRATEGIES IN COMMUNICATING TO, TEACHING AND ADVISING CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS HAVE WORKED, OR YOU THINK MIGHT WORK IN ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES STRUGGLING TO RECOVER FROM THE RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL EXPERIENCE?

The responses provided by the elders are grouped below to highlight certain general themes that became evident to the researcher in examining how the elders addressed the issues raised by this question. Some elders emphasized “communication”, while others emphasized “discipline” and still others talked about “culture”. Not all elders had a response that fit the themes that arose from this question, however, and some elders emphasized more than one theme, as can be seen below:

Communication...

Elder E – “The young people, they love dancing, not our way, but disco, western dances or even concerts. If we put those on, the young generation will be running to it, the louder the noise, the better. We can put this up maybe someone will organize it. We will say, “Gee, this is wonderful music, gee, I wish I was younger so I can dance with my wife; I wish but I am too old. We will not say things that will turn them away; we will say things that follow the dance (energy). We would share things like: how they can improve to help and love one another; respect your parents; respect your grandparents and your education. I think we have to reach them through things like that.”

Elder A – “Talk to young people.”

Elder B – “Assist them to feel good about themselves.”

Elder C – “Mothers should be given support, like parenting classes.”

Elder G – “Create activities that young people will partake in and enjoy— have elders share stories and say a few things about traditions and to follow these traditions.”

Discipline...

Elder C – “Put restrictions on young people—follow through with consequences.”

Elder A – “There was a ‘Kid-jail’ at a pow-wow for kids who misbehave—it worked.”

Elder D – “Right now, nothing is working because elders are not asked to talk with them. Maybe just your immediate grandchildren, you talk to them.”

Culture...

Elder B – “Learning the language—language is so important.”

Elder A – “Children learn from their parents today—if you are leading a positive, healthy life, they will follow; if you are not, they will follow.”

Elder F – “If you teach them prayers, they learn to respect”

One of the answers did not immediately seem to fit these categories was, “Right now, nothing is working—maybe just your immediate grandchildren.” The researcher categorized this answer with the ‘Discipline’ section because this elder may be inferring that there is no discipline outside the immediate family. However, this elder could also be referring more specifically to a lack of opportunity to meet with young people outside the immediate family circle.

HOW ARE THE MEDICINE WHEEL AND SACRED RITUALS USED OR PRACTICED TODAY?

Not all elders answered the above question, possibly because they do not know of or have minimal knowledge of the medicine wheel. Some answered the latter part of the question only:

Medicine wheel...

Elder A – “There’s no medicine wheel, I don’t know who said there is one. The wheel is called “Maa’ma”; that’s where the teepee was set.”

Elder B – “There’s no such thing.”

Elder C – “First, you have to understand the medicine wheel is a very new concept; it was not in our traditional religion. Our old and young people still use and rely on our traditional ways for help. I think only certain Christian religions think its evil and those that go to those religions don’t partake in the old ways. Those that use these ways know to respect them. The medicine wheel is a new concept that explains our traditional ways and explains life a very good way that is simple for young people to understand. I think because of the ‘newness’ of this dilemma we are faced with, we have to find ways appropriate to the times to get our people back on track. A lot of our old ways are still valid for our times.”

Elder F – “Those camps were where the enemy attacked that camp and the four directions helped them escape.”

Elder A – “On the outside, those rocks (tipi rings) will tell you which way the enemy left. My grandmother told me there is no such thing as a medicine wheel.”

Sacred rituals...

Elder C – “A lot of our old ways are still valid for our times.”

Elder G – “Parents and grandparents taught us to respect sweetgrass, incense and smudge.”

Elder F – “When I was young, I was an elder; I joined the sacred Horn Society. I’ll be sitting here and my friends are playing. Once you have that secret/sacred paint on, you’re an elder; you’re not a child. That’s how serious the Horn Society is. I learned all these things. Some things are sacred or secret. I can only share on the surface about ceremonies, only if you belong

to the society, then you can learn the 'ways'. You cannot do wrong in these ceremonies.”

In discussing the medicine wheel, three elders rejected it outright, one added it was a new concept and not part of the traditional religion, while one added that the medicine wheel is called “*Maa'ma*” in the Blood culture and represents the teepee ring. Another response was that it was a ‘simple’ concept for young people to understand (may be implying it could be utilized as a visual aid) in addition, the rocks or teepee ring, told you which way the enemy left. This demonstrates that the medicine wheel, traditionally, was not part of the Blood culture; the people had other ways of dealing or handling their spirituality and well-being. A few elders, while respecting that the medicine wheel is a new concept, refer to it as the rocks or teepee rings and perceive it as having a different meaning than other people give it. One elder thought it was a positive idea to utilize it as a teaching tool for young people because it explains traditional ways and connections of life in a simple manner.

Secondly, there is mention of traditional rituals—smudging, with sweetgrass, sweetpine or incense. This was taught by parents and grandparents and is sacred. Another ritual mentioned was the face-painting ceremony, where utmost respect is to be exemplified while wearing or in the presence of someone wearing the sacred paint. It is worth noting that one elder stressed the sacred and secret nature of some rituals. This means that such rituals cannot be communicated openly to anyone or on any occasion. Thus, incorporating transmission of such rituals to young people would mean that elders would have to grant permission, and young people would have to make a significant commitment.

IS THERE ANY QUESTION I AM NOT ASKING THAT YOU THINK I SHOULD ASK?

The elders asked the following questions and made the following suggestions:

Elder E - "There are all kinds, like rock 'n roll, rodeos, Niitsitapi; we love rodeos, our own rodeos. Maybe an elder can, every once in a while encourage the young with what they are doing."

Elder C - "How children were raised in the old days."

"No." (Elder A & B)

No answer (Elders F, G, & H)

Elder D - "Will this help the elders get a place to share their stories?"

The first suggestion above provides evidence that some elders are willing to conform to what the young people want. One elder, throughout his interview, brought up the idea of bringing young people together by providing activities that the young people enjoy. Elders would be involved with these activities and they would share a message, in a manner that is pleasing to the youth; not just by telling them what to do. This may be on the contrary to what some elders emphasized about young people, such as, "they have no respect," and "they don't listen." Reaching the young people in our society today will take time and patience. No one likes to be told what to do; rather, we can share ideas, roles and rituals and design communication methods that provide an equal opportunity for both the youth and elders to participate. One elder asked if this research would assist in "getting a place" to share stories. This perceived lack of a place at present and may imply that the elders want this type of interaction to occur; they just don't have the means financially to get this started.

DO YOU HAVE QUESTIONS FOR ME?

This was the final question asked (formally), however, the majority shared more stories and I felt that neither they nor I knew how to say 'it's over', 'good-bye', or 'I'll see you again'. (There is no term in the Blackfoot language for 'good-bye'; if

someone wants to say, 'see you later', this is the term in Blackfoot that is used.)

The following questions were asked of me, the researcher:

Elder E - "What is the most important thing you want to bring up doing your research?"

Researchers' answer: "To learn about the traditional cultural interaction between elders and young people, why it has changed and how we can somehow regain this communication. I am frustrated at the high rates of diabetes, obesity, and other health related issues; I want to understand why there still is a high drop-out rate in the education system; and why the majority of our people are on Social Assistance. As a young woman from this culture and as a researcher, combining my two backgrounds provides me with obvious advantages. Also, I have children and I want them to know of specific cultural ways, yet, I want them to know that education is the key to understanding these issues and how to find solutions."

Elder's response: "That's good; it's good you go to elders. You can't do everything all at once. That's my question."

Elder A, C, and D - "No."

Elder B - "I think it's a very good idea what you're trying to do to get the information about our past, the youth and about our way, about our language, our spiritual way. The important thing is to ask the Creator to help you learn our way. It won't be done over night; one person won't share everything with you; the elders will share one by one. They can share it with the young people."

Researcher's thoughts: "I think this elder stresses prayer in different areas. She may have wanted to guide me, to ground me, and to assist me on my

learning journey. I don't feel as if she was 'telling' me what to do or how to do it; just to pray."

Elder D – "Who are the other elders being interviewed?"

Researcher's thoughts: "I think this elder asked who the other elders were to get a sense of whether I was talking to the "right" people. Some elders may feel that specific elders do not know specific ways or traditions. This may have been a way she would have liked to guide me. I informed her that there were three other females and four males; but that all were from our reserve.

Elder D – "Who has given you the authority/permission to interview the elders?"

Researcher's thoughts: "This may have been asked as a precaution concerning the knowledge she is sharing and making sure she would remain anonymous. Or, maybe she was challenging me to make sure I went through the proper channels when interviewing people. It was a challenge for me, as a young member of the culture, but also, as a researcher who is recording the interview and having her sign a consent form. I felt that she might not see that I do respect her and the culture. I advised her that in this institution, an institution where you study and write (for many years), you need approval for your research from a University research ethics committee because you are interviewing "human subjects". I also informed her that all of the elders and youth I was interviewing gave me permission to interview them.

This section has conveyed a sense of the responses the elders provided to the questions in relation to intergenerational communication and well-being. The next section will discuss issues of reflexivity concerning my participation, as a

researcher and as a member within in the Blackfoot culture as it pertains to the topic at hand.

Reflexive findings of self as researcher and participant in Blackfoot culture

Regardless of my membership in this specific culture, I would nonetheless be obligated to respect the cultural norms and specific protocols of the Blood People. Adhering to specific cultural protocol also gives one an advantage in doing research because informants are more likely to open up to researchers who are respectful. One might ask if membership in the culture might also be a disadvantage given that it also involves respecting rules about “secret” knowledge (for example, pertaining to particular ceremonies). However, such secrecy only relates to membership in specific sacred societies (like the Horn Society), not membership in the Blood Tribe or its culture generally.

As a researcher, I encountered a few dilemmas during the process of attaining specific cultural knowledge as it pertains to the topic at hand, within the Blood culture. How was I to approach elders in a way that would show them that I do cherish and respect them, I do recognize and respect the Blood culture and I do value and respect the knowledge attained; while at the same time respecting non-Native research methodologies—guidelines, policies and data collection procedures.

One female elder asked, “Who gave you authority to interview the elders?” I could only hope that she would understand my answer—knowing that she was 85-years-old at the time. I proceeded to answer her in English and I hoped she would comprehend what I was saying. When she asked me a question like that, realizing that we are from different life-worlds (she is 85, I am 32); I didn’t begin

to think 'why' is she asking this, rather, I began to question 'my' actions and reasons for conducting the research. This particular question yielded two issues, the language barrier and my response as her "junior" within the Blood culture. Firstly, the language issue is an increasing concern within the culture itself. The decline in speaking Blackfoot is increasing yearly; even with the Head Start Program (both on- and off-reserve) and Blackfoot classes being offered from grades one through 12 (and occasionally at the University of Lethbridge). The degeneration of the Blackfoot language has taken several generations. It will also take several generations to learn, speak, and maintain the language with such programs and with the willingness of the members to keep it alive. What is a culture without its language? Is it, still in fact, an Indigenous culture?

Secondly, my response as her "junior"; I was directed to answer from two perspectives—as a female Blood woman and as a researcher. I respect this elder, and her honesty and straightforwardness was what I expected. I did not want an elder to feel like they could not ask me questions, let alone challenging and maybe 'uncomfortable' ones. As a researcher, would you go into a culture thinking these human subjects could not ask of you what you ask of them? No. You expect the unexpected. I did feel obligated to give as much detail and explain until they were satisfied with an answer. I see her now and then, and she does not hesitate to ask how I am doing with my education. I respond with a smile and let her know completion is close.

This elder's challenge to me didn't lead me to feel I should stop researching. It did cause me to keep in mind to respect the culture, even if it means to explain and interpret over and over again to participants the purpose of the research. It also meant I always had to keep in mind how my participants defined legitimate authority; not just how academic research might define it. The majority of respondents said it was good, it's okay; what I'm doing is needed, which affirmed my intuition before, during and after the research as I complete the writing. This

intuition came from my own membership in the Blood culture; however, the ability to execute such a task could not have been possible had I not wanted to attain the expertise to conduct such a research project.

On occasion, I felt, as a Blood member, a feeling of constraint, or a “law” in relation to what some of the elders said about sacred or secret knowledge. I also struggled with my own responses to what participants said during certain stages of the research. I wanted to downplay disagreements, ambiguities or contradictions in what the elders said; while at the same time I struggled to obey the “law” of good research, not to alter or cover-up the research findings. I wanted to be respectful of both cultural and research “laws”. I was able to respect both “laws”, but the need to follow specific cultural protocol in relation to the interviews, and the questions I was asked, especially by the elders, did pose challenges of ethical interpretation.

The beliefs and rituals that are valued and practiced today have worked, they have been time-tested; how can one argue or debate their validity? Some might say that social and technological conditions have changed so much that such traditional knowledge can no longer apply. One elder mentioned that the traditional ways are still valid in today’s society; but that if new ways were developed to assist the people to understand the culture that was good as well. If I was not a part of this specific culture, I too, might question the sweat lodge and the medicine men, the Sundance and the sacred rituals, even the daily smudging ritual that many members attest to practicing (and that works in their favor). Because I am from the culture and have been transmitted specific knowledge, and do practice specific rituals, to ask questions pertaining to secret knowledge would be disrespectful. On the other hand, because I am conducting research (and receiving financial aid for doing so), my academic practices would direct me to ask elders about traditional knowledge. In the case of this research, I tried to respect both priorities by asking elders clearly what I can and cannot know as it

pertains to secret knowledge. Thus, I tried to follow both academic research guidelines and cultural respect in order to complete this project. In the end, I am left to ask myself, from both an academic and Blood life-world, more questions of my purpose, as I play a major role in this research: I am the 'voice', so to speak, with the guidance of and advice from elders, professors and my Creator; that is okay. This is partly my answer also, to the question, "who or what gives you the authority to do this research?"

Within the culture, there is openly shared traditional cultural knowledge that serves as the belief system of the general population; in addition to that, there is 'sacred' or secret traditional cultural knowledge that only specific members can know. These select few belong to sacred societies that practice specific ceremonies within the Blood culture. Acknowledging that, I, being a 'common' member, can only ask certain questions without feeling like I've just stepped on someone's toes because of 'lack' of respect. I have adhered to what I've been taught by my parents, grandparents and elders—to be true to yourself (know who you are in terms of the culture), hold closely the values that have been transmitted, and stay 'grounded' and focused on what you do.

It is hoped that the knowledge gained from this research project will shed light on what elders and young people can tell us about intergenerational communication. This research also raises questions and provides insights into how we know that some of what the elders provide is truly, 'Blood cultural knowledge'; the importance of it and the necessity for transmission. If, from this research, we discover that definitions of specific terms, such as "respect", "teaching", "discipline", and "prayer", are perceived differently by different people in the Blood community, does this imply that cultural changes need to be recognized before rebuilding and strengthening certain cultural traditions? The research results do raise questions about what is and isn't traditional knowledge. It raises such questions about whether some things learned in boarding school (e.g. about

certain types of “discipline”) have become accepted by some elders as “traditional.” Even the elders themselves, have indicated that some elders have “strayed from the path”. In addition, one elder asked who were the other elders being interviewed, suggests that this elder might not want me to have the “wrong” knowledge. All these issues raised questions within myself as both a member of the Tribe and as a student. Communication may be hindered by differences in defining terms, which leads to further questions to be asked, about cultural traditions, adaptations to new circumstances and intergenerational communication. The questions we ask will be on-going, in the effort to provide answers and solutions that work fundamentally and on a day-to-day basis in a changing world.

Balancing continuity and change within the Blood culture itself is something worth investigating further. From the comments by interviewees from both age groups in this research project, change entails utilizing new ways to bridge the communication between the two groups in addition to “re-creating” certain aspects of the culture to fit modern concerns. The continuity of the culture is given by the secret knowledge of the societies; those who choose members carefully and take great care in transmitting traditional knowledge. However, this makes it hard to research the role of such societies in cultural continuity. Continuity can also be seen as a matter of faith in traditional culture. Elders “know” that as long as the Land is there and as long as the people are on the land, the old ways and old knowledge will be “there” too...it will be discovered again.

Living in both live-worlds does work to your advantage at times; it certainly did for me while exploring this specific aspect of the Blood culture and people. I attended a workshop titled “*Researching and writing tribal/ band histories*” while undertaking this research, which examined the necessity of being culturally sensitive, realizing language barriers (if any) and pursuing critical and analytical

writing. I was reinforced at this workshop that I was walking on a positive path in relation to interviewing elders (and young people), realizing language barriers would be an issue, and that cultural sensitivity would take work. Maybe I too, need to know if what I am seeking and how I am going about it is valid; if I am following protocol; and if my procedures for attaining this knowledge are acceptable, not only to the academic institution, but with elders. Being a member of this culture and being a student at an academic institution at times confronted me with different and even contradictory protocols and procedures. On the one hand, I was taught from a young age to be respectful when in the presence of elders and not to question what they tell you, but on the other hand, you are taught as part of proper research to ask questions until you comprehend what is being taught. Where do you draw the line? Further, when one does want elder advice and guidance, one does not need a consent form to be signed. Also, “signing documents” historically, meant bad things for Native people (as in signing treaties or child welfare orders). But from a “research ethics” viewpoint, you cannot conduct research without a signed consent form. The challenge was both between cultures and within my heart and mind as a member. What I learned was that “respect” involves respecting the human rights of research participants but also respecting the cultural “place” from which they speak and relate to me, and allowing myself to be “guided” by them.

Researcher Interpretations

The path is not easy. Each answered question raised many more unanswered ones. Many of us have been fostering the reemergence of our way of going to school. Elders, as always, are willing to share; scholars are willing to write; educators are open to new ideas. Now we will see if our children are willing to learn (Castellano, et al, 2000: 113).

The above quote tells the story. While the young people answered the interviews directly, their responses, like those of the elders, raised further questions. There will be more questions asked as this project is read and discussed. Interviewing the elders and young people was an invaluable experience; my understanding of the two groups has expanded significantly. The different life-worlds of elder and youth have taught me much, and at the same time, reinforced many of the traditional teachings that I already know and practice. I realize how I, as a researcher and a participant in the Blood culture, have intertwined these life-worlds. I also look at this intertwining through the metaphor of the Medicine Wheel, in which different “directions” are treated as distinct, but at the same time, equally necessary. These life-worlds, when viewed like the teachings of the medicine wheel can be utilized and looked upon as tools for the well-being of individuals and the community to recognize our foundation and grow from there. The responses given by the elders raise questions about what counts as “traditional knowledge” and also about possible blind spots in their perceptions of young people. These questions reflect the historical disruptions imposed upon Blackfoot society and culture.

From the elders, I learned that there was hardship, pain and confusion stemming from residential schools; but also that the Blackfoot community can acknowledge and strive to learn from these experiences, from our encounters with non-Native people, and from the challenges of higher (formal) education. It has taken several generations for the Blood people and culture to get into the state they are in now; it will take several more generations to relearn, adapt, and practice specific Blackfoot ways consistently again. One can seek, learn and attain specific academic credentials; however, how this knowledge is utilized in relation to the culture one is from, can profoundly impact the whole community. Elders know this; they tell stories (both of their lived experience and of legends); they feel with

their hearts. From the young people, I also felt that I had received benefits as I learned from their straightforward responses and noted their interest.

A few elders are quoted as saying things like: “TV took over our ways”; “There were no computers, TV and radios—the non-Native people, they are going too fast with our lives...in my time, time was slow; time is too fast.” This is also true of mainstream culture. However, it has impacted the Blood people more quickly and more severely. In such a short time frame (30 – 40 years) the computer, TV, and alcohol have influenced this culture’s traditional belief system significantly, as did the residential schools in an earlier era. For myself, what I thought of as “limiting” about Reserve life, when I was a teenager who resided and went to school on the Blood Reserve, is not how I picture that life today. It’s the opposite. Having lived on the Blood Reserve until adulthood, I do want my children to experience certain things like living in a remote area where you are not afraid of kidnappers or predators (of different sorts—pedophiles or thieves); realizing you can shout, yell and sing to the top of your lungs without fearing that someone would be knocking on your door to utter, “Please be quiet”; or to see your children ride their bikes without worrying that motor vehicles may bump them or that the bikes may be stolen. Today, however, some features of modern urban life can also be found on the reserve: political upheaval and scandals, favoritism, alcoholism, and gangs (and murders). As unfortunate as this may seem, it is a reality for many who do reside on the reserve, as witnessed by numerous *Lethbridge Herald* articles and editorials.

Life today is fast; however our traditional elders also know something of the passage of time:

“From nowhere we come and into nowhere we go.
What is life? Life is the flash of a firefly in the
night; it is the breath of the buffalo in the
wintertime. It is the little shadow, which runs
across the grass, that loses itself in the sunset.”

(Chief Crowfoot, Siksika Nation, *Sayings of the Elders*, (Friesen, 1998: 53).

I attest to feeling that living in an urban setting today can be of value in many instances—for instance, the availability of sporting activities and educational or social opportunities. Residing within an urban setting may give you the chances to experience certain things that you may not be able to experience living in a rural (or reserve) setting. On the other hand, other kinds of opportunities are lacking in urban settings. The young people who were interviewed all resided off the reserve, which they did not regard that as a disadvantage. However, all said that they would like to be in contact with elders regularly to be taught specific cultural ways, especially the Blackfoot language.

Regardless of residential schools or contact with Europeans, it could be said that Indigenous people the world over experienced specific changes for a reason. Reasons may include the recognition that different forms of learning (formal and lived) can go hand in hand; or that language is what ‘binds’ a culture, and that learning it, is one specific strategy for cultural renewal; or acceptance that Mother Earth has room for all the diversity of people, animals, trees, water, and things. We are here to protect, nurture and maintain her longevity, regardless of differences.

The topic of intergenerational communication is not only of importance to native people. Enhanced intergenerational communication will greatly assist in developing teaching methods to be utilized so that members and non-members can learn the Blood culture’s history and language. It is also important to talk together about the changes that have occurred, over the centuries in this culture; about how these impact the community and the surrounding towns and cities, and about how these changes compare to those affecting other communities, which are our neighbors.

“Social knowledge traditions and conditions can increase appreciation and understanding of contemporary issues of health, race relations, crime and corrections, education, business trends, and an infinite array of social, political and spiritual realms” (Berg, 2001: 211).

As noted by Berg (2001: 211), “historical research extends beyond a mere collection of incidents, facts, dates, or figures. It is the study of the relationships among issues that have influenced the past, continue to influence the present, and will certainly affect the future.” From the elders, we gain some kind of understanding of what they experienced before, during and after they attended residential schools. In turn, we can relate this to what the young people are challenged with today. We can see both as generational effects from residential schools—loss of cultural identity, of language and of traditional cultural ways. We not only see the need to ‘relearn’ these ways, but we ask what ‘processes’ do we undertake in doing so? This project only scrapes the surface. Further research will be required to increase self-understanding of the Blood people, of our culture and the many influences we have encountered. We do know from the interviews that both the elders and young people want this interaction; young people want to be taught the language and traditions and the elders are willing to teach. Some suggested developing TV programs, after-school programs, and summer programs. Others suggested teaching Blackfoot before the child enters school; teaching everyday words that can be spoken and used daily. The young people want to learn the language and want direct contact with elders, but in a way that isn’t intimidating. The elders want a “place” to meet young people, and they also want to bind together the generations through prayer.

What have I learned on my individual journey? I have learned that a combination of being a member of the Tribe and a researcher reinforced the perception that cultural diversity can be educating; that acceptance of others and self is needed; that tolerance is a learned process; that hope is necessary, and that being open is a

challenge, yet is also a liberating experience. As I asked the questions (for example, “If there was one thing you could tell a young person, what would it be”, I realized there were a dozen more questions I missed. As I asked the interview questions, I asked myself, “why am I asking this, is this really my purpose?” Or, “is this other thing my purpose?” “Am I over stepping a boundary?” “Am I respecting the culture?” All sorts of questions came popping up.

Accordingly, I refer back to reflexivity, because I participate in different life-worlds, at different times and in conjunction with each other. In doing so, I bridge the ‘researcher’ and the ‘participant’. To quote Berg (2001: 139):

“Ethnography then becomes a process of gathering systematic observations, partly through participation and partly through various types of conversational interviews...ethnographers today must do more than simply describe the populations they investigate; they must strive to understand them, and if possible, to explain their activities. Reflexivity further implies a shift in the way we understand data and their collection. To accomplish this, the researcher must make use of an internal dialogue that repeatedly examines what the researcher knows and how the researcher came to know this.” (139).

The result will ultimately be reflexive knowledge: information that provides insights into the workings of the world and insights on how that knowledge came to be (Berg, 2001: 139).

As I practice the ‘smudging ritual’, I realize that I do not know *how* many others practice as I do, however this ritual gives me hope that the culture will sustain further challenges. “Learning the traditional ways of doing things gives everything a deeper spiritual meaning; and while performing spiritual ceremonies every day makes every task and every ritual a celebration of life and a tribute to the Creator” (Johnson & Cremona, 1995: 162). This hope and celebration of life,

for me as a Blood member, is reinforced and affirmed in the following quote from a First Nations teen responding to a question about the importance of being Canadian. This particular teen (who lives on a reserve) said:

...his heritage is "Blood Indian from the Blackfoot Confederacy," adding, "I'm an Indian, not a Canadian." (Bibby, 2001: 107).

He also tells that the one thing he would like to accomplish in his lifetime is to "unite the people of the Blackfoot Nations." There is hope, belief and faith among young people that the culture will be strengthened, in all facets, and will be maintained for future generations. The Aboriginal Youth Network (www.ayn.ca), a web site developed to help Aboriginal youth connect with each other around common concerns, is one vehicle for realizing that hope. But another network is needed too: to connect across, as well as within generations.

The final chapter provides further discussion of the findings in relation to the purpose of the project. It also discusses what this project has added to our knowledge of the topic at hand, and makes some recommendations for program development relating to intergenerational communication.

Chapter 5

Conclusions

“In order to transform learning, the classroom has to expand outward to include the community. Parents and Elders must become active planners and decision makers in education, and education can no longer be confined within the walls of an institution.” (Castellano, Davis, & Lahache, 2000: 98).

“Education is a lifelong continuum of experience gleaned from interaction with one another, with all of nature (seen and unseen), as well as with all of the cosmos...Western schooling, separates “education” from living so the experience alienates us from our surroundings and, therefore, our culture...what Western schooling has done is to essentially provide students with their “formulas”, “theories”, “laws”, “facts”...in many instances, learning is not related to the students’ everyday lives or culture. Students are taught to individualize their understanding” (Castellano, Davis, & Lahache, 2000: 101).

What do the findings point to in relation to the purpose of this project?

The purpose of this project was to gain insight into communication between elders and young people, and how such communication might relate to the overall well-being of members of the Blood Tribe. Gaining an understanding of the opinions and perspectives of the elders, their stories and their recollections of their experiences of residential schools, was invaluable for me personally because I became that much more aware of first-hand stories; thus successful intergenerational communication between the elders and me was an end result. From the opinions of young people and elders, and the recollections of elders, we may gain an understanding of both of the dynamics of communication and of barriers inhibiting it; from the language used in the context of communication and changes in that context.

In the comments made by young people about communicating with elders, and definitions of health and well-being, the following points appeared to be most important. Being in contact with elders, not only for communication or interaction purposes, but also to learn the language and share stories, were things emphasized as desirable. Several wanted the elders to teach them the Blackfoot language. It was clear that the young people who were interviewed were representative of their urban peers in that they could not speak or understand the language. Most of those interviewed perceived elders to be wise and knowledgeable and they wanted elders to transmit their knowledge, even if what is being transmitted isn't in the Blackfoot language. The main emphasis was on transmitting traditional cultural knowledge in addition to wanting to hear stories of the old days and wanting to learn the language. There was no mention of wanting to be "disciplined" or "told what to do". Some did not know how to approach an elder or to carry on a conversation with elders. One youth mentioned he wanted to learn how to pray, or at least to reinforce his own way of praying and in turn, have the elders pray for him. For the elders, on the other

hand, prayer was a key emphasis; they wanted young people to pray, and some also emphasized that an elder's role involved prayer.

Barriers to communication with elders can be related partly to geography: where youth and elders live in relation to each other. If for example, the young people do know elders, but the elders reside on the reserve, their contact may be minimal and limited to family events or cultural gatherings. However, some urban young people are not familiar with elders at all. In the absence of real contact, such youth may romanticize the possibility of contact without knowing how to initiate it, or what it would bring. Historically, all tribal members lived within a very short distance; the circle of teepees, or on the reserve in very small dwellings. Today, in retrospect, even the small reserve dwellings appear to have been important to contact, because they were shared by different generations such that young people still had close communication with grandparents and other elders. Today, time has changed many things—size of homes, cost of living, composition of households and where one resides in relation to 'opportunities'.

Elders are still perceived as respected among the majority of the Blackfoot people, both in urban and rural settings. In many of the responses, besides wanting to better understand the elders, youth showed themselves to be open to ideas about elder/youth communication. To the extent they were able, they gave input on proposed program developments: Blackfoot summer classes, teaching beading, instruction in how to tan hides, songs of the old days, a Youth Center, story telling, cultural teachings, and historical recollections. One young male's typical response to the question, "What would you like to learn from elders?" was "Our legends and beliefs." When asked why he would like to learn this, he responded, "So that I am aware of it and when someone says something (about the culture) I will know if it's true or not; I could tell them, regardless of who they are." His definition of "true knowledge" was transmitted knowledge from the elders rather than "book knowledge". This is what communication between

elders and young people can offer: specific, historical, cultural knowledge, which, in turn can be related to the well-being of individuals, and the community. Many of the youth felt that utilizing sweat lodges, smudging, helping, teaching and prayer were useful ways to assist and define healing. They preferred the teaching of the Blackfoot language to be done by elders; teaching ceremonial practices also to be done by elders. They admitted to a general 'lack' of understanding in relation to the question of how to communicate with elders, however; this lack of understanding did not deter them from the idea of being in contact with them. The key issues here are what kinds of programs or places would encourage contact and "break the ice," and also how to help elders and youth handle the inevitable discovery that the reality of communication will always be different from the anticipation.

Although elders are from a different life-world than the youth and have different priorities, the eagerness for interaction was evident from both groups. The elders' perception of communication with the young people was that there really is no 'formal' type of communication between elders and youth. They provided a discussion of the *old days* and how elders and/or grandparents transmitted knowledge in the course of everyday activities and were often the ones to discipline the young. However, today, it is unfortunate that the majority of young people live apart from their grandparents and some do not reside within a short distance. This makes it difficult to visit with elders and grandparents. The housing situation on reserves is poor; many are forced to resort to renting, and if lucky, seek to purchase homes off the reserve. Elders today still put heavy emphasis on discipline and on teaching social norms of respectfulness and responsibility; but when elders become strangers, or at best, "visitors", does it not become much more difficult for them to do this kind of daily teaching and disciplining? Also, have some elders' definitions of "discipline" changed as a result of the residential school experience? Do definitions of "discipline" need to

be discussed and perhaps modified? Do traditional definitions need to be revived? If elders' skills are no longer economically useful and their moral outlook seems "uncool" in peer-culture or media culture do we need to look for new ways of giving elders relevance in our culture? One of the elders was quoted as saying:

"The tribe taught them (young people); first they learned from their parents and grandparents; uncles and aunts; friends of the family. Then, there were people in the tribe whose sole role was to talk to the young people" (Elder C, September, 2003).

Historically, this day-to-day communication appears to have been positive and powerful. The community, not just the parents, taught the young. Today, the Blood people have been 'Westernized'; TV, technology, media, but also the pull of economic opportunity, are now influential.

A key theme that emerges from the interviews with elders is that of *prayer*. The elders want young people to pray, whether it is to start the morning, to give thanks or to ask for a healthy life; pray. They did not identify which religion to pray in terms of; they reinforced the importance of prayer itself. One youth respondent also stressed prayer. However, it is safe to say that modern youth culture does not encourage a prayerful approach to life, or prayer as a way of life. Nevertheless, the youth respondents mentioned the possibility of elders helping with personal or self-esteem issues. Prayer, thus, may be a way in which the generations can connect around these issues in a supportive way.

Many elders felt that the role of the young people, in the past, was to work (gather food, hunt, care for home). Today, their role is evidently different because of changed organization of work and leisure, and also because of the introduction of alcohol, drugs, computers, and transportation. Statistically, the use of drugs and alcohol among teenagers is alarming (Bibby, 2001: 97-99). One

of Bibby's interviewees provides an anecdote to illustrate the culture in which young people, in general, consume drugs:

"I know lots of kids who go to them (raves) and I went to them extensively myself. The thing is drugs! So many hard drugs are taken by kids, ages 14 to 25 it's amazing. I've done ecstasy about 10 times and it was really fun, although I won't do it again, and I was able to stop unassisted. I know of kids who go to every rave that's put on (about 1 to 2 times a week) and do ecstasy, crystal, mushrooms, smoke dope, use acid, drink, huff nitric oxide, snort coke. People don't really know about this underground rave culture and parents would freak if they found out their 15-year-old daughter went to raves, got f...d out of her mind, and hooked up with some older guy. I can see how kids get addicted to raves but the drugs are the scary thing and it makes me laugh that parents have no clue!" (Bibby, 2001; 101).

Many things pressure the youth of today. How can parents and elders compete with such life and health threatening influences? One answer to this may be to provide places and times at which young people are reminded that they are part of a specific culture, with specific knowledge, and that they can be the recipients of the benefits of traditional culture, only if they choose to be. The elders interviewed for this project emphasized not just discipline or modeling, but also the importance of young people understanding that they do have choices to make, and that specific choices are possible. With such reinforcement, some of the youth of today are already learning the culture:

"It's starting to change, these people that are telling their children and the young, they have to listen to the elders. The young generation today is hungry in their mind, soul and heart; they're starting to ask the elders how it used to be. They are starting to get back the feeding from the elders, which is good, just like you (researcher) are today. You are searching and researching your culture through this interview and how we used to believe in our way of life." (Elder E, September 2003).

If deliberate choices by a few to search and learn are what it will take, it is possible that a ripple effect *can* happen. This is part of my hope as a member of the Blood community and as a researcher. Again, the question to be addressed is what kinds of events, programs or places will allow the communication that allows First Nations young people to begin to see clearly the kinds of choices they can make.

Many of the health and well-being issues, troubling the Blood Tribe today, as stated by the elders, stem from the residential school era. The personal damages and cultural loss have prompted many funding agencies to disperse financial resources to agencies and reserves to assist in the healing of First Nations/Indigenous people and communities. The problem with the healing programs and funds is that they often focus on personal or family trauma, and even when they address cultural issues, they don't specifically target intergenerational communication as a healing device. Unfortunately for some Blood youth, this cultural loss and lack of communication has ended in crime and violence, as witnessed in the following headlines (all from the Lethbridge Herald):

“Reserve Crisis”

“Body found on Blood Reserve”

“13-year-old to stand trial for murder”

“Two charged with murder in Standoff”

Do we want these horrific headlines to feed inferences about the Blood people and culture? It need not be this way. In order to effectively re-introduce young people and elders to each other, we need to further study what the young people

need and want and do, as opposed to ‘telling’ them these specific ways are *good* for them. If elders want young people to know traditional Blackfoot symbols rather than “pan-Indian” symbols like the medicine wheel, they may need help to find another way to teach than being “strict” or “laying down the law”! We also need to inquire further into what elders perceive and feel to be ‘traditional’ and positive ways to best serve young people in order to develop programs with which both groups will be comfortable. We must also find ways to make elders more familiar with what kids find to be intimidating or a “turnoff”.

Medicine Wheel—a short discussion

Something that was not expected by the researcher was the lack of or minimal knowledge about the medicine wheel between both groups. It was outright rejected by some elders, redefined by a couple, and not mentioned by the remaining. It really is a new concept to them. It may be, that I as a researcher am open to ‘new’ concepts and ideas. Researching, writing and utilizing the medicine wheel in my personal life, directed me to ask specific questions in relation to the medicine wheel. We may examine the use of different models in different circumstances; the medicine wheel may be useful for individuals who do see the relation of the concept to their lives. We can also examine and ‘test’ Blackfoot ways and symbols that appear to be losing their potential but which may be worth reviving not only for personal healing, but also for the integrity of traditional Blackfoot culture.

The medicine wheel has been described as cyclical or circular in its foundation, referring variously to the growth of infant to elderly; the changing of seasons, or the rise and fall of the sun. Some elders saw it in relation to the teepee ring: the stones where a teepee once was. However, ideas about the wheel or ring have evolved over hundreds of years (as perceived from different viewpoints) in various First Nations groups, as well as non-Native groups, to become significant today as a healing tool and visual aid in personal and professional development.

From the interviews, it would appear that the medicine wheel is a fairly new concept to the Blood people both in perception and in use. As noted above, for the elders, the significance of such a wheel was the circular teepee rings where they laid stones. Historically, stone circles were used for “commemorating the dead, frightening away enemies such as the Cree, and anchoring spiritual observances such as communion with the Blackfoot creator and the spirits of the land” (Nikiforuk, 1992: 53). The term in Blackfoot is *Maa'ma* (Elder A and B, August 2003). Some of the Blood elders rejected the term ‘medicine wheel’ as well as how it has evolved and is used today. Can there be several definitions for ‘medicine wheel’? From a researcher’s perspective, this is a possibility, especially if both First Nations and non-First Nations people use the term, the definition, and purpose at different times for different reasons. I think, as with other words in the English language, one term can be defined several ways depending on the usage and context. How one uses the term and for what purpose, should be specifically mentioned prior to conducting research interviews, presentations, or teaching. This is to respect what some of the elders said about the medicine wheel. I do not want to jeopardize my relationship as a member and researcher if they feel I do not take into consideration what they expressed as answers and opinions.

In light of Torgovnick’s (1998) review of *New Age* practitioners, and after attending a workshop (2002) titled *Medicine Wheel Facilitator Training*, I find that my perspective is similar to the New Ager’s as defined by Torgovnick: searching for a pathway to healing—from uncertainties and even trauma. This does not mean I do not value specific Blackfoot cultural knowledge and traditions. However, the way my life has unfolded and is unfolding, it made sense to me to use such a symbol even with its New Age connotations, although I’ve thought of it as a traditional teaching tool for myself. My belief system fundamentally is traditional concerning Blackfoot cultural ways, but I have the choice to partake in

contemporary or unconventional ways to understand the self and my participation in my environment. Can we equate “New Age” with what I earlier called a “modern traditional” perspective? Broadly used, we can, if this symbol works while integrating traditional values and beliefs from the Blood culture (or other Indigenous cultures for that matter).

While conducting research for a prior project (July, 1999), I came across an article in *Canadian Geographic* (July/August, 1992), which may shed light on why not too many people are familiar or comfortable with the term “medicine wheel” or its origin:

“American settlers and miners invented the expression in the 1880s when Indians directed them to a stone ring in Wyoming. It was a hauntingly poignant circle with 28 spokes and six rocks piled around the rim. Not surprisingly, it reminded whites of a large wagon or steam wheel and they gave it the name that remains today: the Big Horn Medicine Wheel. According to George Bird Grinnell, a New York adventurer and scholar, the word ‘medicine’ was added to denote ‘the mystery which enshrouds’ Big Horn.” (Nikiforuk, 1992: 53).

The concept of the wheel has since taken several directions for different communities and individuals. The stones represent different ideas to archeologists, environmentalists, sociologists, psychologists, and cultural traditionalists. One scholar writes (Nikiforuk, 1992: 54),

“Since time immemorial, the Blackfoot and their ancestors have made good use of stone. Rings of stone, for instance, weighed down teepees made of buffalo hide; red-hot stones heated water in hide-lined pits to boil buffalo meat; flaked and pecked stone was the raw material for knives, war clubs, mauls, kettles and bowls, stone beat and mashed pemmican. Stone markers pointed the way to campsites. Stones set the perimeter of hoop-and-arrow ball games.”

Maa'ma, medicine wheel, circle of stones, rings of stones, pathways to healing, or historical sites—any and all of the above meanings are used by different people and by different professions. For this particular topic, we cannot ignore the name

given by the Blackfoot people and the definition behind it. It may be utilized differently, depending on the context and the significance to the individual, community or research topic; but the term and definition must be made specific and clear.

“Awareness of the wheels has really suffered among Indian people in the last 80 years,” says Reg Crowshoe, a Blackfoot traditionalist; however, “he hopes recent archeological findings, combined with Blackfoot ceremonial traditions will be able to sort out the specific use of the various wheels”. He further adds, “More research will help in the process of cultural revival and will identify what is sacred and not sacred. I hope we can answer these questions and bridge the gaps.” (Nikiforuk, 1992: 54). I agree with Crowshoe, that more research will aid in the cultural revival and identification of what is sacred or not; however, where do we begin? We may see the answer to this from opposite sides. I am not an elder, I am not a traditionalist *per se*; I am a common Blood member and a researcher. Where I perceive to begin this process does not mean I am right or not, nor does it mean that Crowshoe is right, or not. This is where the combination of intergenerational communication, elder expertise and academia needs to be integrated, in our society today, where we can explore options and choices that we may not have been able to explore fully for 50 years or more. Perhaps we can utilize some non-traditional models to gain insight into the traditional ways that we are seeking, to find solutions for today’s questions and circumstances. Some of us live in several life-worlds—First Nations, academic, elder, and youth, and can take advantage of this.

Discussion of communication barriers & Native Education Task Force (2003)

Both youth and elders in the study mentioned gaps in communication. One limitation or barrier mentioned by both is increasing lack of knowledge of the Blackfoot language. The elders stated that in residential schools, they themselves were not allowed to speak their language. There are many factors that have

produced the outcomes of today. Also, elders perceive the lifestyle of today, including material wealth, fast-paced activities, and other influences (alcohol, drugs, peers), and a lack of reverence and discipline displayed by the youth, as communication barriers, in addition to the language. At the same time, there is a danger that the youth will see “discipline” itself as a communication barrier.

What each group offers to the other is the willingness to try to communicate: the elders to teach and share their knowledge; the youth to learn and apply the knowledge. It has been at least 100 years since residential schools were introduced to First Nations people in this region; it may take 100 years for change to occur, but now First Nations people want it to occur, hopefully utilizing their own initiatives, energy and commitment. As stated by an elder during one of the interviews,

“Another thing I learned, we went down to Kanawake Reserve, to check out Health programs. I asked one of the workers, “how long since you’ve had your first doctor”, he replied, “around 200 years”. The east has had 400 years of contact; before our (southern Alberta) area. That’s why down east, the Mohawks are lawyers, doctors. For us, just a little over 100 years since they (nuns/priests) started teaching us. Some of those people, though, have lost their language. Our language; a lot is not used today.” (Elder F, September 2003).

A revival will take time; the energy must come from the Blood people to do hard thinking and to take action to build specific programs to overcome specific communication barriers. It is slowly beginning, as evidenced by a recent local Native Education Task Force (2003). During an eight month time-frame (September 2003 – April 2004), meetings were conducted in relation to Native Education within the Holy Spirit School District (Lethbridge, Taber, Pincher Creek; AB). Membership in these meetings included:

- Elders
- First Nations and Metis parents
- Piikani Director of Education
- Kainai trustee
- Metis Nation of Alberta
- Alberta Learning
- Indian and Northern Affairs Canada
- Sik-oooh-kotoki Friendship Center
- Opokaa'sin Early Intervention Society
- Lethbridge Community college
- University of Lethbridge
- Deputy Superintendent of Schools
- Superintendent of Schools
- Recording secretary
- Chairperson

In a *Lethbridge Herald* article (April 14, 2004), task force chairman Terry Fortin said “the stars are lining up” for aboriginal policy initiatives federally and provincially, and financial resources are beginning to flow to jurisdictions. In

addition, the Holy Spirit school board of the future could include a trustee position for an aboriginal representative. In her discussion over the rationale of establishing such a trustee position, task force member Valerie Goodrider said the task force wanted something of substance:

"Creating a trustee position for a native person is the ultimate in partnership," Goodrider said. "Partnership is not just shaking hands. It's the acceptance of native people as a credible part of your governing system."

The board agreed to receive the report and consider its recommendations for approval. A few of the recommendations were:

- To develop a policy or directive that establishes a division priority to hire, retain and promote teachers who have First Nations or Métis or Inuit cultural knowledge, the respect of elders and community, completed university/college native studies course and speak Blackfoot or First Nation/Métis/Inuit language.
- Direct the superintendent to develop, with parents and school principals, division and school information documents/communications strategies, programs and services that First Nations and Métis parents need to better support their children's academic achievement and success.

Upon approval, recommendations would be incorporated into the three-year education plan for 2004-2007 and into the school division budget for 2004-2005. Other recommendations include "*Establishing a board goal to increase First Nations, Métis and Inuit student academic success to meet or exceed overall division and provincial student results within the Holy Spirit Catholic Schools Three Year Education Plan (2004-2007)*"; and to "*Direct the Superintendent of schools to immediately establish a division Holy Spirit First Nations, Métis and Inuit Parent Education Advisory Council.*" These, and

many more recommendations were suggested to guide the community, schools, students, parents, professionals, and agencies to meet the demands of the students and children of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit ancestry in their pursuit of academic and sport excellence, cultural revival and learning, and the bridging of cultural gaps in all areas.

We have people with the knowledge, skills and commitment to execute the necessary planning of such programs; if they come from the community, the time to utilize them can never be better.

What has this project added to our knowledge of the issue of communication and well-being in the Blood culture?

One elder stated, “White people, they are going too fast with our lives, that’s why today it’s that way.” On the other hand, Bibby (2001) suggests, “I don’t know about you, but one of the things I like about life is that things never stay the same. They keep changing.” He further adds, “Because life and the people and things in it are constantly changing we are not given the option of living in the past. The set keeps changing, and so must we. Change keeps life fresh” (323-324). These are contrasting beliefs; however, the situation of the Blood people has changed drastically over the years, and so has the way in which cultural knowledge is transmitted. Perhaps the term ‘modern traditional’ (Ch. 2), can be used here to bridge what this one elder says, and what this one author writes.

Modern Traditional is defined in this thesis as a life-world in which the teachings of elders are still respected, but by people who also have occupations, drive vehicles (whether luxurious or not), engage in modern political processes, and who can afford (and value) material possessions. Perhaps the key is not to stop change, but to find a way to control and direct change, and to maintain continuity. Old forms of intergenerational communication no longer work. New forms will not take place unless they are researched, planned, and decided on consciously.

In my experience as both a researcher and participant in the culture, communication with elders has been limited, but not limiting. I remember the times when my grandfather (Mokakin) would come into my 4th grade classroom along with another elder, and tell stories; old stories. I felt so privileged; important. There was my grandfather, telling stories. These stories were not told in Blackfoot; still, the elders were sharing their recollections of knowledge transmitted to them, most likely from their grandparents, and that knowledge was from their grandparents in turn. A chain for the continuation of tradition could be developed, even by just sharing stories from long ago for the youth to listen to once, maybe twice a week in school. This repetition could do wonders for their identity, esteem and cultural knowledge. Feeling connected to something, someone; connected to your ancestors and your heritage: is this not what other minority groups are striving for; the Chinese, Japanese, Germans, Ukrainians, Polish, etc? Keeping in mind that I was already in school, when the elders came to talk, perhaps the best programs will be the ones that reach kids where they are; rather than asking them to make a commitment “after hours”, when there are so many competing temptations—sports, school functions, peers, etc. On the other hand, we must bear in mind that some young people preferred programs out-of-school, and we may want to explore further why.

What will work? Maybe talking to young people, constantly; reinforcing rules in the home, constantly; involving ourselves in their daily activities constantly (Elders A & E, 2003); and realizing that our worrying may not change or influence them (Bibby, 2001: 324). However, young people will feel special and important, and of worth because someone is taking the time and energy to listen to what they may say and what they may dream of. It is never too late; we must start somewhere and at some point. All the statistics of today and what the elders suggest and tell us give us our answer: today. Today we will start.

The next section will discuss some specific recommendations for renewing intergenerational communication.

Today, there is a great deal of talk about the *Aboriginal Healing Foundation*⁴⁶, but that is not enough. We can speak of the federal government funding for reserves and all of its members with the intention of program development or even 'doing away' with reserves altogether⁴⁷, that is not enough. What will be enough? When the young people of today acknowledge it is *their resiliency*⁴⁸ and their willingness to take an active role in fostering communication and ties with elders, and learning their history and heritage; that will make the changes in all facets of First Nations lives. For now, the responsibility rests on the parents, grandparents, elders, administrators, politicians and all levels of government, to develop and implement programs so that the children of today have a tomorrow; one that is bright and positive and full of opportunities and choices.

What recommendations can be made based on the research concerning:

1) Further Research

I would like to explore areas of specific concern to youth: health, sports, family life, how they use their time, what their actual social contacts are, what forms of transportation they have access to, and others. Before we can actually develop and implement programs, we need some degree of knowledge to 'understand'

⁴⁶ Aboriginal Healing Foundation – Their mission is to encourage and support Aboriginal people in their process of 'healing' from physical and sexual abuse stemming from residential schools in Canada. Source: www.ahf.ca

⁴⁷ Lethbridge Herald, April 20, 2004. Article titled, "Same old song and dance", by Gerald Gauthier.

⁴⁸ Resiliency – The ability to bounce back from adversity; applied to both communities and individuals. See Kulig, J. C. (1999), "Sensing collectivity and building skills: Rural communities and community resiliency." In W. Ramp, J. Kulig, I. Townshend, & V. McGowan, *Health in rural settings: Contexts for action*. Lethbridge, AB: University of Lethbridge Printing Services.

the dynamics specific to the lives of young Native people. We also need to examine what young people know of their history, and what specifically they would like to know, and why. The youth all showed a general interest in learning of the Blood history. They all showed interest in communicating with elders. The *desire* is there. However, accommodating the elders is a big concern for this to occur. Therefore, more research is needed on elders' access to transportation; more research also needed on the extent to which elders' perspectives have been influenced by the residential school experience. We also need to look at what sources of accurate (and inaccurate) knowledge of their culture that urban native young people have today; we have to look at what they think they know and what they actually know—what things they see accurately, and what things they romanticize. The elders showed great interest in teaching, in some way, their cultural knowledge. They did feel that times have inevitably changed, but they still feel obligated to transmit their knowledge, if only once or twice a week, formal or informal. Let's listen to what the young people want; let's utilize the elders; let's begin today.

To do this research, future researchers need to take heed of protocols for conducting research with elders (or Indigenous people more generally):

- Researchers must respect community definitions of issues, topics, etc., while comparing them critically to academic terms and definitions, and to definitions used in other cultural contexts (for example, definitions of “elders”; also definitions of “respect” in academic research ethics vs. definitions of “respect” in traditional communities).
- Some elders may have problems with signing forms due to bad experiences with what happened historically when Native people signed “official” documents.

- Elders need to be approached with respect—for example, with small gifts.
- Researchers need to respect community networks: who knows who; and community knowledge of who is a good informant and who is not (and researchers must understand how this might sometimes conflict with confidentiality requirements, and be prepared to handle that diplomatically without either breaking research ethics or the ethics of the community).
- Researchers must allow themselves to be “guided” by elders in ways that aren’t immediately clear.
- Researchers must avoid appearing “rude” by asking too many direct questions or trying to “get to the point” too quickly.

2) Community enhancement of contacts between elders and youth

Programming for community enhancement of contacts between elders and youth involve ‘all’ people of the Blood Tribe, and specifically parents as a bridge between the two groups. We need educators, administrators, professionals, politicians, parents, and the like to assist in the changes that are needed. There are programs operating in other First Nations communities that could serve as models. With commitment, knowledge, resources and hard work, we can develop similar programs here, in this area. These programs can be utilized for First Nations populations, and also for the non-Native majority, thus increasing cross-cultural awareness.

Such programs need specific elements for success, especially ones intended to foster and assist elder-youth communication and interaction. Conducting and analyzing further research is imperative, as mentioned above. The involvement

of elders, community members, youth, and educated members of the Blood Tribe is also essential in the initial stages. Because this type of program would benefit the whole community, active participation throughout all stages is needed. Further, elders and youth need non-threatening places and ways to work through misperceptions, resentments, intimidation and other barriers to communication. Finally, program developers might want to take account of the elders' emphasis on prayer, and the young people's need for personal support. Perhaps a program as simple as prayer partnering, prayer circles, or prayer chains might serve to break down barriers and aid in cultural transmission at the same time as it fosters well-being. Another necessity would be a common place to house activities. This place obviously needs to be funded on an on-going basis, not just for start-up by an agency or financial granting body, which can ensure that specific requirements and objectives are met. Or, maybe several agencies would agree to fund this program equally.

The following are some examples of programs that have been successful elsewhere:

The *Indigenous Peoples Institute* (Sante Fe, NM) runs a program for learning (including reading, writing and speaking) of the indigenous language, along with attaining resources to operate language programs. They receive grants, endowments, and assistance from institutions, community agencies, families, individuals and fundraising. Researchers and tribal leaders need to read about, visit, exchange ideas with and support institutes that are preserving their languages and ultimately, their cultures. They are active participants in such revitalizing and preserving.

Intergenerational communication is the focus of the *Illinois Intergenerational Initiative*, which proposed the involvement of older adults in education as tutors, mentors and sharers of their life experiences. This is what the interview

participants in my research, youth and elders, declared in their interviews. They want to interact, they want to communicate, they want to receive the benefits of this communication, which is increased self-esteem based on increased awareness of cultural history.

In addition to the above-mentioned programs, the *Namadji Youth and Elders Project* has reported similar findings to this research project as mentioned earlier in this thesis. This project was both a community-based and research-driven project, and was developed from comments made by Indian elders over time and in talking circles at public forums sponsored by the American Indian Policy Center. It had four phases:

- 1st Phase: Interviewing Indian Youth—two social service agencies who served the Indian community introduced the interviewer to the youth. Six youth (11-17) were interviewed; interviews last approximately 30 minutes to an hour and a half;
- 2nd Phase: Interviewing Indian Elders—elders were interviewed at an American Indian-based residential facility for elders, and through a social service agency serving Indian families. Referrals to elders who were recognized community leaders were also utilized. Six elders (53-83) were interviewed; length of interview ranged depending on the elder's interest;
- 3rd Phase: Dinner and Informal Focus-group—the intention of this phase was to bring youth and elders together. Five elders attended, however, none of the youth did. It was possible that transportation, time conflicts, work schedules and other practical issues prevented youth from attending. The failure to bring elders and youth together in common discussion may be an unfortunate demonstration of the generation gap.

- 4th Phase: Indian Elders' Comments—while not originally meant to be included, comments from Indian elders from a nearby reservation during a talking circle concerning Indian family preservation were incorporated. In addition, comments by other elders during discussions, talking circles or public forums were included.

Those involved in the project reasoned that they must begin to address the growing distance between the young and the elderly. “Historically and culturally, communication between young people and elders was essential and significant for the preservation of the language and culture” (Namadji Project Report: 1).

All these types of programs could assist in developing community resiliency (as defined by Kulig, 1999: 223-224) in creative, innovative, culturally specific, historically sensitive and educationally based ways, uniting learning as a whole, not as specific, separate parts. This approach treats learning as an exercise in personal and community resiliency, not as simple gaining of technical or academic skills.

3) Why this should be done

We might also ask the opposite, “Why shouldn’t all this be done?” From the social statistics brought forward in this thesis, as in constant news reports, we can see that sometimes, we (and I add myself as member of the Blood culture) seem to be faced with two scenarios, the bad or the worse. It does appear that many Native people are now attaining advanced academic credentials, beyond a basic college or university degree (for example, medical or law professions). These numbers are still minute, however. For every upward step that one First Nations person takes, we must work against two, three or four downward steps taken by others, to somehow, some way, change the general direction ‘upwards’. Given that youth do appear to want to interact with elders on a regular basis, and that

the elders are ready and willing to share their knowledge, provided they have a real and practical opportunity in today's society to do so, we may see just that. We may see the steps leading upward to a brighter, healthier, and lasting future.

Do we want the headlines of today, or do we want tomorrow's headlines to read:

“Blood youth debuts in his first NHL game”

“Medical/Research scholarship awarded to Blood youth to study Cancer”

“Blood youth: Miss Indian World”

“Football scholarship awarded to Blood youth”

“Blood youth says no to drugs & alcohol”

I vote yes to all of the above. I vote yes to going the extra mile for our future, the children. I vote yes to searching and researching cultural heritage. I vote yes to all children experiencing the upward journey.

Current statistics released by Statistics Canada, point in a positive direction, as discussed in recent news articles. One such article (*Lethbridge Herald*, July 10, 2004: A8), notes, “Aboriginal children under 15 who play sports and spend time with elders are more likely to do better in school, suggests a new Statistics Canada report on kids who live off reserve.” The report summarizes the results of the Aboriginal Peoples Survey of 117,000 people conducted between September 2001 and June 2002, including 41,000 children under the age of 15. It provides evidence to support a basic premise of this thesis: that intergenerational

communication helps build healthy communities and helps provide a positive future for off-reserve youth.

Final Thoughts

Realizing this project has come to an end (not *the* end, just at an end), I also realize that I've traveled a precious and educational road. It may have taken a few more months than anticipated; however, I did not think for one second to quit or hand in the towel. My children are blessings, gifts from Creator, I want them to be in the group of the 'upward journey', the ones who go against the grain of the present situation, the ones who challenge any and every difficulty.

As the 2004 Summer Olympics in Athens Greece are televised, I am reminded of one of my most precious memories, as a young Blood Tribe member, as I watched the 1984 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles, California. I witnessed on TV, and so did millions of others, the presenting of the Gold Medal to Alwyn Morris, a First Nations athlete from Kanawake Reserve. As he stood on the top podium, with his gold medal dangling around his neck, in his hand, he held high an eagle feather,

“If you have it in you to dream, you have it in you to succeed”.

My dream, for all First Nations youth is to hold high your eagle feather, in reverence to all our ancestors, to our culture, to our future. May you all succeed in your dreams; walk with dignity; and know that change can be good.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent Form

**Sociology Department
University of Lethbridge**

“Intergenerational Communication and Well-being in Aboriginal Life”

Investigator:
Terri-Lynn Fox, BA

Purpose: To explore and examine the current and past methods of intergenerational communication between elders and young people of the Blood Tribe. To also gather data in relation to ideas and practices relating to well-being in Aboriginal life; to acquire knowledge of specific values, practices and beliefs from the Aboriginal culture; and to examine how these practices/beliefs have changed over time; why they have changed and ways in which they can be restored or adapted. To gain an understanding of these issues for all involved: the respondents, the community of the Blood Tribe and the researcher.

Study Procedures: As a study participant you will be interviewed by the researcher about Aboriginal life. The researcher will ask specific questions pertaining to the topic. There is no set time limit for this interview, although an estimated time of 1 hr is anticipated.

Confidentiality/Anonymity: Information gathered from this study will be used only for the purpose of the thesis for a Master of Arts degree. All participants will be acknowledged in the final paper, where applicable. If you wish to remain anonymous, please indicate so below. Publishing of results may result, however this will not affect anonymity. If you wish a copy of the interview tape or return of all interview data when research is completed, please indicate so below.

Contact: If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study or the interview, please contact me, Terri-Lynn Fox at 331-4041 or Dr. William Ramp at 329-2347. Questions of a more general nature may be addressed to the Office of Research Services, University of Lethbridge at 329-2747.

Consent: I understand that participation in this study is completely voluntary. I have the option to withdraw from this study at any time, without risking any adverse effects. I will not be penalized in any way for refusing to participate or for withdrawing from this study. I have the right to refuse the taping or photographing of any culturally sensitive material. I have the right to review a tape of the interview and to request in writing specific measures to protect confidentiality and cultural sensitivity. I have read and understood the Informed Consent Form pertaining to the Purposes and Procedures of this study. I have received a copy of this consent form, and have kept it for my records. I understand that my anonymity and confidentiality at all times will be protected, if so indicated. Study results will be used for educational purposes only.

I, the undersigned, consent to participate in this study.

_____ Subject Signature	_____ Date
_____ Researcher Signature	_____ Date

- I wish to remain anonymous – circle one: YES NO
- I wish to receive a copy of the interview tape – circle one: YES NO
- I wish the return of all interview data when research is complete – circle one: YES NO

Appendix B

Elder interview questions

1. Do you see communication between generations of Blood Tribe members as having been hindered or tarnished? If so, how?
2. What opportunities for communication do you know of that presently exist between elders and young people (specifically with reference to healthy life-paths)? What kinds of opportunities would you like to see developed?
3. What models exist for this communication to occur?
4. What is an elder? Who is an elder? What do you see as the role of an elder traditionally? Today? What are the differences between the role of an elder in the past, and today?
5. What was the role of young people traditionally? Who taught them? How were they taught? How is it different today? Why?
6. How do you think the role of elders has been affected by the fact that many of today's elders went to residential schools as children?
7. What makes it hard for you today to fulfill the role of elder?
8. What makes it hard for you today to communicate with young people? Or them to you? What makes it easier for you to communicate with young people?
9. What are the occasions on which elders and young people tend to get together today?
10. Do you think elders do/don't understand youth today? Why/why not?
11. Do you think young people do/don't understand elders today? Why/why not?
12. If there were one thing you could tell a young person today, what would it be?
13. What specific aspects of healing and well-being do you think need to be identified more accurately or strengthened? Why?
14. What strategies in communicating to, teaching and advising children and adolescents have worked, or do you think might work, in aboriginal communities struggling to recover from the residential school experience?
15. How is healing defined in the Blood culture?

16. In terms of healing/well-being, are there specific elements that need to be identified or strengthened? What are they? To what degree?
17. What pathways/strategies currently exist relating to intergenerational communication and have these remained constant in the Blood culture? If so, how? If not, why not?
18. Is there any question I am not asking, that you think I should ask?

Do you have questions for me?

Appendix C

Youth Interview Questions

1. Do you see communication between generations of Blood Tribe members as having been hindered or tarnished? If so, how?
2. What models or programs for the opportunity to communicate presently exist between elders and young people (specifically with reference to healthy life-paths)? What kinds of opportunities would you like to see developed? Are these models from the Blood culture?
3. What is an elder? Who is an elder? What do you see as the role of an elder traditionally? Today? What are the differences between the role of an elder in the past, and today?
4. How do you think the role of elders has been affected by the fact that many of today's elders went to residential schools as children?
5. * Would you like to talk to or hear from elders more? Why/why not? About what kinds of things? What does this communication do for you?
6. * What makes it difficult for you to communicate with elders? What makes it easier? What would you like to learn from elders? Why?
7. What are the occasions on which elders and young people tend to get together today?
8. Do you think elders do/don't understand youth today? Why/why not? Do you think young people do/don't understand elders today? Why/why not?
9. * If there was one thing you could ask an elder to advise, teach, or do for you, what would it be?
10. How do you think healing is defined in aboriginal cultural settings (and more specifically, how would the concepts of physical, social and spiritual healing be linked within such a perspective)?
11. What specific aspects of healing and well-being do you think need to be identified more accurately or strengthened? Why?
12. What strategies for intergenerational communication work in the Blood culture? How do these strategies assist in communicating to, teaching and advising children and adolescents struggling to recover from the residential school experience?

13. How are the medicine wheel and sacred rituals used or practiced today? How were they used prior to the introduction of residential schools? Prior to colonization?
14. Is there any question I am not asking, that you think I should ask?
 - Do you have questions for me?