Assignment 4: Applied Focus – Generating a Proposal

Considering Culture and Informed Consent with Aboriginal Clients:
A Manual for Mental Health Service Providers

Student name: Danica Lee

CAAP 6617: Research and Program Evaluation
For: Dr. Noëlla Piquette

University of Lethbridge
Master of Counselling Program

Submission date: December 12, 2014
Considering Culture and Informed Consent with Aboriginal Clients: 
A Manual for Mental Health Service Providers

Introduction

Aboriginal people in Canada have unique cultures, traditions, languages, and customs. Due to powerful ongoing impacts of colonization, some of these traditional ways have been lost, but many of these practices are resurfacing as Aboriginal people are reconnecting to their cultures. Healing is beginning to happen and families are reconnecting to culture. Wab Kinew shared the story of the 8th Fire, an Anishinaabe prophecy that explains that we are now in a time when the Aboriginal people and the settler community need to come together and build a new relationship with one another based on justice and harmony (Hunka, 2013). Counselling practices need to reflect this new relationship and the resurgence of traditional ways is imperative to the well-being of Aboriginal peoples seeking this type of healing. This healing cannot happen without practices in place to ensure the safety of Aboriginal clients.

Due to our oppressive history and relationships with Aboriginal peoples in Canada, it is important to remember what has happened in order to help clients empower themselves to make informed decisions about their mental health. Many historical injustices have been imposed upon Aboriginal people without consultation or an informed process. These realities must be acknowledged in the realm of counselling as we have ethical responsibilities to inform our clients for consent for services provided. The Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) Code of Ethics describes the ethical standards for informed consent under Principle I: Respect for the Dignity of Persons (Sinclair & Pettifor, 2001). Ethical standard I.23 in the CPA Code of Ethics reads:
Provide, in obtaining informed consent, as much information as reasonable or prudent persons would want to know before making a decision or consenting to the activity. The psychologist would relay this information in language that the persons understand (including providing translation into another language, if necessary) and would take whatever reasonable steps are needed to ensure that the information was, in fact, understood. (Sinclair & Pettifor, 2001, p. 51)

Counsellors wanting to work with Aboriginal clients in a healthy way need to ensure that the CPA Code of Ethics is being followed in terms of informed consent. This is amplified by the fact that Aboriginal peoples have a long history of not being informed. What does it mean to relay information in a language understood by the client? Language can mean much more than a spoken or written language. How is this information relayed in a cultural language understood by the client? This project aims to answer this question.

The proposal being put forward in this paper is for an exploration of culturally meaningful informing for consent processes when working with Aboriginal clients in both counselling and research settings. This will be accomplished by a literature review on historical and current experiences for Aboriginal peoples in Canada; traditional healing and helping practices; standards of practice for informed consent; counselling considerations for working with Aboriginal clients; and best practice guidelines and models for informing Indigenous clients or research participants about their rights. In order to distribute this knowledge to the community, a manual will be developed to highlight best practice guidelines for mental health practitioners, researchers, teachers, or anyone interested in working with Aboriginal clients in a good way. The goal of this project is to answer the following research questions: What elements of Canada’s
relationship with Aboriginal people needs to be acknowledged when working alongside Aboriginal clients and what are culturally meaningful ways to inform Aboriginal clients or participants for consent for counselling services or to engage in research projects?

For the purpose of this proposal, the term “Aboriginal” will be inclusive of First Nations (status and non-status), Métis, and Inuit people. At times the word “Indigenous” may be used instead of Aboriginal as some scholars and/or Aboriginal people choose to use this term to self-identify. The word “Native” may also be used throughout this paper to respect the self-identification of the author choosing to use the term or the year in which an article may have been written.

**Literature Review**

This project will explore meaningful counselling practices for Aboriginal clients, particularly with regards to informing clients for consent. Literature will be reviewed across a span of topics pertaining to Aboriginal clients including the historical and current experiences of Aboriginal peoples in Canada, traditional healing and helping practices, meaningful counselling techniques, and issues of informed consent. The literature review provided in this proposal is merely a glimpse into the research available on the topics and will serve as a base for the project. The project itself will explore each of the sections in much more detail. This literature review is based on two preliminary literature reviews completed in earlier assignments for CAAP 6617 and the sections “Traditional Healing Practices” and “Counselling Aboriginal Clients” will be based on this work previously prepared by Lee (2014).

**Experiences of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada**
In order to demonstrate complete empathy for one’s situation, we must have at least a basic understanding of where one comes from. When working with Aboriginal clients, acknowledging historical impacts is paramount as many of these experiences are still felt today as ongoing effects of colonization. Nuttgens and Campbell (2010) wrote “the historical treatment of First Nations people is one such cultural commonality that must be understood if we are to sensitively counsel First Nations clientele” (p.119). Although there are many events that have in influenced the lives of Aboriginal people in Canada, this proposal will briefly discuss the Indian Act, residential schools, and the Sixties Scoop.

**The Indian Act.** Without minimizing the ongoing impacts of initial contact with Europeans such as disease, war, and religion, the Indian Act contributes to many of the experiences of Aboriginal people, particularly First Nations, in Canada today. The Indian Act, first passed in 1876, defined First Nations people as wards of the government and places all First Nations people under this federal legislation (Nuttgens & Campbell, 2010). One of the main goals of the Indian Act was the assimilation of all First Nations people, the so-called “savages”, to western cultures (Gehl, 2000). Under this Act, First Nations peoples had different rights, or lack of rights, from all other Canadians (Nuttgens & Campbell, 2010). Essentially this Act determines who is and who is not an “Indian” (Gehl, 2000).

This Act is responsible for the loss of cultural identities for many of our Aboriginal peoples. The Act made it illegal for First Nations peoples to participate in cultural ceremonies or activities such as the potlatch or sun dance (Kirmayer, Simpson, & Cargo, 2003). This Act also created a pass system so that First Nations peoples would
have to obtain a pass from an Indian agent in order to leave the reserve (Kirmayer et al, 2003). Furthermore, the Indian Act created “social categories of identity” including “status” and “non-status” Indians by way of imposing policies concerning mandatory reasons for which one must relinquish one’s “status” (Kirmayer et al, 2003). One example of how this was done was that all First Nations women who married non-First Nations men (or non-status First Nations men) would automatically lose their Indian status and membership to their bands (Kirmayer et al, 2003). Two of the many other ways to “lose status” were if one required the support of a lawyer or if one wanted to get a higher level education. Many First Nations people lost their status due to the process of enfranchisement which was a procedure in which people would essential “give up” their Indian status to gain full Canadian citizenship (Brownlie, 2006). In exchange for relinquishing status, people were given a share of their band’s funds in lieu of treaty rights (Brownlie, 2006).

Regardless of the fact that the Indian Act was established well over a century ago, many of its impacts are still felt today (Kirmayer et al, 2003). Many First Nations people today are ineligible for Indian status because of the discriminatory policies within the Act and the result of this is that many people are no longer entitled to the few benefits of being a status Indian. More important than the title of being status or non-status is the impact of being disconnected from the community and loss of culture due to this Act.

Residential schools. In addition to the Indian Act, many Aboriginal peoples in Canada have been affected by the legacies of residential schools. Residential schools were church-run and government-funded schools with the goal of separating children
from their families to assimilate Aboriginal people into Euro-centric culture by destroying connections to culture, language, spirituality, family systems, and the land (Heilbron & Guttman, 2000; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2014) or to “drive the Indianness out of them” (Blue, Darou, & Ruano, 2010, p. 266). For more than 100 years, Aboriginal children across Canada were taken from their families and forced to go to residential schools (Nuttgens & Campbell, 2010; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2014). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) (2014) reported that over 150,000 Aboriginal children were taken from their families and forced to attend these schools. The last residential school closed in the mid-1990s and this means that many families are still feeling the ongoing effects of the residential schools to this day (TRC, 2014).

Because of the ongoing effects and intergenerational traumas caused by the residential schools, many families are still on their healing journeys today. Children were separated from their communities, generations of shared knowledge was lost, unresolved trauma was passed on from generation to generation, children were raised without parents or role models, Aboriginal children were forced to adopt non-Aboriginal culture, and many children experienced various forms of abuse in the schools (Blue et al, 2010; Heilbron & Guttman, 2000; Kirmayer et al, 2003; TRC, 2014). All of these experiences are important for counsellors to be aware of because of the effects felt today. Not only are families and communities still dealing with the impacts of residential school, but this is another example of how Aboriginal people have not been provided with adequate information to make informed decisions for themselves or their families. Although families did not have a choice about whether or not to send their child to
residential school, many families were told that the residential schools would provide an opportunity for their children to learn and become respected citizens of Canada. The real intention behind the schools was not shared or discussed openly.

**Sixties Scoop.** Aboriginal peoples in Canada have long experienced many other oppressive practices, policies, and systems. Following the residential schools, many Aboriginal children were taken from their families and placed in foster care or were adopted to non-Aboriginal families (Kirmayer et al, 2003). This is known as the “Sixties Scoop”; however, to this day Aboriginal children are hugely overrepresented in the child welfare system across Canada. Many children were apprehended from their families for discriminatory reasons without appropriate consultation with families or communities (Kirmayer et al, 2003) and families were judged based on what a “good parent” is by dominant culture standards without consideration for traditional child rearing practices or family structures (Hart, 2002). The ultimate effect of oppressive child welfare policies on Aboriginal people is further cultural disconnection.

**Traditional Healing Practices**

Although Aboriginal peoples in Canada have experienced many oppressive policies and traumatic events due to colonization, traditional healing and helping practices are alive today. Kirmayer et al (2003) stated that traditional ways are central to efforts made to confront the legacies of these historical practices and injustices. Counsellors must acknowledge these traditional ways as legitimate and valuable practices by honouring the strength and power behind culture and beliefs of Aboriginal clients (Heilbron & Guttman, 2000; Kirmayer et al, 2003). Traditional practices differ between nations across Canada; however, some examples of traditional practices are
healing circles, smudging, community and family involvement, presence of Elders, and viewing health in a holistic way such as through the teachings of the Medicine Wheel.

The healing circle has been used for hundreds of years in different contexts in Aboriginal communities. The healing circle can be used to provide opportunities to address many issues such as abuse (Heilbron & Guttman, 2000), family or relationship issues (Hart, 2002), and addictions (Blue et al, 2010; Health Canada, 1998) or to provide a space for ceremony, marriages, and planning sessions (Hart, 2002). Healing or talking circles allow for participants to create their own protocols around confidentiality and allow for respectful participation by honouring the choice to “pass” if one does not feel like sharing (Blue et al, 2010). These circles allow for participants to gather strength and support from one another (Heilbron & Guttman, 2000).

For some, the healing circle can be a ceremonial experience. One example of another ceremony and traditional practice is smudging. Not all nations across Canada smudge and for those that do, there are different plants used (such as sweetgrass, cedar, sage, or juniper) that are important to the individual nations. Smudging is a purification process that involves the cleansing of one’s mind, body, and spirit (Heilbron & Guttman, 2000). This process can be very meditative for some people and allows for the participant’s thoughts to be purified. Some people believe that by smudging we can communicate with our ancestors (Blue et al, 2010). For others, smudging is a ceremony that is done in privacy and other Aboriginal people may not smudge at all as it is a very personal choice.

In addition to ceremonies, the involvement of one’s family and community is an essential healing practice in itself. The concept of “personhood” in traditional ways is
different from European inspired notions of individualism (Kirmayer et al, 2003). In traditional ways, a person is defined by their web of relationships that includes extended family, community, the land, the spirit world, and ancestors (Kirmayer et al, 2003). Extended family has been identified as an important consideration when working with Aboriginal clients as the success of an individual relies on the strength of one’s supportive network (McCormick, 2007). Connection to role models such as family or community members is also an important element of honouring traditional ways as role models can demonstrate ways of being and help those in need to find purpose and understanding (Poonwassie & Charter, 2001). Many families have family stories which demonstrate important strengths such as overcoming addictions, defending family honour, or loss of identity (McCabe, 2008) and the sharing of these family stories is a traditional healing practice. This supportive network of extended family, community, and role models also includes Elders in the community. Blue et al (2010) wrote that “Elders have various roles, among them that of guiding agents through a journey of self-discovery and self-actualization” (p. 277). In traditional ways, Elders do not provide advice; however, they guide us to seek our own answers.

In trying to find answers, many traditional people tend to view the path to healing as a balanced path. For some cultures, this takes place in the form of the Medicine Wheel. The Medicine Wheel is a cultural practice that promotes balance between physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual sense of self and is important to some Aboriginal clients in the realm of counselling (McCabe, 2008; McCormick, 1996; Poonwassie & Charter, 2001). Each sense of self is equal in the larger whole and reinforces that in order to obtain harmony, everything is interconnected (McCormick,
CONSIDERING CULTURE AND INFORMED CONSENT

1996). The Medicine Wheel approach allows counsellors to explore well-being by this holistic sense promoting balance. McCabe (2008) shared that the Medicine Wheel is also a ceremony when used in a sweat or a sharing circle and promotes cultural teachings or codes for living. Not all nations traditionally used the Medicine Wheel approach so it is always important to not make assumptions about one’s traditional practices.

McCormick (1996) shared that many traditional ceremonies can promote the healing process in counselling work. Some of these ceremonies can be shared and talked about, while others remain private. Participation in ceremony or traditional healing practices is a personal choice as some Aboriginal people do not accept the validity of practicing certain ceremonies (Poonwassie & Charter, 2001) or their teachings may be different from another nation. It is important to note that many Aboriginal people feel different about each of the issues mentioned above. Some people are returning to more traditional worldviews and other people are not culturally connected and have adopted more mainstream views. Practitioners must be aware of the diversity amongst clients and honour these differences as each person will have a different healing journey.

Counselling Aboriginal Clients

A therapeutic relationship that begins without assumptions or expectations is important when working with Aboriginal clients. Nuttgens and Campbell (2010) emphasized the fact that it is necessary to assess the client’s degree of acculturation before making assumptions about appropriate healing practices. Brady (1995) identified “rapport with professional staff and sense of belonging” (p. 19) as important factors
necessary for Indigenous peoples to have successful experiences in treatment and counselling. There are certain ways of being, or “cultural imperatives”, that are important to consider and model when working with some Aboriginal clients such as: sharing, non-competitiveness, non-interference, acceptance of responsibility, and acknowledgement of wisdom shared with us (Poonwassie & Charter, 2001). McCormick (1996) described that another important value involves the goal of connecting. This can mean connection to the world, to the self, or to each other in the case of a therapeutic alliance (McCormick, 1996). Shepard, O’Neill, and Guenette (2006) emphasized the importance of acknowledging a client’s way of being to build trust and respect within the therapeutic alliance.

Because community has been identified as an important traditional healing practice for many Aboriginal people, Fan (2007) identified that in order to work successfully with Aboriginal clients, one must build a trusting relationship with the community. As counsellors, it is vital that we build relationships with community role models and leaders and participate in community events when it is appropriate and when invited (Shepard, O’Neill, & Guenette, 2006). Understanding Aboriginal worldviews, such as all living things being equal and having their own spirits or a role in interconnection for the purpose of survival of all, is important when learning about where a client is coming from (Poonwassie & Charter, 2001). There are many ways to offer counselling from a cultural perspective, but it is most important that counsellors first and foremost present themselves in respectful ways. Poonwassie and Charter (2001) shared that it is important to be aware of social determinants of health, culture and language differences, the importance of cultural identity and communication style.
Finally, counsellors must be self-aware as well as culturally aware. Nuttgens and Campbell (2010) defined self-awareness in the field of counselling as the “ability to know ourselves as culturally embedded beings” (p. 116). The ways in which we are embedded in our own cultures influences our perceptions of others and this results in how we treat others (Nuttgens & Campbell, 2010). Counsellors must acknowledge their own privileges in order to avoid unintentional racism by imposing ethnocentric judgments on clients from different cultures (Nuttgens & Campbell, 2010). It has been suggested that mental illness can be intertwined with the effects of racism and poverty as a result of historical or current injustices experienced by Aboriginal people (Nuttgens & Campbell, 2010). Being self-aware and also aware of the experiences of our clients will allow counsellors to practice in a more effective way.

Issues of Informed Consent

Because many of the historical issues discussed above involve a level of deception and secrecy which resulted in intergenerational traumas for Aboriginal peoples, it is especially important to ensure that the process of informing clients for consent is thorough and culturally meaningful. McCormick (1998) shared that clients and counsellors from different cultural backgrounds are likely to see the world in a different way therefore it is important to discuss ethical issues in a cultural context. Informed consent is important in many relationships in both counselling and in research and people from diverse cultures may have different requirements of what is needed for true informed consent. Counsellors, psychologists, and other mental health practitioners are required to follow practice standards for obtaining informed consent from clients.
Having strong ethical responsibilities with regards to informed consent is a foundation for ethical practice with Aboriginal clients.

**Standards for informed consent.** Before discussing cultural adaptations to informed consent in counselling Aboriginal clients, it is important to examine existing standards for informed consent processes currently practiced in the realm of counselling and psychology. Depending on which college, association, or governing body a therapist belongs to, there will be different standards of practice to follow for informed consent. The British Columbia Association of Clinical Counsellors (BCACC) (2010) stated that all counsellors must obtain informed consent before the client receives any counselling services and that consent must be continued throughout the counselling relationship. Informed consent is defined as providing the client with “sufficient information to fully understand the nature of the treatment being proposed” and this means that the counsellor must provide information about the purposes, risks/benefits, client’s rights, and confidentiality (BCACC, 2010, p. 1). Consent can be obtained through the written consent form, verbal consent, and implied consent with documentation in recorded notes (BCACC, 2010). Clients must also be provided with opportunities to ask questions about their concerns (BCACC, 2010).

The College of Alberta Psychologists (CAP) (2013) stated that informed consent must be obtained before providing any services to clients or before sharing client information. The informed consent process addresses similar items to the BCACC’s practice standards and includes: information about the purpose and nature of the activity, mutual responsibilities, limits to confidentiality, benefits and risks,
CONSIDERING CULTURE AND INFORMED CONSENT

consequences of non-action, rights to refuse or withdraw from treatment, period of time covered by consent, and information on how to rescind consent.

The standards of practice for informed consent outlined by these two bodies promote the safety of clients from all cultural backgrounds and walks of life; however, there are specific standards that suggest room for improvement when working with Aboriginal clients. The BCACC (2010) states:

Generally, the sort of information a counsellor must provide to a client before the client can give informed consent is information that a reasonable person in the client’s particular circumstances would require so as to understand the proposed services and make an informed decision. (p. 1)

This statement suggests that the counsellor must have an understanding of the client’s circumstances in order to provide the right information. For Aboriginal client’s, this may mean having an understanding of history and traditional practices. Furthermore, it is stated by the BCACC (2010) that “a counsellor has a duty to communicate with a client in a way that is appropriate to that client’s particular skills, ability and language” (p.2) and the CAP (2013) stated that “a psychologist shall provide information for informed consent in a language that the client can understand and ensure that the information is understood by the client” (p. 3). This statement encourages the questioning of a client's language. Could this mean a “cultural language”? If so, counsellors must be equipped with this knowledge. It is crucial to have standards of practice in place for informed consent; however, counsellors must ensure that these standards are meeting the needs of their individual clients.
Aboriginal peoples and research. Piquemal (2001) wrote about the importance of understanding what free and informed consent actually means in cross-cultural situations as people from different cultures from the researcher, or counsellor, may have different understandings and expectations. The process of informed consent is not a simple contract or an ethical process to “tick a box”; the process of informed consent involves ongoing negotiations and extensive discussion (McHugh & Kowalski, 2009; Piquemal, 2001). When working with Aboriginal clients or research participants, it must be acknowledged that client/participant concerns may be rooted in ongoing impacts of colonization (McHugh & Kowalski, 2009) and that best practices for informed consent must be considered on a case-by-case basis when working with clients/participants from marginalized groups (Marshall & Batten, 2003). Given the history of harm to Aboriginal peoples as explored earlier, it is essential to consider the collective context and root ethics in the community by respecting Indigenous practices (Baydala, Letendre, Ruttan, Worrell, Fletcher, Letendre, & Schramm, 2011).

Research can be a difficult topic to discuss in some Aboriginal communities because of past harm caused by unethical research practices. Many researchers have shared cultural models for working within Aboriginal communities in research settings. Perhaps one of the most prominent models is based on the work of Piquemal (2001) and the four main ethical recommendations for obtaining free and informed consent with Native American communities. The model aimed at putting forward protocols to mitigate the risk of researcher’s ignorance leading to physical, emotional, or spiritual harm to participants (Piquemal, 2001). The recommendations to add to existing protocols focused on negotiating responsibilities before seeking informed consent; ensuring that
conferred that consent is still being given on an ongoing process; and ensuring that the community is provided with the data (Piquemal, 2001). This cyclical process of informed consent allows for revision, ongoing opportunities for negotiation, and community input (Piquemal, 2001).

In sharing learning experiences from working with Aboriginal youth, McHugh and Kowalski (2009) confirm that the process of informed consent must involve constant dialogue throughout the research process from start to end. Marshall and Batten (2003) shared that cultural methods of informed consent are more fluid in nature thus requiring ongoing reexamination and redefinition. Requests for consent must be asked for at every step in a research process (Marshall & Batten, 2003). Obtaining informed consent in a culturally respectful way is usually a non-linear process and takes time for relationship building (Fletcher, Baydala, Letendre, Ruttan, Worrell, Letendre, & Schramm, 2012). Fletcher et al. (2012) gave an example of a cultural method of consent by explaining that they offered Elders a tobacco bundle and the Elder’s acceptance of the offering, along with their oral consent, was considered an acceptable form of consent in a particular research study. It was also shared that in working with Aboriginal families and children, one team of researchers visited each child’s home personally more than once to explain the research project, build relationships and trust, and obtain consent (Fletcher et al., 2012). In research involving children, researchers can respect cultural protocols by empowering children to take part in the process as well by signing assent forms created in an age appropriate way (Baydala et al., 2011). Baydala et al. (2011) described another cultural model for obtaining informed consent
that involved a community “campout” open to all community members to learn about the project or a community feast in order to begin the project in a way that respects cultural protocols. The above research suggests that there are some emerging practices for cultural ways to obtain informed consent from Aboriginal clients in research settings.

Aboriginal peoples and counseling. Although some scholars have been exploring ethical issues in counselling and research, there is little information specific to the informed consent process in counselling Aboriginal clients in Canada. McCormick (1998) wrote extensively about the ethics of counselling and researching with Aboriginal clients including: using interventions with Aboriginal clients that have not be researched with this sample group, cultural considerations with using standard assessments, and the importance of wellness frameworks that reflect Aboriginal worldviews. This article does not provide any information specific to obtaining informed consent in a respectful way. Many of the suggestions for cultural adaptations for informed consent in research settings are transferable to the field of counselling, but there are some additional issues to consider. One example of this is the counsellor’s ethical responsibility to report past or current child abuse. Heilbron and Guttman (2000) highlighted the importance of addressing issues of child abuse in a safe way with Aboriginal clients given the historical traumas that have taken place in some Aboriginal families due to the ongoing effects of colonization. This is one example of a situation that may require a culturally meaningful approach to informed consent when informing clients about the responsibility to report these experiences. After a preliminary review on the topic of informed consent in counselling settings with Aboriginal clients, it is clear that more work needs to be done in this area as research is limited.
Summary and Conclusion of Literature Review

Everything we do as Aboriginal peoples is linked to our histories. Our histories influence our lives today and our day-to-day experiences. Traumatic experiences such as oppressive policies in the Indian Act, residential schools, and the Sixties Scoop contribute to who we are as a people today. Many Aboriginal people have been working to heal from these experiences by reconnecting to traditional healing practices. Counsellors have a responsibility to support Aboriginal clients to heal in meaningful ways and with the help of appropriate interventions. The research described in this literature review highlighted important considerations for working with Aboriginal clients in a way that reflects cultural protocol for the purpose of developing a strong therapeutic alliance.

Many of these cultural considerations have also been discussed in the realm of research. Many researchers have shared examples of culturally safe informed consent processes when working with Aboriginal communities and much of this research was based on the foundational research completed by Piquemal (2001). The four pillars of the circular model for working with Native American participants presented by Piquemal (2001) provide a solid foundation for ethical practice and future research with more specific populations.

The topic of honouring culture in Aboriginal counselling relationships has been researched as well; however one specific area that was lacking sufficient research was in discussions around the process for informing clients for consent for counselling services. Many of these practices have been explored in informing for consent in research settings with Aboriginal communities, but there is a lack of research directly
exploring informed consent for Aboriginal clients in counselling settings. In an attempt to explore this gap in research, the proposed purpose of this project is to examine connections between important Aboriginal healing practices and informed consent in counselling relationships.

**Methodology**

This project will consist of an extensive literature review on the topics of historical and current issues experienced by Aboriginal peoples in Canada, traditional healing practices, meaningful counselling practices for Aboriginal clients, standards of practice for informed consent, and issues of informed consent in research and counselling situations. In addition to the literature review, a manual will be created to teach the importance of informed consent when working with Aboriginal clients or participants in counselling or research settings. The target audience for the manual will be counselling or social work students, teachers and student teachers, counsellors or social workers already working in the field, researchers interested in working with Aboriginal populations, and anyone interested in learning more about meaningful ways of working with Aboriginal clients. The intent behind the manual is to provide opportunities for those who are interested in working with Aboriginal clients in counselling or research settings to learn about useful information about Aboriginal peoples’ experiences, culturally relevant ways of working alongside Aboriginal clients, and the importance of obtaining truly informed consent.

The main part of this project and the starting point for the research will be an extensive literature review on the topics outlined in the brief literature review in this proposal. Because of the range of topics necessary to explore to complete the manual
in a more thorough way, four major areas will be reviewed as discussed above. Many
different databases will be accessed throughout the literature review. For the
counselling related topics, some of these data bases will include: PsycINFO, Sage
Journals Online, PsycARTICLES, JSTOR, Academic Search Complete via EBSCO,
threeSOURCE, ERIC via EBSCO, and Google Scholar. For topics on historical and
current issues impacting Aboriginal peoples, the following databases will be explored:
First Nations Periodical Index, JSTOR, Bibliography of Native North Americans via
ESBCO, Indigenous Studies Portal (iPortal), and Google Scholar.

The search for relevant articles will require the use of many different key words.
Because there are so many different words used to identify Aboriginal people in
Canada, the search will involve words including Aboriginal, Indigenous, Native, First
Nations, Inuit, and Métis. These words will be used with issues, experiences,
colonization, historical impacts, residential school, Indian Act, and societal issues when
reviewing literature on past experiences and current impacts. The various terms used to
identify Aboriginal people will be used with terms such as traditional practices, healing,
helping, counselling, mental health, and holistic well-being in order to locate research on
traditional helping and healing practices. Finally, in order to find relevant research on
the ethics of informed consent in counselling or research settings, all of the above terms
for Aboriginal peoples will be used in conjunction with terms such as informed consent,
research ethics, counselling ethics, counselling and rights, and client rights.

Following a search for articles through the various databases identified,
additional articles can be located by examining the reference lists of the found articles.
After the relevant articles are found through various methods mentioned, an extensive
literature review will be completed. Once this is completed, the information from the literature review will be used to create a manual for those interested in learning more about working with Aboriginal clients with a particular interest in ethics and counselling and/or research. This manual will be developed using Microsoft Word and will be created in a user-friendly and practical way. This information will be useful to both those working in the field already and those newly interested to the field in order to promote best practices for working alongside Aboriginal clients.

Although this is a big undertaking, careful consideration and effort to follow a timeline will make completing this project realistic and attainable. The initial work of the literature review will commence in January 2015 through April 2015. The first phase of the literature review will be to find relevant articles, carefully read the articles, and then integrate appropriate material in the review. From April 2015 to mid-June 2015, the manual will be created based on the information learned through the literature review process. Ideally, the preliminary draft for the entire project would be finished by mid-July 2015 to begin the editing stage. Edits would take place from mid-July 2015 throughout fall 2015 with a final draft available by December 2015. Once the project is completed, the final version will be available to share with the public.

Knowledge Transfer

The intention behind this literature review and the development of a manual is to share information with people working in the field of counselling, emerging counsellors, teachers, and anyone else working with Aboriginal clients or interested in learning more about the experiences of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. Heilbron and Guttman (2000) wrote that in order for non-Aboriginal counsellors to develop effective therapeutic
relationships with Aboriginal clients, they must accept the importance and legitimacy of traditional ways. Although this is a really important statement, there needs to be opportunities for non-Aboriginal service providers to gain this knowledge and increase their personal awareness. Speaking as a person who is Aboriginal but disconnected by generations from traditional teachings, it can be very difficult to gain this knowledge and understanding without having family or community members to guide the learning. This manual will provide an opportunity for people to access some of these teachings who may otherwise struggle to find the support.

The literature review will provide the information necessary to develop a user-friendly manual for practicing and emerging service providers. Many service providers and clinicians have very busy schedules and have limited time to conduct their own research when trying to find ways to support individual clients. This manual will be written in an accessible, succinct, and engaging way so that service providers can work through the material in their own way. Ultimately, the most important group to benefit from this project is Aboriginal peoples as the intent of the project is to ensure that culturally meaningful services are available to Aboriginal clients in the world of counselling. The bigger picture behind this project is to support service providers to better support Aboriginal clients. Having a therapist who is self-aware and aware of issues impacting Aboriginal peoples will support the development of a stronger therapeutic alliance.

The manual will be available for all to access through the University of Lethbridge library once it is completed, submitted, and approved. This will allow seekers of this knowledge to access the information through online databases. The manual will be
distributed electronically to anyone who is interested in the author’s network and beyond. One of the target audiences is the social work and counselling students at local community colleges. Requests are often made from professors seeking resources about counselling Aboriginal clients. This manual will provide a valuable perspective for this group.

Summary

More and more professionals are interested in learning more about appropriate counselling styles, techniques, and considerations when working with Aboriginal clients. This is a major step forward based on Canada’s oppressive history towards Aboriginal peoples. This movement forward requires Aboriginal scholars and mental health practitioners as well as non-Aboriginal allies to give back to the field of counselling by providing information on the topic to support the growth of the field in general. As an emerging counsellor, beginner researcher, and Aboriginal woman, this proposed project aims to contribute back to the field of counselling by raising awareness of culturally relevant issues surrounding the process of obtaining informed consent.

This proposal highlighted some of the prominent research on historical and current issues affecting Aboriginal people today including the Indian Act, residential schools, and the sixties scoop. Traditional ways of healing and helping were then discussed. Literature on healing circles, the use of ceremonies, and the importance of family and community was included. Current research on culturally relevant counselling practices was introduced and suggestions were made for respectful practice. The major themes involved focusing on therapeutic alliance, getting involved in community when appropriate, and being self-aware. Finally, the literature review included a discussion on
CONSIDERING CULTURE AND INFORMED CONSENT

cultural practices in research and counselling settings in the process of obtaining informed consent from Aboriginal clients. While there was research to support meaningful informed consent processes in research settings, there was minimal research available specific to counselling.

Counselling relationships begin right from the first interaction with clients. For some Aboriginal people who have experienced oppression as outlined in the literature review, the connection to the therapist could be affected by the delivery of important items such as the process of informed consent. Because of the ethical importance of ensuring that clients are informed before receiving services, it is essential that counsellors acknowledge cultural differences in this process. This paper proposes a project to address this gap in literature specific to counselling Aboriginal clients. The project will review items in this current literature review on a much deeper level and then a manual will be created to provide current and emerging mental health service providers with information in a user-friendly version to enhance their practice. This research will contribute to the field of counselling by offering ideas about informing Aboriginal clients for consent in a meaningful way and will contribute to our Aboriginal communities by advocating for culturally appropriate services.

**Personal Statement**

As this project is about acknowledging traditional ways and because I am trying to return to more traditional ways in my own life, I will begin this section with the practice of storytelling. This is a story of how the topic for this project came to be. My grandfather, James Bird of Peguis Nation, passed away in late winter 2014. I was devastated by the loss of my grandfather as he was the cultural connection for my
family to our Cree community. In a giveaway, I was gifted a piece of furniture that belonged to my grandfather and in one of the drawers I found a letter addressed to my grandfather from Indian and Northern Affairs mailed in the 1970s. This letter was written in response to a letter of inquiry my grandfather sent asking about whether or not he was still entitled to his hunting/fishing rights or housing rights after selling his status in the 1950s. Although the Indian Agent was kind in this reply mailed a year after my grandfather’s inquiry, he told my grandfather that he was no longer entitled to his rights upon being declared enfranchised. When I read this letter, I felt a second sense of grief for the loss of our rights as First Nations people. My family was reinstated our status as Indians under the Indian Act after Bill C-31 was passed in the 1980s; however, it became clear to me through this letter that my grandfather was not truly informed about what rights he was giving up through the process of enfranchisement.

Both my incredible love for my grandfather and my passion for social justice issues inspired me to consider a project aimed at exploring the importance of why informed consent is particularly important for Aboriginal clients. This intense passion will definitely been a benefit for this project moving forward because it will give me the energy and justification for doing this work in a good way. Although passion is an important aspect to research, I am also aware that this personal connection could be a barrier at times as well. I need to make sure that I am being completely objective throughout the process and that I am open to being proved wrong about certain issues. Another barrier is that there is not a huge amount of research specific to Aboriginal clients and informed consent in the realm of counselling. Because of this, I will expand
my project to also include proper informed consent in research with Aboriginal participants and communities.

With regards to my learning throughout this assignment and the previous assignments, I have learned that I do, in fact, enjoy research. I have always feared research to a certain extent, but I have learned ways in which research can be done in a good and empowering way for all involved. I have learned that research involves a certain level of creativity as well. I have also learned that research takes significant time, energy, and perseverance. At times the process can be frustrating or intimidating and the process may seem disorganized, but attention and hard work can bring the project into focus.

This experience has allowed me to think about what will be required in moving forward with my final project for the Master of Counselling program. First of all, I will need to be organized by following a timeline to complete the work. This will be a big project and it will take time to read all of the articles necessary to complete the literature review. I will need to strengthen my understanding of research methodology and build on my current knowledge level of research practices. A personal goal of mine will be to check in regularly with my supervisor and follow a mutually agreed upon plan in order to ensure that I meet the deadlines for completing this project. I will also need to make sure that I build in time for self-care while I am working on this project. Because of the highly personal connection to this work, I will need to make sure that I have support systems to access and that I try to live a balanced life while working through the project in order to stay healthy. In terms of strategies to help with the process of writing, I have decided that it is important in my process to take good notes while I am reading articles.
One of the learning moments I had during the qualitative research assignment was that I read some of the journal articles and assumed I would remember what ideas came from what articles. Due to the volume of articles included, I had to reread many of the articles to make sure I knew exactly where each idea came from. Because the literature review will be so extensive for this project, I will have to be diligent about taking notes and ensuring that I am keeping strong records of my work along the way. This project will be challenging in many respects, but I look forward to doing this work for myself, the counselling community, and for my family.
References


Lee, D. (2014). “Being curious is a cultural consideration”: A qualitative content analysis of interviews with Aboriginal service providers. (Unpublished paper). University of Lethbridge, Lethbridge AB.


CONSIDERING CULTURE AND INFORMED CONSENT


