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### Article abstract

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## Indigenous Youth Conflict Intervention: The Transformation of Butterflies

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### Preamble – A Snap Shot of the Aboriginal people of Canada

Indigenous peoples have been defined as traditional people, with attachments to land, cultures, and ways of life that have survived since time immemorial. They are descendants of the original inhabitants of a territory that was conquered and is now occupied by an alien and dominant culture (Burrowes, 1996; Warry, 2007, Westra, 2008). Aboriginal people are the Indigenous people of Canada. In Canada, there are three Aboriginal groups defined by the Canadian Constitution Act 1982: "Indians, Inuit, and Metis"<sup>1</sup> (Imai, Logan, & Stein, 1993, p. 5). It is important to note that Indian is a misnomer for the native peoples of America and Canada and many contemporary Aboriginal people find the term offensive – even though it still remains the term used in the

1 For further discussion on the subject of labels of Aboriginal people in Canada and their application see Kulchyski (2007), Warry (2007), Alfred (1999).

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### Abstract

The purpose of this article is to discuss the impacts of structural violence and its effects on Indigenous Peoples using Aboriginal People – The Indigenous Peoples of Canada, and the Canadian education system as the context for discussion.

Due to the root causes of conflict and the nature of violence in Aboriginal contexts being structural, working towards positive peace based on a concept of human security is the best approach to managing Aboriginal youth violence. This approach is conducive to building a culture of peace which is consistent with Indigenous traditions. Alternative methods of formal education should be considered in Aboriginal / Indigenous contexts. These methods should be grounded in the traditions of local Indigenous groups providing a safe space for rediscovery and identity negotiation between tradition and contemporary society.

The ability for Indigenous peoples to further their formal education has a profound impact on long term peace building activities. The link between education, poverty, and violence must be of primary consideration when designing peace building activities where Indigenous Peoples are involved.

**Keywords:** Aboriginal youth, structural violence, poverty, human security, alternative education, transformation, peace building activities.

Canadian constitution. Indian is also used to identify those people the government recognizes as having Indian status - people who live or were born on a reserve, have an identifiable band, and are recognized under the Indian Act also known as First Nations. There are also non-status Indians who are not recognized by the government because their parents or ancestors lost their Indian status (Warry, 2007).

Canada's Aboriginal population has now reached more than 1 million people. In 2006, the Aboriginal population accounted for 3.8 percent of the total Canadian population and has been on a steady rise since 1996 where it stood at 2.8 percent (Statistics Canada, 2008). The Aboriginal population is

growing at twice the rate of the general population of Canada. This is especially relevant in the Western provinces of Canada where it is predicted that by 2017, Aboriginal people aged 20 to 29 could make up almost 60 percent of some provinces. More than 80 percent of Nunavut's youth population is aged 20 to 29 and the proportion is expected to grow (Statistics Canada, 2008; Luffman & Sussman, 2007).

In 2006, over half of the Aboriginal population in Canada were children and youth. Only 21 percent of the population aged 25-64 had a high school diploma. 34 percent of Aboriginal people and 50 percent of First Nations 25-64 living on reserve had not completed high school. 14 percent had trade credentials, 19 percent had a college diploma, and 8 percent had a university degree (Statistics Canada, 2008). Life expectancy for Aboriginal men is seven years shorter than for non-Aboriginals. Suicide is two to three times more common among Aboriginal people than non-Aboriginal. 52.1 percent of Aboriginal children live in poverty compared to 23.4 percent of the general population. 46 percent of Aboriginal children in census metropolitan areas live with a lone parent, compared to 17 percent of non-Aboriginal children (Deane, Bracken, & Morrissette, 2007, p. 126-127).

In Manitoba, a province of Canada, 54 percent of the Aboriginal population lives in urban centres, 72 percent live off reserve (Statistics Canada, 2008). Aboriginal people comprise 70 percent of sentence admissions to federal or provincial custody (Deane, et al., 2007, p. 127).

In Winnipeg, the provincial capital and largest city in Manitoba, Aboriginal people represent the highest per capita child poverty rates. 80 percent of the families living in the core area of the city are Aboriginal. They live at half the rate of what is considered the poverty line for a family of four with an income of \$13,000.00 per year. The median of the general population is 40 where the median age of the Aboriginal population is 25. 48 percent of the Aboriginal population is 25 and under. The Aboriginal population increased by 45 percent between 1996 and 2006 with the largest increase occurring within the Metis community at 91 percent compared to an 8 percent growth for the non-Aboriginal population (Deane, et al., 2007, p. 127).

Winnipeg has the largest urban Aboriginal population in Canada and several low income inner city neighbourhoods have large concentrations of Aboriginal persons. The three neighbourhoods described in their paper on desistance in Aboriginal youth gangs have Aboriginal populations ranging from 39.8 per cent to 54.9 per cent. Unemployment rates are three to four times those of the city and family incomes are one third to one half the city average. In one neighbourhood 59.6 per cent of community income comes from government transfer payments (primarily social assistance) (Deane, et al., 2007, p. 127).

On average, Aboriginal people face poverty and disparity more than any other population in Canada (Anonson, Desjarlais, Nixon, Whiteman, & Bird, 2008) and the link between education level attainment, poverty, and violence ( Prothrow-Stith & Spivak, 2004; McCluskey, Baker, & McCluskey, 2005), and poverty, crime and victimization (Eisler & Schissel, 2004) is no more evident, then in the Aboriginal community.

### Introduction

My beautiful daughter is the inspiration for this paper. I watch as she is transforming before my eyes into a magnificent butterfly through an urban based Aboriginal organization called Ka Ni Kanichihk<sup>2</sup> that, among other types of programming, provides cultural experiences for young Aboriginal women in the city of Winnipeg. Although only nine years old, I marvel at her caring, wise, protective, and curious spirit – so much like her mother.

She has asked many times for a jingle dress (Although she wants to be a fancy dancer now) and to receive her spirit name. I'm not sure why these things are so important to her. I never even knew what those things were until I was in my mid-thirties. I wasn't even an Indian until I was sixteen<sup>3</sup>. But for her, even though she has blond hair and fair skin, she already knows she's an Indian and she knows she belongs to a clan. I know this because she tells me about the arguments she has with her friends at school - all second nations of Canada, when she tells them proudly she is Indian, and they reply, "You're not an Indian. You don't even have brown skin".

Although I've never been to "The Butterfly Club", my wife tells me how intently my daughter listens, how she asks many questions, and how the Elders like to teach her. This experience has caused me to wonder why her attitude is so different then mine and reflect on why my attitude towards teaching her Aboriginal *STUFF* is so different then my mother's was about teaching me. Clearly, our fundamental values and beliefs are similar, so why the differences?

My daughter is fortunate to have a place like Ka Ni Kanichihk within the urban environment of Winnipeg where she can go and experience Aboriginal teachings and culture. The vision of Ka Ni Kanichihk is, "to honour the spirit of our ancestors, "those

<sup>2</sup> *Ka Ni Kanichihk* means "those who lead" in the Ininew (Cree) language. Available at <http://www.kanikanichihk.ca> [Accessed 10 April 2010].

<sup>3</sup> I was not considered an Indian under the Indian Act until I was sixteen years old. This is the year that my mother's Indian status – the thing that supposedly defines her as an Indian in Canada, was returned to her. "Prior to 1985 women who married someone other than a registered Indian lost their status under the old law. They recovered their status automatically under Bill C-31 if they applied for re-instatement. Their children could also recover their status" (Imai, et al., 1993, p. 124).

that go before” and to seek their wisdom to help guide peoples back to balance and beauty”. Their mission is “to awaken and heal the spirit of Aboriginal peoples that will guide us to our goodness, our strength, our beliefs, values, teachings, identity, and our history and to reclaim our rightful place within our families, our community, and our nations” Available at <http://www.kanikanichihk.ca> [Accessed 10 April 2010]. My experience with Aboriginal peoples is that living peacefully (in balance, harmony, and beauty) is an integral component of our world view and that of many, if not all, Indigenous peoples around the world (Ewen & The Native American Council of New York City, 1994; Mills, 1994). Aboriginal people have always practiced forms of peace building (Rice, 2009). The contemporary manifestation of this concept can be found in organizations like Ka Ni Kanichihk that provide a safe place to negotiate Aboriginal identity in contemporary Canadian society.

Culture and identity are an extremely important part of any discussion concerning Aboriginal people, youth, and violence. The stages of Aboriginal identity development celebrated through ceremony and cultural rights of passage (Simard, 2009) being experienced by my daughter at Ka Ni Kanichihk, are as unique as the diversity of Aboriginal people in Canada. Similarly, the questioning of her Aboriginal identity by her peers within the education system is also part of that journey as a young Aboriginal person in Canada. Unfortunately, this can result in an alienation from the school system for many Aboriginal youth. For example, one author identified that high school, in particular, is a major site of identity struggle where Aboriginal youth who “feel disconnected from the curriculum and the school environment, and uneasy about leaving behind peers and relatives if they achieve too much. Many report an urge to take control of their lives, even if it means taking to the road with a knapsack” (Castellano, 2008, p.7).

Programs like The Butterfly Club provide a safe space where my daughter and other female Aboriginal youth can learn and experience cultural traditions while negotiating contemporary Aboriginal identity. What Archer (1991) as cited in Adelson (2000) defined as “Aboriginality”: “the negotiation of the political, cultural, and social space of Aboriginal peoples within the nation-state” (p. 14) Aboriginality is constructed through interpretation of historical relations and present-day circumstances and, in Canada, are always linked to issues of self-determination and land rights. “Aboriginality is thus a critical political tool: an essential space of otherness that is shifting, complex, and dynamic [yet] in which Aboriginal imagination can produce an identity” (Adelson, 2000, p. 14).

In Canadian society, the structures designed to educate and create healthy Canadian citizens and protect our youth, in fact, create circumstances that contribute to the marginalization and

subsequent youth violence within the Aboriginal community – One example used for this discussion being the education system. Urban based Aboriginal organizations like Ka Ni Kanichihk play a critical role in providing a safe space where Aboriginal youth can find support, continuity with cultural traditions, and extended family that will assist them in negotiating Aboriginality while providing the opportunity for furthering their formal education.

This paper will discuss Aboriginal youth violence through the lens of oppression, structural violence, and the search for peace from an Aboriginal perspective. In discussing this controversial topic, Robbins’ (1974) summary of attitudes towards organizational conflict<sup>4</sup> and its management will be applied to an Aboriginal ethnic vs. the second nations of Canada context - which I would argue aligns better with the Aboriginal worldview (Cormier, 2009). Robbins summary is explained in three philosophies: “(i) *The traditional philosophy* which views all conflicts as destructive; (ii) *The behavioural philosophy* which views conflicts as inevitable in organizations, and its existence is accepted as serving organizational goals; and, (iii) *The interactionist philosophy* which recognizes conflict as appropriate in organizations and takes the logical next step of recommending the stimulation of appropriate conflicts while seeking to prevent or resolve others” (Robbins, 1974, as cited in Thomas, 1990, p. 226). How does Robbins (1974) three philosophical views apply to the issue of Aboriginal youth violence? Can it be considered appropriate when discussing conflicts in Aboriginal contexts?

### **The Theoretical Challenge of Violence and Peace in Aboriginal Contexts**

Similar to the butterfly that develops through a process called metamorphosis, meaning transformation or changing of shape, Aboriginal people in Canada are transforming. Indeed, one traditional viewpoint suggests that change is the only constant in life, that we are in a state of continuous change, and that change occurs in cycles or patterns (Bopp, Bopp, Brown, & Lane, 1989). The challenge is being able to see how a particular change is connected to everything else. Thus, before providing a description of youth violence in Aboriginal communities, it is necessary to first define violence and determine how these particular patterns of change are connected to everything else. For the purpose of this paper, I will limit the discussion to issues directly related to Aboriginal youth violence in Canada in terms of oppression, structural violence / conflict, and peace/non-

4 I do not differentiate, like some theorists do, between organizational conflict management and other types of conflicts like ethnic conflicts. Consequently, I draw on literature from organizational conflict and change management when discussing Aboriginal conflicts – even though they may be classified as ethnic conflicts.

violence. The following questions will guide the discussion: In Aboriginal contexts, are conflict and violence synonymous with one another? Is it possible to define violence without considering peace through the eyes of those experiencing the violence? When does conflict and/or violence require change?

### 2.1 *Oppression and Structural Violence*

Freire (1970) described violence in terms of oppression. He suggests that any situation where one group or person objectively exploits the other or hinders the pursuit of self-affirmation is one of oppression. These situations constitute violence, even when sweetened by false generosity because they interfere with the individual's ontological and historical vocation to be more fully human: "With the establishment of a relationship of oppression, violence has already begun" (Freire, 1970, p. 55). This Freiran concept of oppression, equated with violence, has been applied to situations of structural violence where the established rules or norms of a system, in our context Canadian society, support the ongoing unequal distribution of power that can lead to hunger, poverty, and inequality (Hodgkins, 2008). To understand this concept of structural violence and the resulting oppression, it is useful to think of it in terms of a dichotomy between direct and structural conflict: *Direct conflict* occurring over clearly articulated values between conscious, strategy-planning actors, and *Structural conflict* occurring between parties over interests embedded in social structure - parties that do not even, in a sense, know what is going on (Burrowes, 1996, p. 67).

In the field of peace and conflict studies, structural violence has been used to describe and analyze how political systems and social and organizational structures act as sources of social conflict. "Structural violence, often referred to as institutional violence, arises from social, political, and economic structures that sanction the unequal distribution of power and resources" (Botes, 2008, p. 363). This concept of structural conflict is built into social structures and appears as unequal power and unequal life chances (Burrowes, 1996). Uvin, (1998) suggests that violence in this context is a result of limiting individuals' physical and psychological capabilities, Spitz (1987) described it in terms of hunger, poverty, and inequality - what he calls "silent violence". Azar, 1990 as cited in Botes (2008) referred to this dynamic as structural victimization. This type of victimization occurs when there is "a lack of effective political participation for minorities, or the majority population's failure to recognize the identity and culture of minorities" (p. 363). Burton 1997 as cited in Bites (2008) suggests that structural violence can be found in policy and administrative decisions, economic sanctions, the workplace, and families. When these structural conditions and situations go beyond one's ability to accommodate, they often lead to physical (behavioural) violence possibly manifesting

itself socially through violent behaviour like domestic violence or child sexual abuse.

In the discussion of structural violence, the terms violence and conflict seem to be used synonymously. The difficulty begins when we begin to define conflict as necessary and positive social process (Coser, 1964; Kriesberg, 1998; Fisher, 2000). If one assumes that the majority of conflicts are managed through cooperation, constructively between the parties involved, then at some point, the relationship becomes destructive. As Fisher (2000) writes, "If this does not occur around incompatible goals or activities, and the parties work to control or frustrate each other adversarially and antagonistically, the scene is set for destructive intergroup conflict" (p. 167).

In explaining his eclectic model for intergroup conflict, Fisher (1993) makes a distinction between low intensity and high intensity intergroup conflicts. Characterized by conflicts of interest and/or values, a small number of issues, adequate individual and group functioning, and a mix of competitive/cooperative orientation, *low intensity conflicts* rely on traditional methods of dispute resolution. In *high intensity conflicts*, the sources of conflict shift to the denial or frustration of basic needs and/or struggle for power "Thus, the groups are primarily battling not for scarce resources or to propagate their values, but for their very survival in terms of identity, scarcity, freedom, and recognition" (p. 118). Similarly, in the context of hostile action, some theorists have made a distinction between physical and emotional action, and malevolent or non-malevolent behaviours. "Malevolent behaviour is designed to hurt an individual or group with little concern over the consequences for the target group or attacker. Non-malevolent hostility is action taken to worsen the position of others and to improve the position of the attacker" (Boulding, 1972, cited in Weller & Weller, 2000, p.164). In these cases, only transcendent or external influences will be effective in transforming the system back to a state of low intensity.

### 2.2 *Meaningful Peace, Human Security, or Just Non-Violence?*<sup>5</sup>

When discussing the effects of structural violence, it is necessary to identify a concept of non-violence or meaning of peace to develop an awareness of oppression or negative privilege. As I have established above, conflict and violence are synonymous in this discussion. Therefore, it would reason that the absence of conflict and violence would be a state of peace. Thus, any intervention must work towards a state of peace (Galtung, 1969). This is especially significant if peace is a

<sup>5</sup> This discussion is not meant to be a lengthy philosophical discourse on the meaning of peace. My intent is to establish for readers an objective of intervention approaches based on the structural violence discussion above from the perspective of Aboriginal peoples in Canada and specifically the youth population.

precondition of progress for Indigenous peoples (Onah, 2008). So, what would peace look like in Aboriginal contexts?

Galtung (1969) made a distinction between positive and negative peace: "Just as a coin has two sides, one side alone being only one aspect of the coin, not the complete coin, peace also has two sides: *absence of personal violence, and absence of structural violence*. We shall refer to them as *negative peace* and *positive peace* respectively" (p. 183). In describing his three pillar approach to comprehensive mapping of conflict and conflict resolution, Sandole (2001) similarly describes the concepts of negative and positive peace - *Negative peace* being the prevention / cessation of hostilities and *positive peace* being the elimination of underlying causes and conditions of hostilities, including structural and cultural violence (p. 14). *Positive and negative peace* have also been described as being the absence of all direct, cultural, and structural violence, and the absence of war respectively (Byrne & Senehi, 2009). Positive peace transcends the conditions limiting human potential and assures opportunities for self-realization (Cortright, 2008).

Some authors discuss peace in terms of human security. For example, the United Nations Development Program recommended defining human security in broad terms: "Human security can no longer be narrowly defined as the absence of war. Rather, it must encompass economic development, social justice, environmental protection, democratization, disarmament, and respect for human rights and rule of law" (Annan, 2001). Gleditsch (2007) further summarized the concept as "safety from chronic threats such as hunger, disease, and repression and also, protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life" (p. 177). Burrowes (1996) defined security specific to Indigenous peoples as "recognition of their traditional rights, measures to protect Indigenous institutions that regulate resource harmony with nature, and processes to ensure meaningful participation by Indigenous Peoples in the decisions that affect their lives" (p. 140).

Boulding (2000), in her book *Cultures of Peace: The Hidden Side of History* provides a detailed discussion on the history of peace movements/cultures in the world and transforming structures that support conflict. Her book begins with a detailed description of peace as moving towards a culture of peace:

*A peace culture is a culture that promotes peaceable diversity. Such a culture includes lifeways, patterns of belief, values, behaviour, and accompanying institutional arrangements that promote mutual caring and well-being as well as an equality that includes appreciation of difference, stewardship, and equitable sharing of the earth's resources among its members and with all living beings. It offers mutual security for humankind in all its diversity through a profound sense of species identity as well as kinship with the living earth.*

*There is no need for violence. In other words, peaceableness is an action concept, involving constant shaping and reshaping of understandings, situations, and behaviours in a constantly changing lifeworld, to sustain well-being for all. (Boulding, 2000, p. 1)*

This concept of developing a peace culture is echoed in an Aboriginal traditional perspective. For example, Rice (2009), in discussing *Restorative processes of peace and healing within the governing structures of the Rotinonshonni "Longhouse People"* describes how the Rotinonshonni transformed from a perpetual state of warfare with one another to The Great Way of Peace (p. 410). This was accomplished by restoring the minds of the chiefs from violence to peace. In achieving this objective, the people would "be without fear, sadness, anger. They would be more powerful in peace than at any time when they were at war" (p. 411). Clearly, by transforming the minds of the people - bringing internal peace, one would bring peace to the nation. Sandole (2001) similarly argued this sentiment by stating, if "any one party is conflicted, it would be difficult for it to deal effectively with conflict it has with another party unless it first deals with its own internal conflicts" (p. 5). Other authors have argued the emphasis placed on restoring relationships in traditional Indigenous peacemaking (Meyer, 2002; Pinto, 2000) and the acceptance of change as a constant in life. Bopp et al., (1989) write, "There are two kinds of change, the coming together of things (development) and the coming apart of things (disintegration). Both of these kinds of change are necessary and are always connected to each other" (p. 27).

### ***2.3 The Theoretical Challenge of Violence and Peace in Aboriginal Contexts Summarized***

The patterns of youth violence and conflict resulting from structural violence in Aboriginal contexts seem to be synonymous with one another. Similar to the literature presented here, the challenge comes when conflict turns high intensity or malevolent in nature. It seems that in Aboriginal contexts in Canada, high intensity malevolent conflict is a symptom of structural conditions that influence behaviour caused by laws, policies, authoritarian practices, cultural, group, or peer norms, other perceived dysfunctional practices, and expectations of others behaviours (Weller & Weller, 2000).

In this brief discussion on peace in Aboriginal contexts, I presented literature related to negative / positive peace, human security, peace culture, and Indigenous traditional views on the subject. My assumption is that, due to root causes of conflict and the nature of violence in Aboriginal contexts being structural, working towards positive peace based on a concept of human security is the best approach to managing Aboriginal youth violence. This approach is conducive to building a culture of peace.

In Aboriginal contexts, a culture of peace is not intended to be introduced as something new, it is returning to tradition that emphasizes the ubiquitous nature of change / conflict and the restoring of communal relationships. Aboriginal cultures are collectivist in nature and emphasize the goals, needs, and views of family and community over the individual (Cheah & Nelson, 2004). As a collectivist culture, "Conflicts are conceptualized in terms of their impacts on the groups as a whole, rather than in terms of consequences for the individual. Hence, members of collectivist cultures emphasize conflict management approaches that benefit and preserve the group and that address the conflict in a holistic fashion" (Folger, Poole, & Stutman, 2001, p. 61-62).

However, it is important to consider that there is a certain amount of awareness that must also occur. A negatively privileged group must first develop awareness that *it is* negatively privileged before a social conflict between the two groups can take place and turn hostile attitudes into social action (Coser, 1964) - "It must come to believe that it is being denied rights to which it is entitled" (p. 37).

### Youth Violence in Aboriginal Contexts

The intent for this paper is to discuss Aboriginal youth violence in Canada through an Aboriginal perspective. So far, I have provided some context on the subject by presenting a theoretical discussion based on literature from the field of Peace and Conflict Studies. But, what is violence in Aboriginal communities? Is there a difference between Aboriginal violence and Aboriginal youth violence? How does structural violence impact Aboriginal youth and their ability to live peacefully?

Like the life cycle of a butterfly from egg - to caterpillar - to pupa - to adult, Aboriginal people experience violence at all stages of human development from child - to adolescents - to adult - and Elder. This section will provide evidence to support the assumption that the majority of violence experienced by Aboriginal youth is a result of Canadian societal structures. These structures keep Aboriginal people in a perpetual state of low levels of education, poverty, and violence. Although there are a number of structures in Canadian society that propagate violence on Aboriginal people including the justice system (Ross, 2006), natural resource management systems (Thoms, 1996; Nadasdy, 2003), and the child welfare system (Bennett, 2008) to name a few, I will provide a specific example related to the education system for this paper.

#### 3.1 Examples of Violence in Aboriginal Communities

The issue of violence in Aboriginal communities in Canada is complex and there is a considerable amount of academic writing on the subject. The following discussion is limited to

examples that demonstrate the pattern of education, poverty, violence, and the dramatic effect this has on Aboriginal youth.

Blackstock, Trocme, & Bennett, (2004) conducted a comparative analysis of child maltreatment cases between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families. They summarize their findings as, "Aboriginal families face worse socioeconomic conditions, are more often investigated for neglect, less often reported for physical or sexual abuse, and report higher rates of substance abuse" (p. 901). A pervasive pattern of over representation exists from the first call to the decision to place children in out-of-home care. As a result, the number of children entering the child welfare system continues to rise. Some possible causes include poverty, unstable housing, and alcohol abuse complicated by the experience of colonization (p. 916). Similarly, Eisler and Schissel (2004) conducted a study on the complex nature of the association between poverty and victimization in adolescents. The results demonstrate clearly that poverty places youth at psychic and physical risk and the damaging effects of poverty on youth security are dependent on the day-to-day context inside and outside school. The authors suggest that "for Aboriginal youth, being poor is a substantial risk factor for being the victim or witnessing a crime" (p. 370).

Brownridge (2003) conducted an empirical investigation of male partner violence against Aboriginal women in Canada. His analysis shows that "Aboriginal women have a significantly higher prevalence of violence by their partner compared to non-Aboriginal women. Violence against Aboriginal women is more likely at all levels of severity, with the greatest disparity on the most severe forms of violence, and appears more likely to be ongoing" (p. 65). The author suggests that the impact on violence living common-law is substantially larger for Aboriginal women, and despite the perception of alcohol being largely responsible for domestic violence in Aboriginal contexts, this analysis demonstrates that "alcohol problems and partner violence are symptoms of something larger" (p. 79).

The effects of poverty and the resulting violence that Aboriginal people begin to feel as children, through to adolescents leading to violent adult relationships is clearly demonstrated in the work of Farley, Lynne, & Cotton, (2005) who conducted research on prostitution in Vancouver – one of Canada's largest cities. These authors found that of 100 women interviewed for their research fifty-two percent were First Nations women - compared to (1.7-7%) of Vancouver's general Aboriginal population, and all participants had an "extremely high prevalence of lifetime violence and post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)" (p. 242). They also found that:

*Eighty-two percent reported a history of childhood sexual abuse by an average of four perpetrators. Seventy-two percent reported childhood physical abuse, 90 percent*

*had been physically assaulted in prostitution, 78 percent had been raped in prostitution. Seventy-two percent met DSMV-IV criteria for PTSD. Ninety-five percent said they wanted to leave prostitution. Eight-six percent reported current or past homelessness with housing as one of the most urgent needs. Eighty-two percent expressed a need for treatment for drug or alcohol addictions.* (Farley et al. 2005, p. 242)

This historical pattern of violence is also discussed by Ross (2006) in his book, *Returning to the Teachings: Exploring Aboriginal Justice*. The author paints an equally compelling and tragic picture of the people of Hollow Water resulting from years of community violence:

*The Hollow Water team presently estimates that 80 percent of the population of their community, male and female alike, have been the victims of sexual abuse, most often at the hands of extended family members usually for long periods of time. Just as shockingly, they now estimate that a full 50 percent of the community's population, male and female, has at one time or another sexually abused someone else.* (Ross, 2006, p. 38)

This type of trauma manifests itself in various types of violent and destructive behaviour (Herman, 1997) in the Aboriginal youth population including high levels of sexually transmitted infections (Steenbeek, 2004), gambling (Schissel, 2001), sexual offenses (Rojas & Gretton, 2007), and urban Aboriginal gangs (Deane, et al., 2007). However, none are more severe than suicide. Kirmayer (1994) asserted that "Canadian Aboriginal peoples currently suffer from one of the highest rates of suicide of any group in the world" (p.3). The author's evidence suggests that over a third of all deaths among Aboriginal youth are attributable to suicide and the Aboriginal suicide rate is three times that of the general Canadian population. From ages 10 to 29, Aboriginal youth on reserve are 5 to 6 times more likely to die of suicide than their peers in the general population.

It is apparent that violence against Aboriginal people, whether committed among Aboriginal people or committed historically by forces external to the Aboriginal community (Churchill, 1997; Howley, 1980), the most intense victimization is found within the child and youth demographic - Similar to children in war zones affected by violence (Boothby, Stranz, & Wessells, 2006), the effects of trauma reaches deep within contemporary Aboriginal communities and across generations (Barnes, Josefowitz, & Cole, 2006). Anonson, et al., (2008) accurately summarized, "Aboriginal peoples, on average, face poverty and disparity more than any other population in Canada". The Canadian council of Social Development and the Native Women's Association of Canada (1991) as cited in Brownridge (2003), stated that the nature of family violence

in Aboriginal communities "transcends cultural boundaries. Its affiliation is indiscriminate ... But family violence in Aboriginal society also has its own unique dimensions. It is not simply Aboriginal women who have been rendered powerless - it is Aboriginal society" (p. 81).

Beginning with life as a child, moving through adolescents, and fighting for survival as an adult, the one common structure that has been shown to have a positive impact on poverty and adolescents is education attainment (Brownridge, 2003). Similarly, I would suggest that no public system can promote empowerment of individuals at the individual, community, and political levels (Kirmayer, 1994) like the education system. Unfortunately, there is no better example of a history of oppressive Canadian governmental policies and racist practices that manifest in "high rates of interpersonal violence, alcohol abuse and related accidental deaths and suicides reported in many Aboriginal communities" (Adelson, 2000, p. 12) than the education system.

### **3.2 Structural Violence in the Education System in Canada**

The discussion below asserts that, beginning with Indian Residential Schools and moving to today's education system, schools have consistently been used as a tool by the Canadian nation state to assimilate Aboriginal people – to "take the Indian" out of native children (Adelson, 2000, p. 12); The effects of this approach to building Canadian citizens is that Aboriginal people do not succeed to the same degree as non-Aboriginal students.

Indian Residential Schools were developed to educate widely dispersed Aboriginal children, remove them from their parents care, and to encourage them to abandon and denigrate Aboriginal language, culture, and religious practices. This separation from parents, immigration to a new culture, second language learning, and denigration of their first language and culture placed residential school students at risk for potentially harmful psychological impacts (Barnes, et al., 2006). The devastating effects culturally, socially, economically, and personally resulting from systematic efforts to control and assimilate in Canada has been described as internal colonization (Deane et al., 2007). Barsh, (1994) as cited in Barnes et al., (2006) summarized the effects this has on Aboriginal children to this day, "problematic conditions at residential schools likely contributed to the difficulties that Aboriginal children, as a group, continue to have in education" (p. 29). It is clear that these experiences have negative influences well beyond immediate lives of former students. However, does the structural violence experienced by Aboriginal people during the residential schools period still exist today? Considering that First Nations people have only been allowed to attain postsecondary education without fear of being disenfranchised since the early 1970s



(Anonson et al, 2008), the historical legacy of residential schools seems to have survived to this day.

Statistics Canada 1998, as cited in Hardes (2006) suggested, Aboriginal students are half as likely to finish high school or complete a postsecondary diploma and one-fifth as likely to complete a university degree as the general population. The Social planning Council of Winnipeg 1999 as cited in McCluskey et al.(2005) stated that “50.3% of Aboriginal youth drop out of school annually in Winnipeg, compared to only 19.5% of non-Aboriginals” (p. 335). School dropout is particularly severe in rural areas where many Aboriginal youth must leave the support of their communities to advance in education. For example, McCluskey et al. (2005) noted that in the three partnering school districts for their project “only 1 in 25 Aboriginal students who left their reserves to attend high school graduated in 1996. In the second school district, a longitudinal review of 23 Aboriginal children who entered Kindergarten indicated that only 1 made it all the way through the system. And, in the third, a residential school designed specifically for Native youth coming from a northern community failed to graduate even a single student in several years of operation” (p. 335-336). Siler, Mallett, Greene, and Simard 2002 as cited in McCluskey et al. (2005) highlighted that these issues are all “exacerbated by the fact that the Aboriginal population is growing exceedingly quickly (from 210 in the 1951 census to approximately 67,000 – almost 10% of Winnipeg’s inhabitants” (p. 335).

O’Donnell & Tait 2003 as cited in Hutchinson, Mushquash, & Donaldson (2008) identify reasons for Aboriginal non-reserve youth aged 15-19 leaving high school. They include being bored (20%) and wanting to work (15%). Among women of the same age group, reasons for permanently leaving high school included pregnancy or needing child care (25%) and boredom. For Aboriginal non-reserve people aged 25-44, family responsibilities and financial reasons were the two most cited motives – men most likely to cite the latter (24%) and women the former (34%) (p. 270).

This short discussion provides evidence to support the assertion that the Canadian education system propagates structural violence on Aboriginal people by not allowing them the same life chances as other Canadian citizens. This occurs by limiting their physical and psychological capabilities through the policies and administrative decisions that limited their ability to succeed in the school system and thereby remaining in a state of poverty and violence.

### Back to Butterflies – Conclusion

I began this paper by sharing the story of my daughter and her experiences at Ka Ni Kanichihk in The Butterfly Club. As a blond haired, fair skinned, urban based Indian, she represents

one of the new faces of the Indigenous population of Canada. A population that although seems to struggles at times, is in the process of reconciling traditional Aboriginal identity with life in the modern Canadian nation state. As Adelson (2000) points out, if social suffering “derives from a colonial and neo-colonial history of disenfranchisement and attempts to eradicate a cultural history, then the proper response to that suffering must include the reconstitution and reaffirmation of identity” (P. 30).

The evidence of violence resulting from this process of renegotiation seems overwhelming. In their book, *Murder is No Accident: Understanding Youth Violence in America*, Prothrow-Stith & Spivak (2004) identify a number of factors that contribute to youth violence including social norms, culture, and expectations of others; poverty; overcrowding (number of people per square foot of housing); environmental factors like witnessing violence, victimization, fear, and anger; alcohol and drug use; glamorizing and promoting violence; adult role modelling; adolescent vulnerability; and the accessibility of guns. Evidence gathered for this paper clearly demonstrates that the Aboriginal population of Canada reflects a number of these factors. In fact, I would argue that all these factors are pervasive in Aboriginal communities in Canada.

However, despite struggling for their basic physical and moral survival rooted in the protection of identity needs (Rothman, 1997), the renegotiation of Aboriginal identity does not have to be violent. Through reflection and negotiation of cultural and political identities via ceremony, celebration, and reconnection to the elements of Aboriginal identity or what defines Aboriginal culture, non-violent changes in identity can occur (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008). An Aboriginal solution to the problem of youth violence is “manifested in the meanings associated with ceremonies or traditions that have been carried out for thousands of years and that define - at least in part - the nature of the people” (p. 944). According to Northrup (1989), this will result in changes to the structures that support violence:

*If change occurs in the identities of at least one of the parties, the chances for long-term change are greatly increased, particularly if the change involves core aspects of identity that are directly related to the conflict. Such structural changes, or core changes to identity, affect the entire system; that is, change in identity results in changes in the relationship, resulting in changes in behaviour (p. 78).*

Folger, et al., (2001) suggested that people choose conflict resolution strategies based on the attributions they make regarding the causes, biases in the attribution process tend to encourage noncooperative modes of conflict, and the choice of conflict strategies influences the likelihood of conflict resolution and the degree of satisfaction in the relationship. These three propositions suggest that in Aboriginal contexts, Aboriginal

people must determine the appropriate strategy to address violence based on their beliefs of the causes. Fundamentally, these strategies must address their need for security and identity, a consistent response from their environment (without which learning is impossible), both recognition and valued relationships or bonding from their social context, and most importantly, some control over their environments in order to ensure their needs are fulfilled (Lerche III, 2000). As presented in the introduction of this paper, the vision and mission Ka Ni Kanichihk very clearly meets these criteria and fills a void in the education system that the present system in Canada is clearly not meeting.

Robbins (1974) three philosophies applied in the context of Aboriginal youth violence would read: (i) *The traditional philosophy* which views all conflicts as destructive; (ii) *The behavioural philosophy* which views conflicts as inevitable, and its existence accepted as serving goals; and (iii) *The interactionist philosophy* which recognizes conflict as appropriate and takes the logical next step of recommending the stimulation of appropriate conflicts while seeking to prevent or resolve other. An Aboriginal worldview necessitates acceptance of change as constant and therefore, accepts conflict as inherent in life. However, as discussed earlier, the terms conflict and violence are used synonymously. Thus, change, conflict, and violence seem to be synonymous with one another. However, by thinking about Aboriginal conflicts in terms of high intensity / low intensity or malevolent behaviour, conflict can be viewed as appropriate and in fact, can be used when required to create learning. Here once again, an urban based Aboriginal organization like Ka Ni Kanichihk can fill this need. Clearly, the vision and mission of the organization can assist Aboriginal people in rediscovering their culture of peace.

Similar to the transformation of a butterfly, Aboriginal people are in a state of constant change. Indeed, embracing change is the Aboriginal worldview. However, like the butterfly, although the physical form changes, the essence of the being remains the same - the strength and resilience of the spirit remains eternal. The spirit of Aboriginal people remains in organizations like Ka Ni Kanichihk that are assisting the youth population to, as Senge (1994, p. 18) asserted, "move naturally towards a state of balance and equilibrium". To live Indigenous peace.

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