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Article abstract

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission report has challenged Canada to alter the relationship with Aboriginal peoples across the country. They have specifically identified child protection as one area that requires a significant reconsideration around how agencies charged with this responsibility interact with Aboriginal people both on and off reserves. The legacy of Residential Schools, the Sixties Scoop and other policies of assimilation and cultural genocide are found in a number of existing social policy and practices, including child protection. This work examines the depth of change that will be needed in child protection methodologies by challenging the current assessment practice which seeks to determine, from a Western child-rearing perspective, if parents are 'good enough' to raise their children. The project shows the depth of disparities between present and historical practices and Aboriginal culture, using reference to the Blackfoot Confederacy in southern Alberta. The project draws upon a broad literature review as well as an expert consultation with six traditional Blackfoot Elders.

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Nistawatsiman[1]: Rethinking Assessment of Aboriginal Parents for Child Welfare Following the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

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Abstract

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission report has challenged Canada to alter the relationship with Aboriginal peoples across the country. They have specifically identified child protection as one area that requires a significant reconsideration around how agencies charged with this responsibility interact with Aboriginal people both on and off reserves. The legacy of Residential Schools, the Sixties Scoop and other policies of assimilation and cultural genocide are found in a number of existing social policy and practices, including child protection. This work examines the depth of change that will be needed in child protection methodologies by challenging the current assessment practice which seeks to determine, from a Western child-rearing perspective, if parents are 'good enough' to raise their children. The project shows the depth of disparities between present and historical practices and Aboriginal culture, using reference to the Blackfoot Confederacy in southern Alberta. The project draws upon a broad literature review as well as an expert consultation with six traditional Blackfoot Elders.

Key words: *Residential Schools; Sixties Scoop; First Nations parenting; Aboriginal parenting; parenting assessment; parenting capacity assessment; child protection*

This work could not have been done without the contribution of a group of Blackfoot Confederacy traditional Elders: Leonard Bastien, Kathy Breaker, Stewart Breaker, Evelyn Good Striker, Wilton Good Striker and Audrey Weasel Traveller.

[1] Nistawatsiman is a Blackfoot word which means rearing children with all the traditional teachings of our people that include compassion, harmony, trust, respect, honesty, generosity, courage, understanding, peace, protection, and knowing who your relatives are. The word was gifted to this project by the Elders working with us from the Blackfoot Confederacy.

Introduction

As a result of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report (TRC) (2015), Canada has begun an expanded conversation on the results of cultural genocide related to attempts at forced assimilation of Aboriginal peoples. The conversation arises following the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (Canada, Erasmus, & Dussault,1996) as well as the apology issued by the Government of Canada (Canada, Harper, 2008). However, the roots of the conversation really come from the ongoing efforts of survivors of the Indian Residential Schools (IRS), their families and communities, who urge that their stories not be forgotten as they continue to press for systemic change.

The TRC report (2015) articulates, in great detail, the ways in which the cultural genocide affected all aspects of Aboriginal people's lives. They have shown that reconciliation, done in partnership between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples of Canada, is going to be complex, difficult and as a result of significant, committed effort. There are many aspects of Canadian infrastructure, policy, legislation, practices and methodologies that will need to be reconsidered.

In this project, one feature of child protection practice, Parenting Capacity Assessments (PCA) will illustrate the nature of the challenge confronting Canada's child welfare systems and also shows how it will take many forces within the fabric of the country to work with a clear purpose of reconciliation.

The TRC (2015) has identified the importance of addressing child protection for quite a number of reasons. Perhaps most obviously, Aboriginal children remain significantly over represented in child protection cases across Canada. This began during the era of the residential schools later evolving into the Sixties Scoop (Blackstock, 2007) and then to present day child welfare practices. For example, in Alberta, 69 % of children in care are Aboriginal (Mann-Johnson, 2016).

One of the most critical decisions that child protection workers must make, is whether a parent is 'good enough' to raise their children. We sought to unpack the underpinnings of that decision making process to determine if present practices are appropriate to Aboriginal families and, if not, what that would mean in terms of adopting new approaches. An expert consultation was conducted with six traditional elders from the Blackfoot Confederacy in Alberta to explore the practice issues that would need to be addressed if assessments were to become appropriate for use with Aboriginal peoples.

Literature Review

Good Enough Parenting

The term 'good enough,' while poorly defined, has been widely adopted as a measure to determine whether or not to keep a child in parental care. It is a term that appears in the assessment literature and courts use the term as well (Choate & Engstrom, 2014). 'Good enough" has also been called Minimal Parenting Competence (Budd 2005; 2001).

There are quite a number of factors that make up 'good enough,' but as Choate and Engstrom (2014) show, they are broad concepts that are not drawn from a particular cultural place. Rather, they are based upon a notion that there is some sort of widely accepted group of factors that might be used with all parents, regardless of their cultural position.

History is told from the hegemonic voice which, in the Canadian context, tells a story of an Indigenous parent who fails, cannot bring children up in a 'good enough' manner, thus requiring that the children be removed from parental care by child protection This thinking has been prominent in child protection. The Sixties Scoop is the quintessential example when large numbers of Aboriginal children were scooped up from their families and placed in mainly non-Aboriginal foster and adoptive homes away from culture and family connection (Blackstock, 2007). The TRC (2015) has shown that child protection story was not only incorrect but also culturally destructive.

Assessing Parents

In the same vein, there is a literature that shows how social workers, psychologists and other mental health professionals go about completing PCAs. This literature places a heavy emphasis on understanding family from a Euro-centric perspective (Budd, Clark, & Connell, 2011; Choate, 2009; Pezzot-Pearce & Pearce, 2004; Budd, 2005; White, 2005; Reder, Duncan, & Lucey, 2003; Budd, 2001).

There has been some recognition that specific sub-populations may require unique or modified approaches, such as those affected by Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (Choate, 2013); parents involved in drug manufacturing (Choate, Harland, & McKenzie, 2012); parents with intellectual disabilities (Feldman & Aunos, 2010; Tymchuk & Feldman, 1991) and those with mental illnesses (Jacobsen, Miller, & Kirkwood, 1997).

In our extensive review of the literature, we found no systemic approach showing how an Aboriginal parent might be assessed as 'good enough' within a cultural context. The existing approaches to assessing parents have not been validated with Aboriginal peoples as well as other non-dominant cultures throughout the western countries. There has been criticism of this. A parent cannot be validly assessed in that role if the cultural standards used as a base of comparison are not relevant to the parent (Drew, Adams, & Walker, 2010; Mushquash & Bova, 2007).

Blackstock (2009) has gone further, noting that the basic concepts of social work, theoretical and methodological, have not been developed from within Aboriginal contexts. Rather, they have been drawn from Euro-centric approaches with attempts being made to adapt them to Aboriginal situations. Even Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943) which was based on his research with people from the Blood Reserve in Alberta has failed to accurately reflect the cultural reality in which it was developed (Blackstock, 2009).

Other vital theories of social work and psychology have challenges in their application to Aboriginal peoples, such as Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1969). This does not sustain applicability in Aboriginal cultures because there is a system of inter-connected caregivers along with the natural world (Carriere & Richardson, 2009). An Australian study noted that Indigenous attachment might also be thought of in a collective sense (Yeo, 2003). Yet, courts across Canada are making decisions regarding Aboriginal children involved with child protection based upon the assessment of parents using these Euro-centric definitions, tools and assessment approaches (Choate & Hudson, 2014). Social work must incorporate Aboriginal perspectives into its teaching, practice and methodologies (TRC, 2015: Harris, 2006). To do otherwise is to sustain oppression, deny the inherent validity of Aboriginal worldview and fail to reverse the current trend of over representation of Aboriginal children in the care of child protection. This paper responds to this necessity by not only illuminating the underlying philosophies and

approaches that require an overhaul of current child protection assessment practices, but also providing a direct correlation to the TRC's Calls to Action (2015); specifically, those related to the consideration of culturally appropriate and culturally informed parenting approaches.

Aboriginal Views of Family

Our review of the academic and clinical literature revealed a dearth of material specifically considering how family is defined within Aboriginal cultures. For example, the relational worldview of Aboriginal cultures entails a perspective in which all people and things are related, and the notion of relationship "is the cornerstone of tribal community" (Cajete, 2000, p.86). This leads to an understanding that the notion of family extends beyond nuclear, or even immediate kinship to include the larger community. The community, therefore, plays a significant part in the parenting or raising of children in a way that is quite foreign to Euro-centric definitions that focus on immediate caregivers.

The TRC (2015) urges redefining how child protection is done and the framework in which it is done. This involves incorporating a serious acknowledgment of the intergenerational traumas arising from cultural genocide into the relationship child protection has with Aboriginal peoples. It requires a change in the assessment tools and methodologies as well as the definitions used. McCaslin and Boyer (2009) state that healing and "transformation require new patterns of thinking, acting and behaving that honour and respect Aboriginal cultures as traditions" (p.62). Child protection processes such as assessment should be part of the healing process rather than the root of ongoing fracturing of the community.

This transformation leads to a shift in perspective. Indigenous scholar Castellano (2002) offered insight into how the shift might be considered, stating, "the [Aboriginal] family instills values, the sense of what is important, what is worth preserving, protecting and, if necessary, fighting for" (p.15). In the Euro-centric view, the family acts as the foundation from which the child will eventually separate and establish an independent nuclear unit. In an Aboriginal context, family responsibilities are shared with social institutions such as education and extra-curricular social interests along with a variety of kinship and community connections which "parent" and for which long term connection is anticipated (Neckoway, Brownlee, & Castellan, 2007). Community and tribal membership is an ongoing and cross generational part of the Aboriginal identity providing a support system for raising a child. As Simard and Blight (2011) describe, Aboriginal development is conceptualized from within family contexts that include nuclear, extended, clan, community, nationhood, and cultural families and is integral to the development of the child. From an Aboriginal perspective, the natural world is also seen as part of a relational alliance that transcends human connections.

If the Aboriginal perspective of family is included in child protection practice, then there is a need to alter definitions not just in social work education and practice, and also within the jurisprudence of family courts in Canada. For example, from a Euro-centric perspective, the notion of the best interest of the child is conceptualized from the stance that a child is an independent being. Alternately, an Aboriginal worldview would see supporting the needs of the child within a broad relational system to which the child belongs. Thus, rather than turning to parents or immediate caregivers as the focal point, the court would consider best interest from a communal perspective (Kline, 1992). Such an approach can also help to support inter-generational transmission of the specific cultural values of the nation and clan where the

child's identity belongs which acts as a counter to impacts of colonization (Long & Sephton, 2011).

Defining Parenting

In many Aboriginal cultures, child autonomy and independence are fostered along with unconditional adult affection. Extended family connections serve important parenting roles. Who is included in an extended network is broadly defined and transcends blood lines. Children experience this larger network as part of the parenting and caregiving system (Benzies, 2013). Spiritual connections, crucial to the culture, also come from a variety of people throughout the community (Muir & Bohr, 2014). Muir and Bohr (2014) identified different approaches to discipline, although there is not a homogeneous pattern. Mothers tended to use less harsh discipline which would include lesson or teaching connected to it that would benefit the child overall.

Muir and Bohr (2014) identified there was less verbal interaction and direction with Aboriginal approaches in comparison to Euro-centric approaches where language is a central tenant to parenting. This could mean certain milestones around language might occur differently in many Aboriginal family systems that, when compared to Euro-centric standards, would show the child as delayed. Instead, assessment would see the child as developing on a different trajectory based upon cultural approaches.

Other examples of difference in parenting approaches can be seen in the work of Cheah and Chirkov (2008). They found Aboriginal mothers to place a greater importance in the autonomy and agency of children as a way to foster competence in specific life tasks. Reliance on community and family connections is used to support growing specific competencies and mastery. There is an emphasis on learning by doing (GFellner, 1990). Aboriginal mothers placed a greater emphasis on retaining cultural and spiritual traditions. Socialization is different in that Euro-Canadian mothers view as personal gain of the child whereas Aboriginal mothers view it as being more connected to the collective good. Aboriginal mothers place value on respecting elders, whereas Euro-Canadian mothers were more parent-focused, often for self-serving motivations (Cheah & Chirkov 2008).

The value placed upon children has also been found to be different and is shared by the Aboriginal community as gifts from the Creator. People within the extended family system play different roles. For example, in some Aboriginal systems, grandparents are teachers while aunts and uncles disciplined the child. This drew upon the wisdom of elders and, by having aunts and uncles discipline, allows a stronger bond to form between parents and child (LaFrance & Collins, 2003). Children are viewed as equals, and they deserve individual freedom and significant autonomy, which is a significantly different approach from Euro-centric beliefs, which have greater restrictive and controlled approaches (GFellner, 1990).

This article does not allow room for an in-depth exploration of comparisons between Aboriginal and Euro-centric parenting beliefs. These examples help to illustrate how Euro-centric approaches to assessing parental capacity would miss key elements of Aboriginal worldview, thus causing the Aboriginal parent to be seen as deficient.

Indian Residential Schools (IRS)

Assessing Aboriginal parents involved with child protection cannot be done without considering

the impact of the IRS, which the literature on parenting capacity assessment does not address. We know from the TRC (2015) that the impact was dramatic, genocidal, and has long standing intergenerational impacts. Chrubini (2008) identified the IRS also changed the way in which Aboriginal people and cultures were valued within the larger Canadian culture. In particular, traditional Aboriginal educational perspectives and approaches are misrepresented and misunderstood in mainstream Canadian society. As well, Aboriginal standpoints are degraded by national perspectives because they are seen as coming from a place of disadvantage and deficit.

Blackstock (2009; 2007) maintains that this has led to the high rates of intervention by child protection in Aboriginal families across Canada. Even with the closing of IRS, the belief system that underpinned the IRS remained and child welfare took up the mantle with the Sixties Scoop. Neglect is the most common reason for child protection intervention with Aboriginal families (Blackstock, 2009; Sinha et al., 2011; Trocmé, Fallon, MacLaurin, Daciuk, Felstiner, Black et al., 2005). This links to poverty, which arises from the impact of the IRS in areas such as family, culture and individual self worth impacting mental health, substance use and interpersonal violence (Fontaine, Forbes, McNab, Murdock, & Stout, 2014; Bombay, Matheson, & Anisman, 2011). These IRS impacts act as a cycle to reinforce negative stereotypes within the larger Canadian society.

Despite the IRS, some research indicates that traditional parenting practices continue to be utilized (Muir & Bohr, 2014).

Our contention is that the present approach to PCAs fails to consider the connection between IRS, child protection and the outcomes on parenting as well as the ongoing efforts of communities to reverse the trend. This is further compounded by the lack of significant educational content in social work programs across Canada, and impacts how such issues are considered by those entering the profession (TRC, 2015).

Assessments need to take into account the effects of IRS which include inter generational trauma, community and cultural disconnects, loss of parental and caregiver modeling as well as loss of cultural identity. Our review of the literature indicates that these factors are not included within the present PCA models. Thus, there would be reliance upon the unique knowledge of these issues that a particular assessor possesses and a willingness by courts to accept that these factors are essential to an assessment of an Aboriginal parent. Equally, care must be taken to ensure that the reverse position is not taken where IRS is seen as having been so destructive that effective parenting is not probable.

Systemic Issues

Carriere and Richardson (2009) note the system is now structured around a colonial view of Aboriginal parents that has institutionalized parenting of Aboriginal children within the child protection system. Many apprehensions occur within the first year of life or even right after birth. Such early apprehensions deny many mothers the opportunity to show that they can parent with community, family, informal and formal supports which promote changes from the impacts of IRS.

While many of the provincial and territorial child protection statutes in Canada see protection of Aboriginal culture as vital, children are removed from their culturally based support systems through foster and group care or adoption (Sinha & Kozlowski, 2013). When assessments do not include IRS and

other intergenerational trauma concerns, then Aboriginal parents are being assessed against standards that are not consistent with their identity and risk being see as non-conforming to colonial determinants of what a 'good enough' parent is (King, 2012). Addictions and mental health can be assessed within parenting capacity assessments utilizing structural health determinants that are not inclusive of Aboriginal issues (Nygaard, 2012).

However, efforts in specific areas suggest assessment can be modified or adapted to determine the needs and capacities of various populations such as those affected by Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (Choate, 2013), parents involved in drug manufacturing (Choate, Harland, & McKenzie, 2012), parents with intellectual and other disabilities, (Feldman & Aunos, 2010; Tymchuk & Feldman, 1991) and those with mental illness (Jacobsen, Miller, & Kirkwood, 1997). No such efforts were found in the literature for assessing Aboriginal parenting capacity, although we believe such an outcome is possible. The lack of efforts to address populations that do not fit into the Euro-centric model has received criticism in the United States in reference to non-Caucasian populations (Lee, Goplan & Harrington, 2004) and in Australia in respect of the Aboriginal population there (Drew, Adams, & Walker, 2010). Mushquash and Bova (2007) have raised some criticism about the Canadian approach. Choate and McKenzie (2015) have noted that many of the standardized assessment tools used in parenting assessments have not been normed on Aboriginal populations in Canada and only marginally in the United States.

Conversation with Elders

"We can't wait for anyone else. We have to do it."[2]

Six traditional elders from the Blackfoot Confederacy met with us for conversations about parenting and child welfare. They indicated readers must understand that although they present their understanding of the issues and worldview, they do not speak for Aboriginal peoples whom they believe must find their own way to address these concerns: "You have to be careful not to use a pan-Indian approach because there is very specific teachings that Blackfeet have, that Lakota people have, that Anishnaabe people have, and I think we have to respect those instead of saying you all do this."

The elders identified six predominant themes in their discussions. As Figure 1 shows, the elders saw parenting as interconnected to six domains.

[2] All direct quotations are from the elders.

Figure 1 – Interconnected Domains for Developing the Child

The elders explained the themes in the following ways.

Family cannot be defined homogeneously

Aboriginal families are seen as part of a larger network that is not bound by specific relationships or role definitions. Primacy of parenting does not necessarily rest with the biological parents as those who perform parenting duties, including not only the biological parents but also other family and community members. This means that cousins, for example, may be seen more as siblings. The Elders emphasized that a nuclear family is not a presumed element within Aboriginal.

The child is a gift

The child is a gift from the creator and belongs to the larger community. The child has a meaning that is rooted within this spiritual domain along with the larger community and culture. The spiritual sense of the child connects to how a parent should act. One Elder stated, "[i]f your children are raised with love and understanding, patience, they'll have that belonging and the trust, and the consistency of home and love, and bonding and belonging."

Caregiving is seen broadly

Consistent with the prior two themes, caregiving can be carried out by different people as the child has differing needs that can best be met by a variety of people. As an example, an elder may be seen as the best to offer a specific teaching. The family welcomes a variety of community members to perform

roles that, in a Euro-centric situation, would be seen as belonging to family.

Another example is the notion of nurturing, which is seen as belonging to the community as whole. The child is meant to be the pathway to ongoing generations so the community ensures the child has presence in the culture.

The parent is but one source of nurturance and modeling. Traditions are brought to the child through knowledge keepers in addition to parents. This accesses pre-colonial knowledge bringing it into the present but ongoing colonial period.

Relational grounding within culture

The development of a child is linked to a relationship that is rooted in trust, grounded in culture, place and community as well as family. This allows the child to know who they are. There is strength in cultural connection, which is counter to the pattern of colonial ideas about separation and isolation.

> *"[O]ur cultural ways, traditional ways, when you ground somebody like that, they can tackle just about anything."*

Recent advances in neurobiology affirm that optimal neurological development in children is dependent on healthy and robust caregiving relationships that extend beyond one or two caregivers (Britto, Lye, Proulx, Yousafzai, Matthews, Vaivada, Perez-Escamilla et al., 2016). The elders noted that the neurobiological effect of traditional parenting practices foster relational safety or, as seen slightly differently, these cultural pathways are in sync with the neurobiology involved with developing healthy and loving relationships. Different relationships within family, community and clan offer that.

Healing is done in a broader context

Intergenerational impacts must be considered in discussions about family. As one elder put it, the legacy of IRS can mean that people can be "afraid of even our own ways." As the TRC (2015) pointed out, traumas have occurred across generations. An understanding of trauma is crucial to include in any PCA. Healing must also occur across generations and child protection needs to hold space for that to occur. In doing so, the PCA must understand the structure of Aboriginal family and community:

> And I think our people are also beginning to realize that the clans are really important, the families are really important. And in our language we didn't have a word for aunt or uncle, they were your parents, your aunts and your uncles were also your mom and dad. We didn't have a word for cousins, those people were your brothers and sisters. So I think people are again realizing I do have a big family, and I do have a support network out there that I can reach out to.

In this broader context cooperation is needed by child protection, and with the other institutions working with families, such as health care and education, from an Aboriginal perspective. An elder indicated some institutions have changed their relationships in the community, "as time has gone on it has become that the school is not the enemy so much anymore, and this is where the positive is coming from."

Changes within Aboriginal cultures are breaking down the barriers with institutions, which have

historically been connected with the inter-generational traumas. Child protection must also support the cultural connections and healing believing that they can be part of the healing process. The elders feel changing the PCA process matters, but they caution:

> [I]t frustrates me when I come to these things… we can develop the best model but once it's done will those workers will they practice it? One thing is… you can say all of the right things, write all of the best things so you can get proposal money, but then when you do… and then you're trying to implement it, it's over their heads, so how are these people or children going to benefit if they refuse our traditional ways.

Reconnection

Elders spoke frequently about the power of reconnection with traditional ways of knowing, ceremony and spirit. This is part of the child yearning for knowing self. The child must come to know their place and identity which PCAs must factor into the analysis. As one elder stated, "[t]hey get connected to their heritage, their ancestry, and it's just like they wake up and it gives them self-esteem. It's like all of the sudden they have identity and they have pride."

The parent may be searching for cultural identity, as well. Becoming familiar with tradition and culture guides their role as parents including the connection to community and family in the broad context:

> [W]hen the mother knows that we're going to have a child, there's a group of grandmas and mothers that will surround the mother, and guide and direct for a healthy birth, and at the same time the father will be getting guidance from the Elders… they're all fathers, they're all grandmothers, grandpas.

Elders form an important part of the reconnection. They provide the teaching, guidance and understand the oral history and teachings across the generations. Their influence and impact counters the effects of colonization and may help to reverse the assimilation process. Elders act as a conduit to overcome the fear that permeated communities as a result of the various assimilation efforts. This gives families a different way to interact with each other as well as the support systems for children. According to one elder, "[i]t wasn't until we overcame fear, and we really realized what was happening to us because of the oppression and that was all part of colonization, that we understood that there's nothing wrong with this. We're going to go to a ceremony, and we're going to participate." Such reconnection changes the life pathways for children that may add to positives within the family helping to counter the impact of deficits.

Success existed and continues to exist

Colonization and the effects it has had on Aboriginal peoples across Canada is a dominant story and the elders emphasized these are not the only stories. The elders emphasized that there have been stories of success and resilience, as a foundation for safety, nurturance and cultural connections: "But my saving grace for myself, and my two other brothers was our grandparents. They didn't buy into it, they didn't go to residential schools, they didn't go to industrial schools, and so that nurturing was always there."

The elders felt it is vital to show the successes not only as a way to counter the dominant narrative of deficit within the Canadian collective but to also show to Aboriginal people that success is part of the fabric of their history:

> [W]e have in our communities, and right now I have to use the term thousands of us within the Blackfoot confederacy that are professionals, university graduate professionals, they came from that place of being in poverty. They came from that place of being in distress… There's educators, there are lawyers… we have every profession covered.

Implications for Assessments of Parenting Capacity

This paper has identified several implications for PCAs, which range from activities that need to be discontinued, and explore new directions. It is worth noting that this work draws on the knowledge of elders from the Blackfoot Confederacy. Other Aboriginal peoples will find value in the work but will need to consider the issues from their own perspective. There is no universal approach being suggested.

Activities That Should be Discontinued

i. The use of Euro-centric definitions of family as they do not capture the reality of Aboriginal peoples.

ii. The use of psychometrics as they are not culturally appropriate nor are they representative of the population being assessed (Choate & McKenzie, 2015).

iii. Based upon the input from the Elders, it is apparent that present methodologies used in assessing Aboriginal parents are not appropriate data gathering tools.

Activities That Need Exploration

i. Introduction of wider assessment parameters that include the "extended family" support systems.

ii. Use of "family" mapping tools that would replace such tools as the genogram and would consider linkages that serve family type purposes without being biological.

iii. Use of community support mapping that considers how such linkages can add strengths and also diminishes the impact of identified deficiencies.

iv. Addition of resiliency based approaches.

v. Finding ways to include cultural connection (which might include spirituality) within the assessment data as a source of meaningful and informative to the case formulation.

vi. Consider the impact of inter-generational trauma and the ways in which the present generation is addressing or mitigating the impacts.

vii. The inclusion of an Elder in the assessment conversation.

viii. Expanding home visits to include the primary support system.

Conclusions and Limitations

This paper has outlined many concerns regarding the utilization of the continuing use of assessment approaches that are based upon assumptions that, what has been developed for a dominant culture can be used with Aboriginal cultures. We have suggested that this extends colonial practices placing Aboriginal parents in a disadvantaged position when interacting with child protection. New methodologies and assessment approaches are required, but they should be developed by or in partnership with Aboriginal groups.

A significant limitation of this work is that Aboriginal parents who are not connected to their culture may find the existing approaches better fit their understanding of parenting. Future endeavors might seek to explore this concern. Another limitation is that families still need an individualized approach as they may be connected to Aboriginal culture but not spirituality as they draw upon non-Aboriginal belief systems in that area of their lives. This work drew upon knowledge from the Blackfoot Confederacy. We encourage other Aboriginal, Métis and Inuit peoples to explore this within their own communities, as there is no "pan Indian" approach that would be valid.

Future research should attempt to establish culturally appropriate methodologies for assessment of Aboriginal parents while also considering the larger recommendations of the TRC.

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