

ONKWATENRO'SHON:'A HEALTH PLANNERS

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Disclaimer: This section provides the learner with an introduction to Indigenous realities. It does not serve to replace courses in Indigenous Cultural Competence/Understanding which all people who serve indigenous communities should take.

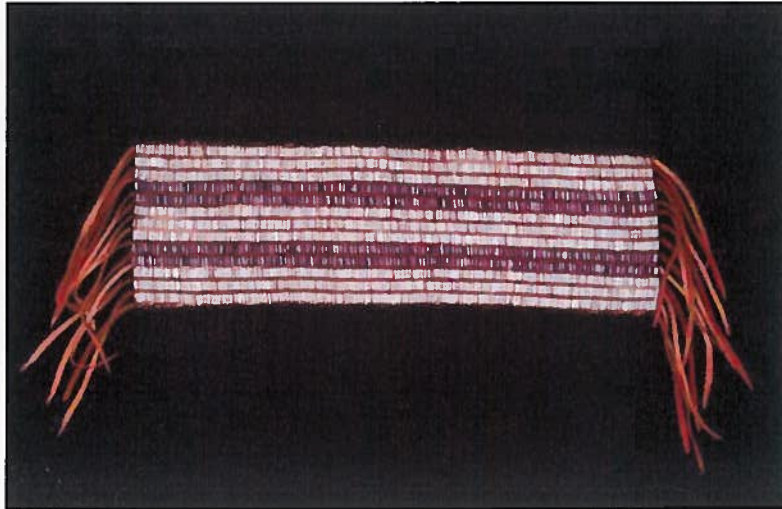
TWO EYED SEEING: FIRST NATIONS PERSPECTIVES OF CRISIS AND TRAUMA FROM THE INSIDE OUT AND THE OUTSIDE IN

There are 617 First Nations and 53 Inuit communities in Canada. Fifty-six percent of First Nations and Inuit people live outside of their home communities. According to the 2006 census over one million 'Canadians' identified themselves as Aboriginal. Within First Nations there are more than 50 aboriginal languages. Amongst the Inuit population there are differences in language, beliefs and cultural practices across the northern territories. The Métis populations across Canada demonstrate similar diversity. In short, although there is a common perspective or holistic worldview that binds indigenous populations together, there is also great diversity in languages, beliefs and cultural practices throughout the country.



While it is true that a higher percentage of First Nations and Inuit people experience the negative effects of trauma as compared to the larger non-native population, there are a large number of First Nations and Inuit communities and individuals who have the capacity to cope effectively with crisis and to minimize the negative effects of trauma. These communities and people could be referred to as resilient. These are the communities and people that we must learn from when attempting to understand trauma in indigenous communities. Without doing so we create the impression that the capacity to cope with trauma does not exist within indigenous communities and we fail to learn what we so desperately need to know -- How do we redevelop the capacity to cope with crisis and trauma within indigenous communities?

Since first contact with Europeans First Nations people recognized that there were two worldviews or perceptions of reality between themselves and the newcomers to this land. These worldviews consisted of different languages, cultures, beliefs, values and lifestyles. In short these are different ways of thinking about and making meaning of ourselves, each other and all of creation. The Haudenosaunee or Iroquois had marked these differences when we made a peace treaty with the Dutch in 1613. The Two Row Wampum belt (shown below) symbolized these two distinct worldviews that were represented by the Europeans in their ship and the Iroquois in canoe travelling side by side down the river of life. It was said that peace could be maintained if each respected the others worldview and did not interfere with each other's journeys.



In the Fall of 2004 Mi'kmaw Elder Albert Marshall offered the Mi'kmaw term *Etuaptmunk* or in English – 'Two Eyed Seeing' as a way of understanding the integration of Indigenous and Western worldviews or forms of knowledge. (Martin, 2012).

There are other ways of understanding 'Two Eyed Seeing', one of which recognizes that the Indigenous worldview and knowledge incorporates both the intuitive, holistic, metaphorical mind of the brain's right hemisphere with the analytic, reductive, linear left hemisphere. Whereas Western worldviews and knowledge rely predominantly on the functions of the linear, analytic left hemisphere, 'Two Eyed Seeing' refers to a state of mind that relies on a balanced use of the left and right brain functions.^{x1} This is often referred to as a holistic worldview. From an Indigenous perspective we define this as consisting of knowledge produced from the body, mind, heart and spirit. It appears that this form of 'traditional' indigenous knowledge gave indigenous populations the capacity to perceive crisis as an opportunity to grow and become stronger.^{x2} As a result, Indigenous populations were endowed with the capacity to minimize the negative effects of trauma.

When First Nations people used 'Two Eyed Seeing' in the past we faced crisis with confidence because we were able to manage and grow from crisis and cope with trauma.

"The (traditional) tribal family continues to grow in spite of whatever trouble comes along and has the ability to use crisis as an opportunity for growth. The (traditional) tribal family is adaptable and resilient in that it has the capacity to encounter crisis and use the discoveries from these experiences to become stronger. Problems are perceived as challenges and opportunities for learning. These perceptions have provided Aboriginal people with the capacity to survive numerous challenges from

the environment and European settlers. However depleted abilities may be Aboriginal people have remained strong enough to survive tremendous crises over the past five hundred years.” (Connors & Maidman, 2001)

Colonization experiences which have included residential schools resulted in loss of language, culture, teachings, beliefs, lands and self-determination contributed to progressive disconnection from ‘two eyed seeing’ and weakened our ability to face and cope with crisis, leaving us vulnerable to the negative effects of crisis. As well, colonization in itself has been a traumatizing experience that has negatively impacted the health of indigenous populations for generations. The ongoing onslaught of assimilating policies and colonial forces has led to the transmission of trauma through several generations and is recognized as intergenerational or multigenerational trauma. (Wesley-Esquimaux, 2004).

Today crisis often creates increased events of trauma that result in prolonged and pervasive physical, mental, emotional and spiritual harm. In addition, colonization has weakened our positive connections and relationships within family, and community. These losses have also contributed to depleting our capacity to cope with crisis and trauma. Current western research supports First Nations knowledge recognizing indigenous communities that maintain and support traditional cultural practices, beliefs, values and self determination experience less crisis and trauma and cope more effectively with these events (Chandler & Lalonde, 2008), Levy, 1965, & Westlake & May, 1986). In other words, ‘two eyed seeing’ and living appears to increase our capacity to cope with and benefit from crisis so that trauma occurs less and when it happens it is less likely to produce enduring harmful effects. Today we refer to this capacity as resilience. From an indigenous perspective we can refer to this as ‘Two Eyed Seeing’ and living. Elders often refer to indigenous culture as ‘a way of life’ or a way of seeing and living.

The ability to employ the functions of both hemispheres of the brain in balance, as described in ‘two eyed seeing’, appears to offer the abilities that enable resilience.

From a healing or therapeutic perspective this condition can be encouraged by utilizing therapies or healing practices that speak to the development of, each hemisphere. Both Western and Indigenous healing/therapeutic practices offer approaches that can accomplish this. However, the effects of colonization on Indigenous people have shifted our worldviews so that Indigenous people now have worldviews that range from assimilated western worldviews to traditional Indigenous worldviews (Two Eyed Seeing). As a result therapeutic interventions that address both brain hemispheres have to be used and have to match the client’s worldview. It is therefore, imperative that therapists/healers assess the worldviews of their clients and ensure that the healing/therapeutic practices offered match with their worldview. This means that appropriate healing practices can consist of Western therapies, traditional Indigenous practices or combinations of both. Today we identify these approaches as culturally safe or competent practices. Practitioners who desire to be effective healers within First Nations, Inuit Métis communities should complete an indigenous cultural competence program.

^{x1}Jill Bolte Taylor in her book *My Stroke of Insight* offers useful insights into this phenomena.

^{x2}Rupert Ross offered useful insights into the indigenous worldview in his book *Dancing With A Ghost* Exploring Indian Reality.

In short traditional indigenous cultures contain the strengths that create the capacity to cope effectively with crisis and trauma.

“Despite the many assaults that have occurred on the Aboriginal families of North America during the past five hundred years, Native people have survived and are...(recovering from the impact of colonization). While it is a travesty that some First Nations did not survive to see this time of healing, it is a testament of the resilience and strength of the tribal family that so many Aboriginal families remain. Today, many Aboriginal people are beginning to realize that most of the strengths that enabled our survival lie within our cultures. Those ways that the colonizers regarded as primitive and from which they attempted to separate Native people are what many First Nations and Non-Native people now realize contain the tools that will likely ensure the survival of all peoples and all of creation on this planet. This is why today there is a strong resurgence of native culture and native pride. Aboriginal families are now coming full circle to redefine the principles from our past that will help us to form a healthier future.”
(Connors & Maidman, 2001)

One core principal that can promote healing and recovery is ‘two eyed seeing’. As we learn once again to utilize the functions of both hemispheres of our brains in more balanced ways we rebuild resilience and by doing so recover our capacity to cope effectively with crisis and trauma. In short much of the rebuilding that we need to do is from within ourselves in balance with some of what is offered from others. Some First Nations people refer to this process as decolonization or reclaiming much of what we have lost. This reclamation also includes incorporation of our cultural practices and knowledge into our community programs and policies which will enhance our ability to be self governing and self determining.

Our Elders often provide reminders that ‘Creator has given us all that we need to live good lives. We need only to attend to these gifts and use them well for our benefit and the benefit of all of creation.’

The above changes are from the inside out and represent factors that can once again be within our control. However, there are other outside-in factors that remain mostly in the control of the ‘people in the ship’ that effect and create crisis and trauma within Indigenous populations. These factors are often referred to as social determinants of health and speak to system inequalities that can only be changed through social justice. Indigenous peoples loss of self determination due to inequalities within the systems that have been created and operated by the ‘ship people’ have left the ‘canoe people’ dependant and often unable to be self determining. Consequently most indigenous people remain alienated at the bottom of the economic social structure and are identified as living in poverty. The impact that this form of alienation has on health outcomes has been identified within research that has been conducted globally. In short the greater the inequality in a society the worse the health outcomes (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009). Interestingly the research shows that the negative impact of social inequality on health outcomes not only negatively impacts those at the bottom of the social ladder but ultimately reduces the health of the entire society. In short more equal societies present as healthier societies. Therefore the principal of influencing greater social equality has an important role in addressing crisis and trauma within indigenous communities. This is the outside factor that remains more in the control of the ‘people in the ship’ but is currently beginning to be challenged by Indigenous people and other supporters through such social action for justice as seen in the Idle No More Movement.

When we reflect back to the beginning of the relationship between the 'people in the ship' and us 'in our canoe' we can see that the Peace Treaty that was created through the Two Row Wampum was understood by our Elders to consist of the above principal of social equality. In fact, the treaty spoke of the 'people in their ship' travelling down the river of life beside us 'in our canoe', respecting each other's journey and not interfering with each other as the way to a peaceful relationship. In the time since that treaty was made many other treaties were signed. As these new treaties were made indigenous people repeatedly attempted to clarify to the 'people in the ship' that we were establishing a relationship of brothers and not one of father to son as they so often wished to refer to. It is clear that the indigenous worldview as presented through our early Peace Treaties identified equality as an important principle and proposed sharing as a further principle that contributes to peaceful relationship. Today we are beginning to realize that this principle is an important determinant of health. Rudolf Dreikur, an internationally recognized psychiatrist, believed the real challenge facing the human race is to establish equality at all levels of human activity and that this alone may be the determining factor of our continued existence.

"Then I was standing on the highest mountain of them all, and round about beneath me was the whole hoop of the world. And while I stood there I saw more than I can tell and I understood more than I saw; for I was seeing in a sacred manner the shapes of all things in the spirit, and the shape of all shapes as they must live together like one being. And I saw that the sacred hoop of my people was one of many hoops that made one circle, wide as daylight and as starlight, and in the centre grew one mighty flowering tree to shelter all the children of one mother and one father. And I saw that it was holy."

Black Elk

Vision of Ogala Sioux medicine man Black Elk. Circa 1860's.



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