

Visions of Community: A “Seventh Moment” Critical Phenomenological Study

by

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A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements of the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in the School of Child and Youth Care

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## ABSTRACT

The research provides a descriptive understanding of the everyday lived experience of *sense of community* and an interpretive understanding of the aspects of meaning that are associated with this phenomenon. Using a critical hermeneutic phenomenology, which formed the conceptual and methodological framework for this study, I experienced an interpretive inquiry that takes place in the experiential reality of the *lifeworld*, not as an object of conversation, but as something that is intensely and personally encountered.

The study was located in Northern British Columbia and involves six communities and four different stakeholder groups. Conversational interviews were conducted with 32 individuals representing an equal number of persons representing: recipients of services or have histories as volunteer workers in the community; human service practitioners employed in not-for-profit community-based resources; senior administrators employed in bureaucratic and non-bureaucratic organizations; and provincially delegated child protection workers. Written reflective journals were also kept by research participants for a four week period following the personal interview. Interview and journal data were transcribed into text and subjected to hermeneutic phenomenological thematic analysis. The phenomenological method then shifted into a mode of interpretative inquiry by engaging co-researchers in focus groups to reflect upon the essential themes and structures that emerged from the thematic analysis. Key areas of the phenomenological investigation included the meaning and lived experience of sense of community, how one participates in building community, the experience of absence of sense of community, and the perceived barriers to sense of community in one's life.

Through this study, 18 essences of the lived experience of sense of community were identified. A further seven insights were revealed on how the findings might be useful for child welfare community governance and community-based practice. They are "phenomenologically informative" in that they provide an insightful understanding of the complex nature and meaning of sense of community.

It is my hope that this research will encourage readers to reflect on their personal sense of community; and for those who work in government bureaucracy, consider questioning how the work might be transformed and wonder about how community governance might be lived differently.

Supervisor: Dr. Frances Ricks, (School of Child and Youth Care)

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I would like to thank the co-researchers who participated in this study. Their generosity and enthusiasm in sharing their unique and rich narratives with me made this dissertation possible and authentic.

To my committee members, Jim Anglin, Gordon Barnes, and Peter Stephensen, I wish to convey my sincere appreciation for their thoughtful enthusiasm, genuine interest, and expert advice throughout the duration of the study. I am honored to have their involvement.

I express heartfelt thanks to the University of Victoria for granting me the privilege of pursuing this challenge. I also express my thanks to the entire social work faculty at the University of Northern British Columbia for their support and encouragement these past two years.

I sincerely thank Merrie-Ellen Wilcox for her assistance and valuable advice with the editing and formatting of the dissertation.

Finally, I wish to thank my Advisor and Supervisor, Dr. Frances Ricks. Dr. Frances Ricks has not only been incredible in that role, she has also been the best teacher that I have ever had. She has allowed me to taste the true joy of learning. Without her, I do not see how I could have survived this dissertation journey. I have been blessed with the one true dream that every doctoral student hopes for, a supportive and caring Chair. It has been my pleasure working with her and I bow to the wisdom within her. Always, she will have a special place in my heart.

## CHAPTER 1: TURNING TO THE PHENOMENON OF SENSE OF COMMUNITY

*Insight is more than the knowledge of this or that situation. It always involves an escape from something that had deceived us and held us captive....Insight is something we come to...It too is ultimately part of the vocation of man—i.e., to be discerning and insightful. (Gadamer, 1975/2004, p. 350)*

This study explored the phenomenon of *sense of community* from the lived experiences of community members in Northern British Columbia. It involved six Northern British Columbia communities comprising four stakeholder groups. My motivation for the study was to develop a better understanding of why community initiatives of the past have failed to provide effective governance for family and social services. It was my hope to create an understanding of community that might offer different paradigm thinking for social service governance both within and outside government. I thought that a more in depth understanding of community from community stakeholders might offer new possibility for rethinking community and community involvement in social service governance.

Max van Manen (2003, p. 30) suggests that the way to determine the question in phenomenological inquiry is to turn “to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world.” Van Manen (2003) also insists that it is equally important for the researcher to have a pedagogical relationship with the phenomenon being investigated so that the insights revealed can be applied to the education of others. Of this relationship he says, “To be oriented to an object means that we are animated by the object in a full and human sense” (2003, p. 33).

I have been interested in and committed to community governance in child welfare for some time, always wondering how communities could be the heart of what we do. For twenty-five years I have traversed the world of child welfare, first as a BSW student in a field education practicum, and later as a human service practitioner employed in the not-for-profit sector, director of a First Nation child protection agency, provincial director of community development, consultant to community-based organizations, and assistant professor of social work at the University of Northern British Columbia. Throughout my travels, *sense of community* has been an unresolved issue in both my experiences of the discourse on community-based governance as well as my experiences of community-based practice in the field of child welfare. Community governance involves multiple and complex aspects of governance: globalization, globalization of social policy, social policy in Child Welfare, bureaucracy, and understanding community. I thought it important to determine people's *sense of community*, as this has been a missing piece in building governance structures in Child Welfare. It is important because our sense of community speaks to and operates within these multiple and complex aspects of governance within the larger context of community.

### The Larger Context of Community

The political consequences of globalization<sup>1</sup> have brought about the most fundamental redesign of the world's political and economic arrangements since the Industrial Revolution (Albrow, 1997; Greider, 1997; Held, McGrew, Goldblatt, &

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<sup>1</sup> The term *globalization* is used in the context of this paper as a comprehensive term for the emergence of a global society in which economic, political, environmental, and cultural events in one part of the world quickly come to have significance for people in other parts of the world.

Perraton, 1999). The *Declaration of Paris*, entitled *The Challenges of Globalisation* (Socialist International, 2004), adopted at the Socialist International<sup>2</sup> XXI Congress held in France in November 1999 echoes this sentiment.

Humankind is witnessing a new change of era marked by the phenomenon of globalisation. The transformation of an industrial society into one dominated by information and knowledge is taking place at a pace and extent hitherto unknown in history. (para.1)

In April of that same year, in a speech to the Economic Club in Chicago, British Prime Minister Tony Blair (1999) spoke about the liberalization of capital markets and growth in international trade and its effect on the sovereign power of individual states to independently determine economic and social policy.

We live in a completely new world. Every day about one trillion dollars moves across the foreign exchanges, most of it in London. Here in Chicago the Mercantile Exchange and the Chicago Board of Trade contracts are worth more than USD 1.2 billion per day. Any Government that thinks it can go it alone is wrong. If the markets don't like your policies they will punish you. The same is true of trade. Protectionism is the swiftest road to poverty. Only by competing internationally can our companies and our economics grow and succeed.

Globalisation has transformed our economies and our working practices. (para. 17–18)

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<sup>2</sup> The Socialist International is the worldwide organization of social democratic, socialist and labour parties. It currently brings together 168 political parties and organizations from all continents. The supreme decision-making bodies of the International are the Congress, which meets every three years.

Four years earlier, Keith Banting (1995), then Director of the School of Policy Studies at Queen's University, persuasively articulated the social and economic consequences of globalization in reshaping the underpinnings of the Western welfare state.

Globalization and the associated technological and economic restructuring have transformed the politics of the welfare state in the West. Domestic and international policy can no longer be separated, and the future of social protection can no longer be contemplated except in a global context. The pressures on the welfare state are intense. There has been a strong convergence in the problems facing Western governments; and the politics of restructuring generates a similar agenda in most countries. (p. 36).

One of the most interesting arguments with regard to the position that globalization hinders democracy is that of John Gray, professor of European Thought at the London School of Economics. Gray (1998) offered one of the most pessimistic and apocalyptic views of globalization for the developed Western welfare states in his book *False Dawn: The Delusions of Global Capitalism*.

Bond markets have knocked away the floor from under post-war full employment policies. No Western government today has a credible successor to the policies which secured western societies in the Keynesian era<sup>3</sup> [my footnote]....Social market systems are being compelled progressively to dismantle themselves, so

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<sup>3</sup> Taken in combination with intervention in the economy by the state, based on Keynesian principles, in order to even out the booms and busts of the capitalist business cycle, and job creation initiatives by the government aimed at combating unemployment, these welfare state programs were the basis of variations on the theme of the Keynesian welfare state that emerged in advanced capitalist countries (Mulvale, 2001).

that they can compete on equal terms with economies in which environmental, social and labour cost are lowest. (p. 92)

While a number of writers have presented a different view of the relationship between economic constraints and political agency in relation to welfare states (Burgoon, 2001; Doremus, Keller, Pauly, & Reich, 1999; Hirst & Thompson, 1999) most analysts agree that globalization is associated with new or deepened patterns of inequality between regions, between countries, and between and within different groups of people (Bryan, 1994; Kapstein, 2000; Sassen, 1998; Watson, 1998).

For example, in an October 2003 report entitled *The Challenge of Slums* (UN-Habitat, 2003, p. 6), the United Nations' Human Settlements Programme broke with traditional circumspection and self-censorship by stating that "the primary direction of both national and international interventions during the last twenty years has actually increased urban poverty and slums, increased exclusion and inequality, and weakened urban elites in their efforts to use cities as engines of growth." The report also noted that the 1990s were the first decade in which global urban development took place within almost utopian parameters of neoliberal market freedom.

During the 1990s, trade continued to expand at an almost unprecedented rate, no-go areas opened up and military expenditures decreased....All the basic inputs to production became cheaper, as interest rates fell rapidly along with the price of basic commodities. Capital flows were increasingly unfettered by national controls and could move rapidly to the most productive areas. Under what were almost perfect economic conditions according to the dominant neoliberal

economic doctrine, one might have imagined that the decade would have been one of unrivalled prosperity and social justice. (p. 73)

The authors conclude the report by stating that “instead of being a focus for growth and prosperity, the cities have become a dumping ground for a surplus population working in unskilled, unprotected and low-wage informal service industries and trade” (p. 40). The rise of this informal sector, they declare frankly, “is...a direct result of liberalization” (p. 46).

Canada is among the most committed of any developed nation to trade and commercial liberalization (Government of Canada, 2005). The Canadian Council on Social Development (CCSD) reports that a decade and more of shredding the social safety net to deliver billions of dollars of tax cuts to the rich and corporations isn't a rising economic and social tide lifting all boats (Saul, 2004). Instead, an analysis of the 2001 census by CCSD (2003) makes the case that only the yachts are rising. The report concludes.

Canadian society is becoming increasingly polarized. The richest 10% of our population has seen its income grow by a whopping 14% while the bottom 10% has seen only a slight increase of less than 1%. Moreover the income of many working families has actually declined! Instead, all but the yachts are sinking, creating an ever more unequal society in which the rich are getting richer, the poor poorer, and the middle class, democracy's bulwark stagnating....It is time that we started to pay careful attention to social policy and social programs. A few years ago we began to realize that our healthcare system was in real trouble, so government conducted numerous studies, launched provincial and royal

commissions, and made substantial new investments. What the Census results are telling us is that we need to start doing the same thing for social policy in this country. We need to be harnessing all of our collective efforts and energies towards turning the tide. Let's move beyond federal/provincial jurisdictional battles, let's recognize the role of cities and communities in strengthening our social fabric, and let's support our voluntary sector across the country so that we can truly begin to address the issues that the recent Census has made so evident.

(p. 1)

The growing disparity between the haves and have-nots relates to the demands of the global economy and resulting profound changes in the work habits and lifestyles of people in their own native countries (Canadian Labour Congress, 2003; Saul, 2004). In order to meet the challenge of global competition, national economies are obliged, if they are not to fall behind, to "retool" themselves and restructure away from full-time, full-year employment to a just-in-time workforce (Canadian Labour Congress, 2003; Freiler, Rothman, & Barata, 2004; Jackson, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c; Saunders, 2003).

### *The Globalization of Social Policy*

The politics of social policy as they have played out in the era of globalization have profoundly altered the relationship between Canadian citizens and their governments (Albrow, 1997; Baldwin, 1997; Banting, 1995; Held, 2000; Kymlicka, 2000; Saul, 2004). Fritz Scharpf (1998, p. 5) writes that the "increased levels of economic interdependence between states undermine the congruence between the 'people' being governed and their supposed governors." Across all Western welfare states, to one degree

or another, this change in relations is marked by the drastic downsizing of civil services, the mounting deregulation of the public and private sectors, political emphasis on tax cuts and balanced budgets, the retreat of government from the provision of public services, the radical realignment of social and state institutions, and a turn to *the community* as a resource in solving social problems (Mullaly, 1994, 1997; Panitch, 1994; Rice & Prince, 2001; Silver & Arrighi, 2001). An even more significant impact of globalization has been a serious rethinking about the assumptions and values of public policy and their application.

It is now acknowledged by all levels of government that returning to community is a key feature of social policy in the era of globalization. Whether the focus is on health care services, income assistance, the elderly, housing, people with disabilities, children with special needs, child welfare, or Aboriginal issues, governments have turned their attention towards the community as a resource in solving social problems. However, when one considers that in Canadian society one child in six (over one million) still lives in poverty (Campaign 2000, 2003), the gap between the rich and the poor continues to widen (Stanford, 2001; Statistics Canada, 2001), over three-quarters of a million Canadians rely on food banks (Mitchell, 2003; Pollack, 2002), and over 200,000 Canadians are homeless (Addario, 2003; Rice & Prince, 2001), community cannot be regarded as a substitute for all other needed social policy responses, but rather as a complementary strategy.

Most people would agree that the world would be a better place if community were a place where people cared for one another. Despite this initial agreement, what is meant by the word *community* is less clear. Furthermore, one of the more pressing

questions in this new century has to do with the sustainability of community in the era of globalization. Is there a place for community in a global society is a legitimate question being asked by scholars, policy analyst, and activist from across the political spectrum (Coburn, 2000; Lynch, 2000; Raphael et al; 2001; Rice & Prince, 2001; Saul, 2004).

If community is going to become a critical aspect of social policy development, we need to understand what it is. We must understand community as it is lived, especially across cultural and socio-economic boundaries, as a resource for change and opportunity. This is challenging because the word *community* evokes a set of meanings and images that are misleading and for a large number of people, are dangerous negations of reality (Finn, 1994; Fukuyama, 1995b). As many are quick to point out, the deceptive coziness of the word *community* serves to disguise a social reality in which a growing number of children and families are left in isolation and poverty (Campaign 2000, 2003; CCSD, 2003). James Rice and Michael Prince (2001) show that many past community-based policy reforms have contributed to reduced benefits and services to the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in our society.

Central to the political rhetoric on community is the meaning to return to a lost moment of social harmony. However, some argue that this is nothing more than nostalgia for something that never existed (Benammar, 1994; Pahl, 1991). For social constructionist the phenomenon of community is ever changing and cannot be seen in a diachronically linear path of development. Rather, it is actively constructed in the present by members of society to meet current socially constructed needs. This means that the phenomenon of community manifests in different ways across local, cultural and

historical contexts. What really matters is what people are constructing from their current experience of the world.

*The Impact of the New Social Policy Context in Child Welfare*

Child welfare is a form of social policy in which the state, in fulfilling its historical role as *parents patriae*,<sup>4</sup> is granted the power by specific statutory law to look out for the welfare of children (Downs, Costin, & McFadden, 1996; McCall, 1990; Wharf, 1993). As such, child welfare services include counselling services, homemaker services, day care services, services for unmarried parents, as well as protective services and out-of-home placement services, such as foster care. In Canada, the responsibility for child welfare services lies with each of the 10 provincial and three territorial governments. Each province and territory has its own legislation that outlines the range and extent of child protection services and provides the mandate for policy and program development. In addition, some Aboriginal authorities<sup>5</sup> are legally mandated to deliver the full range of child welfare services under the Federal First Nations Child and Family Services Program.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Parents patriae*, which in Latin literally means “father of the country or government as parent,” refers to a rule, derived from the English common law, empowering the monarch to act as guardian and protector of persons. Under the authority of this doctrine, the court may act as a substitute benevolent parent on behalf of the state and has the right, in the “*best interest of the child*” and for the child’s protection, to remove some authority from the parents through its legislative and court systems and to establish services on behalf of children in need of state intervention (Wharf, 1993, p. 9).

<sup>5</sup> For the purposes of this paper, the term *Aboriginal authorities* is used to describe both off-reserve Aboriginal agencies, such as the Vancouver Child and Family Services Society, mandated in 2001, and First Nations on-reserve agencies.

<sup>6</sup> In 1991, a national First Nations Child and Family Services Program was established by Indian Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) under the authority of Cabinet. Under this program, First Nations child

As in other areas of social policy, the objective of child welfare policy over the past two decades has been to create, expand, and rely on community capacity<sup>7</sup> to assume responsibility for the care and well-being of children. In spite of reforms undertaken by provincial and territorial jurisdictions to bring improvement within their respected child welfare systems, the situation has steadily deteriorated. The final report of the *Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect* (Trocmé et al., 2001)<sup>8</sup> estimated that over 135,573 child maltreatment investigations were carried out in Canada in 1998, an annual incidence rate of 21.52 investigations per 1,000 children. Based on statistics found in provincial/territorial ministries of child and family services annual reports from 2000 to 2002, there are currently approximately 80,000 children under the protection of these ministries across the country.

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and family service agencies provide services for children who are registered and ordinarily resident on reserve. They receive their mandate and authority from their respective provincial/territorial government and function as agencies of these governments, while receiving their funding through INAC. In 1997/98, there were 79 First Nations child and family service agencies delivering services to over 70% of on-reserve children and youth across Canada, from birth to 18 years of age. None are in Yukon. For additional information, see INAC'S web-site.

<sup>7</sup> While one could be forgiven for thinking that the term *capacity building*, which in some quarters is associated with program maintenance after cessation of limited-term funding, is a not unexpected consequence of 1990s-style economic rationalism, such assumptions are incorrect. Capacity building has its roots in a range of disciplines that in the 1970s flew the flag for empowerment—for example, community development, international aid and development, public health, and education. Although these traditions are somewhat inter-related and have to varying degrees been concerned with developing healthy communities, it is perhaps not surprising that *capacity building* as a term has been conceptualized in a diverse range of ways and associated with a plethora of meanings (Ricks, Charlesworth, Bellefeuille, & Field, 1997; Hawe, Noort, King, & Jordens, 1997; Selsky, 1991).

<sup>8</sup> The *Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect* is the first nation-wide study to examine the incidence of reported child maltreatment and the characteristics of children and families investigated by Canadian child welfare services.

Moreover, several recent studies have shown that the vulnerable population of children in need of protection is increasing significantly in Canadian society (Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies [OACAS], 2002; Child Welfare League of Canada [CWLC], 2001; Trocmé, 2002). For example, between 1993 and 1998 the estimated number of child maltreatment investigations increased 44%, from 44,900 to 64,800; the incidence of substantiated maltreatment nearly doubled in Ontario from an estimated 12,300 investigations to 24,400, an increase of over 12,000; and the number of child maltreatment investigations that resulted in ongoing services beyond the initial investigation doubled, rising from 5,200 to 10,900. (OACAS, 2002). In Ontario, between 1998 and 2000, the number of investigations increased by 27% and the number of children in care increased by 36% (Trocmé, 2002).

There is a plausible argument that the development of a global economy is linked to the steady rise of child protection caseloads across the country because of the strong relationship between poverty, child maltreatment, and the placement of children in out-of-home care (Courtney, 1998; Dudding, 2004; Romero, Chavkin, & Wise, 2000; Rutman, Strega, Callahan, & Dominelli, 2001; Serge, Eberle, Goldberg, Sullivan, & Dudding, 2002). The overwhelming majority of children involved with the child welfare system come from families living in poverty or in marginal economic circumstances (Wharf, 2002). The *Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect* (Trocmé et al., 2001) reported that 36% percent of reported child abuse and neglect involved children whose families received unemployment insurance benefits or social assistance as the primary source of income. Similarly, a national study conducted in the United States in 1993 shows that the incidence of abuse and neglect is approximately 22

times higher among families with incomes below \$15,000 per year than among families with incomes of more than \$30,000 per year. It has been argued that any significant change in the economic circumstances of low-income families is likely to affect the need for child protective services (Department of Health and Human Services as cited in Courtney, 1998).

*British Columbia's Bill 65*

The introduction in 2002 of Bill 65 in British Columbia, the *Community Services Interim Authorities Act*, is an example of the profound changes that have taken place in the relationship between Canadian citizens and their governments over the past decade. The establishment of regional community-based governance authorities makes the community the key resource for tackling child and family social welfare issues. In the words of a previous minister, Gordon Hogg (2002, MCFD Transition Web Page), "the old social services delivery system was centralized, rigid and unresponsive....we need innovative solutions that come from the communities affected by the decisions."

Relying on the community is a key feature of the move toward regional community-based governance that theoretically offers a strategy for bringing the community together to design community-based responses to meet the service and program commitments of the ministry. The intent is to move to regional community-based governance by acknowledging and reinforcing the capacity of communities to "support and enhance the resilience of children and families," "to promote choice, innovation and shared responsibility," and to enable "communities to develop and deliver

services within a consolidated, coherent, community-based service delivery system” (Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2002, pp. 4–5).

While this strategy has merit, it creates many pressing challenges, not the least of which is the fundamental difference between community and bureaucracy. They are profoundly different paradigms. As John Hagedorn (1995) reports, while there have been many attempts to reform public decision-making structures through the development of regional and community-based governance authorities, the overruling characteristics and values of the bureaucracy have severely undermined these efforts.

Acting on the principles of community participation and empowerment requires the enabling of community to participate as an equal partner with government bureaucrats and human service professionals in setting the policy agenda, defining priorities, and developing the approaches to address those priorities.

### *Locating Community in Bureaucracy*

In the traditional bureaucracy individuals are surrounded by a sea of professionally delivered services, which stigmatize and set people apart from the community (McKnight, 1995). At the core of McKnight’s approach to social change is the profound belief that communities have the capacity to articulate their own needs. Further he argues that a capacity building approach is fundamentally bottom-up, beginning with what is present in the neighbourhood, and relying on the efforts of internal agents, such as residents, associations, and institutions (Finn & Checkoway, 1998). It is a model for community revitalization that is focused on “strengthening the capacity of residents, associations, and organizations to work, individually and

collectively, to foster and sustain positive neighborhood change” (The Aspen Institute, 1997, chap3., para. 17). Claudio Schuftan (1996) notes that capacity building can be characterized as:

...the approach to community development that raises people’s knowledge, awareness and skills to use their own capacity and that from available support systems, to resolve the more underlying causes of maldevelopment; capacity building helps them better understand the decision-making process; to communicate more effectively at different levels; and to take decisions, eventually instilling in them a sense of confidence to manage their own destinies.  
(p. 261)

In contrast, bureaucracy is based on a needs-based paradigm, which focuses on a community’s deficiencies and problems (McKnight, 1995). Such an approach is often top-down, beginning with what is absent in the community, and outside-in, relying heavily on the efforts of external agents, such as technical assistants. It can be argued that needs-based approaches not only teach local people that they cannot shape their own future, but also lead people to believe that services are the answer to their problems. Consequently, “many lower-income, urban neighborhoods are now environments of service where behaviors are affected because residents come to believe that their well-being depends on being a client” (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993, p. 2).

For many, the “rational-linear” driven bureaucracies simply do not understand *community* and resist community because the essence of community is at odds with the fundamental beliefs and values of the bureaucratic apparatus (Fook, 2002; McKnight, 1995; Mullaly, 1997; Newman Kuyek, 1990). For example, German sociologist Max

Weber (1946) argued that rational bureaucracy was essential in structuring governments and the administration of modern society. He defined rationalization as the increasing role of calculation and control in social life, a trend leading to what he called the “iron cage” of bureaucracy. “Once it is fully established,” he observed, “bureaucracy is among those social structures which are the hardest to destroy” (Weber 1946, p. 228).

The administrative bureaucratic governance paradigm, through its principle of “rationality,” is a paradigm that removes awareness of difference and fosters “normal” as healthy. Consequently, in the provision of social services, the ability to create individualized responses to local need is constrained by the bureaucracy’s characteristics and values. Those with authority are in charge. There is an objective reality, quantified in facts, that becomes the focus of concern. Collective fears and feelings are not “real.” Explicit rules of conduct are to be followed. Discretionary judgment defers to regulation. The competitive high achievers have the authority and are in charge.

While there have been many attempts to reform public decision-making structures through the development of regional and community-based governance authorities, the overruling characteristics and values of the bureaucracy limit the impact of these efforts (Hagedorn, 1995). In a review of several case studies, Lisbeth Schorr (1998) asserts that some highly successful social welfare programs, which prosper in local settings, are destroyed when they are transferred to bureaucracies. In a speech at the 1999 fall forum of the Coalition of Essential Schools, she noted,

After several years of looking at both successes and failures in reform, I have become convinced that in most domains of social action and social policy, the reason we haven't been able to build on success on a scale large enough to matter

is that we have ignored how powerfully prevailing systems have created obstacles to the spread of effective programs and institutions. Whether you look at neighborhood health centers, family support, child protection or schools, the stuff that dedicated professionals recognize as effective, and the stuff they often fight to sustain, is typically undermined by the pressure of the systems that determine where and how the money flows, and how programs are regulated and held accountable. (Coalition of Essential Schools, para. 10)

Schorr (1998) believes that governments have the capacity to create the conditions under which communities could exercise a level of self-governance and take responsibility for their social welfare, but she wonders whether they possess the political will to release real decision-making power to the community. She contends that changing public institutions is possible when such change is dependent on recognizing the power of relationships; realizing that standardization and rigidity are not inherent in systems, having conviction and hope for change, recognizing that people who believe in fairness, justice, and opportunity will join the effort, believing that local and national leaders will emerge to create a new approach to complex problems, and believing in our ability to solve these problems based on our common knowledge.

While community-based approaches to promoting social change and economic development are not new, what is new is the sudden strategic application of the concept as a central social policy strategy. This expanded role of community is filled with uncertainty, contradictions and complexities. For example, what are the implications for “at risk” children and families? Will services be improved as a result of this growing reliance on community? Do the normative and restorative expectations of community as

espoused by governments fit with the types of distress experienced by our modern communities? And will the shift towards “community governance and community-based practice” differ from the prevailing bureaucratic model of governance and child welfare services? These are some of the questions that have guided this dissertation. In addressing them there is opportunity to take a more critical stance towards the changing politics of social policy.

### Orienting to the Phenomenon of Sense of Community

This research builds upon my community-based investigation conducted for the British Columbia Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD). The initial research examined the level of community involvement in the planning and implementation of a northern regional community-based authority. The MCFD study involved 650 surveys, 9 public focus groups, and 12 key informant interviews administered across 7 case-study communities (see Appendix A). While the investigation focused on the process of change in the North Region (see Appendix B), what emerged as a dominant theme was the divergence between senior administrators, provincial child protection workers, community-based line service providers, and former recipients of services in how one understands community and conversely what one expects from a community-based approach to governance and practice. It was this unexpected divergence that presented the opportunity for examining the phenomenon of community in this dissertation, and to do so as it is understood and lived by community stakeholders in this northern region. My primary interest was in discovering how members of the

community would characterize their personal experiences in community and how that might lead to different governance and service options.

### Establishing the Rationale for the Phenomenological Inquiry

This study was informed by critical and constructivist social theories and the hermeneutic approach to phenomenology defined by van Manen (2003), which derives from the traditions of Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Hans-Georg Gadamer. Further, the study is informed by the theory and practice of the “seventh moment” of qualitative inquiry, which “asks that the social sciences and the humanities become sites for critical conversations about democracy, race, gender, class, nation-state, globalization, freedom, and community” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 3).

Seventh moment inquiry attempts to “connect qualitative research to the hopes, needs, goals, and promise of a free democratic society” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 4) by drawing students and faculty into communities and into the various forms of action learning and ethical reflection. The seventh moment approach to qualitative inquiry was chosen because, first, it draws attention to the “moral dimension of research—that is the pursuit of worthwhile purposes for the flourishing of persons, communities and the ecology of which we are all a part” (Reason, 2004, p. 3). Second, it is concerned with issues of text and voice (i.e., who is speaking and who gets heard). Third, it attempts to set aside debates about methods to move to an action arena guided by hope and an ethic of social justice (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). And finally, research practice in the seventh moment constitutes a response to the “crisis of representation” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p.3).

The crisis of representation is one focus of a larger intellectual movement (Geertz, 1988; Marcus & Fischer, 1986) concerned with the gap between the lived experience of people we study and the inability of our research to fully portray such experiences through our methods and interpretation of findings (Lincoln & Denzin, 2000; Schwandt, 2001). This crisis has led many researchers to engage those who are studied more significantly in the research process, providing them with roles in influencing the research designs, verifying findings, and guiding the application and interpretation of study.

As a result, there has been an explosion of alternative paradigms for conceiving reality and legitimating forms of knowledge and social practices that support political and moral commitments to create a better world (Kendall & Michael, 1997). These alternative paradigms are, by and large, grounded in the constructivist research paradigm (Chambers, Wedel, & Rodwell, 1992; Franklin, 1995; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Rodwell, 1994) and informed by a variety of separate but related philosophical stances, which include but are not limited to critical theory (Kaplan, 2003; Klein & Truex, 1996; Ngwenyama & Lee, 1997), critical legal studies (Kramer, 1993; Leonard, 1995), critical social psychology (Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor, & Tindall, 1994; Brydon-Miller, 1997; Burman, 1997a, 1997b; Parker, 1998; Prillettensky, 1994; Spears, 1997; Thomas, 1998; Tolman, & Brydon-Miller, 1997), cultural studies (Gray, 2002; Saukko, 2003), critical feminism (Agger, 1993; Fraser, 1992; Young, 1990a), and postmodernism (Lather, 1991, 2001; Leet, 2004; Lyotard, 1989; Pensky, 1997).

Critical inquiry raises the questions of knowledge—defined by whom, about whom, and for what purpose (Lather, 1986; Wallerstein, 1999)—and invites a more

critical stance by challenging current ideology and initiating action towards the search for social justice (Foucault, 1980; Freire, 1982; Gitlin & Russel, 1994). It views knowledge as historically and socially constructed and mediated through perspectives of the dominant society. The main task of critical inquiry is seen as being one of social critique, in which the restrictive and alienating conditions of the status quo are brought to light. Thus, it calls for knowledge that challenges researchers to go beyond conventional worldviews and create new social relations (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Habermas, 1987; Kemmis, 2001).

A phenomenological approach can be used in critical inquiry to produce knowledge with emancipatory relevance while promoting individual autonomy and the solidarity of the entire community. Burke Johnson and Larry Christensen (2000) point out that the purpose of phenomenological research is to obtain a view into the research participants' life-worlds in order to understand what it means to them as constructed from their life experiences. A critical phenomenological approach to inquiry has a pedagogical end, in the sense that the participants benefit in some way from the research and is undertaken as an attempt to not only learn about people, but as a means to know with them (Crotty, 2003).

This inquiry was grounded in the critical hermeneutic philosophical perspective. The five specific questions that guided the study were: (a) What is sense of community to you? (b) Do you experience sense of community in your life? (c) Do you participate in building sense of community for yourself? (d) Do you ever experience absence of sense of community? (e) What outside influences affect sense of community?

## Organization of this Phenomenological Journey

In this chapter I began the exploration of the phenomenon of *sense of community* within the larger context of community and have intentionally avoided defining community in order to allow sense of community to emerge from the research. Explicit assumptions about the globalization of social policy and the shift to community-based models of governance, and the potential implications for child welfare policy were presented. A methodological approach for traversing my exploration of the phenomenon *sense of community* was given and the research questions were presented.

Chapter 2 places the study in context by providing an examination of the notional and theoretical perspectives that inform my understanding about sense of community. The implications of the various conceptual frameworks for child welfare policy and practice are discussed, providing a further rationale for the five research questions. Chapter 3 addresses the philosophical underpinnings and foundations for this study. This chapter also presents the overall research design and methodological framework for the study including a discussion on the issue of rigour. Chapter 4 provides an overview of the first and second level data analysis. It also presents several additional insights that emerged from the focus group discussions on how the findings might be useful for child welfare community governance and community-based practice. Finally, Chapter 5 presents my co-researchers and personal reflections of our joint investigative journey into the lived experience of sense of community. It concludes with some personal reflections on what I think are possible options for child welfare policy and practice and future research in light of the study's findings.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

*Our task is to broaden our reasoning to make it capable of grasping what, in ourselves and others, precedes and exceeds reason.*

—Maurice Merleau-Ponty<sup>9</sup>

In order to frame the issues that provide relevance and background to the study, an extensive literature review was conducted. The review encompassed a critical review of the character and core assumptions that underpin the distributive approach to social welfare, an examination of the literature on the nature of community, and a review of four leading theoretical perspectives in the advancement of current social policy, including health promotion, population health, social epidemiology, and social capital theory.

Hermeneutic phenomenology requires that pre-understandings are brought to consciousness in order to provide the phenomenon under investigation with the greatest opportunity to reveal itself (Addison, 1994). One of the ways that I addressed this hermeneutic imperative in the present study was by conducting an initial exploration of the literature to help me explore my pre-understandings of social welfare policy and the phenomenon of community within the context of my personal historical, cultural, social, and economic background of lived experiences. In part, it is an exploration of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that inform the philosophy of practice and provided material for reflection. I elaborate further on this point under the “Pre-Understanding: The condition of Self Awareness” sub-heading in Chapter 3.

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<sup>9</sup> See Flyvbjerg (2001, p. 9)

## The Distributive Approach to Social Welfare

The institutional framework for social policy in Canadian society has always been organized from a residual welfare state perspective, which assumes that the family and market economy are the proper sources for meeting peoples' need (Armitage, 1975; McGilly, 1998; Mulvale, 2001; Olson, 2002; Wharf, 1992). As such, programs are by and large confined to serving those individuals who fall through the cracks of a competitive market-driven capitalist society and all of its structural shortcomings (McGilly, 1998; Mullaly, 1997, 2002). The individualism inherent in the prevailing residualist approach to social policy implies that the locus of "need" is within the individual who experiences loss of employment or illness or requires some other form of public assistance, rather than in external social, economic, and political forces.

Drawing primarily on critical theory and social constructionist critique, the literature review presents the argument that the distributive paradigm built on an individualized view and "deficit" orientation of need, is inadequate and ill conceived, and that what is needed is an alternative non-distributive paradigm to supplement, complement, and in some cases take precedence over the current distributive model.

The review takes as a starting point the view that the leading social welfare ideological stances in Canadian society, ranging from the far Left to the far Right, essentially share the same basic residual needs-based distributive paradigm. The crucial difference rests only in the apportionment of redistributive resources directed toward social welfare provisions.

A discussion of paradigms also is undertaken to help cast the literature review beyond the usual ideological debate over social welfare policies as a contest between

right-wing individualism and left-wing collectivism. Given the power of paradigms, there is an implicit reliance on the distributive approach of social welfare as the “only way” (McGilly, 1998). Hence, a “normative” discourse of inevitability is constructed and widely disseminated through society’s framework of social, educational, economic, and political institutions. Consequently, little critical reflection on alternative social welfare paradigms is seriously entertained.

### *The Residual Nature of the Distributive Paradigm*

The modern social welfare state in the Western world is commonly identified with varying degrees of institutionalization of the state’s responsibility for the well-being of its citizens (Furniss, 1992; Held, 1995; Huber & Stephens, 1998). It is commonly defined as:

...a system in which the government undertakes the main responsibility for providing for the social and economic security of the state’s population by means of income transfers (pensions, social security benefits), in-kind benefits (food, housing, free health care), and other services that, in affluent societies, protect citizens from the vicissitudes of capitalism. (McLean, 1996, p. 526)

Over the last 50 years, social policy researchers have developed a number of typologies to help delineate the key manifestations and workings of the distinct social welfare states around the world. One of the first typologies to be constructed divided welfare states into two major dichotomous categories: residual and institutional (Wilensky & Lebeaux, 1965).

Essentially, the residual social welfare state is seen as restricting its social institutions to limited responses that come into play only when the “normal” structures of

the free market fail to meet the basic needs of its citizens. It has a much narrower range of social welfare programs covering far fewer social contingencies, as it is designed primarily to meet the needs of only the very impoverished left unmet by the capitalist-driven market (Mullaly, 1994; Olson, 2002). Consequently, it reaches far fewer people, provides far shorter periods of benefit entitlement, and is bound by more stringent rules and regulations (Olson, 2002).

The Canadian social welfare state is ordinarily observed as a member of the residual state family (Armitage, 1975; Wharf, 1992). It is designed on a remedial, minimalist model in which social programs are typically deficit oriented and put in place as a last resort when basic human needs are left unmet by the structural shortcomings of a capitalist-driven market society. The narrow emphasis on need confines the conceptual analysis of social welfare to market-based distribution of resources, resulting in distributive social welfare policies as the only way to think about questions of social inequality.

At the other end of the continuum, the institutional concept of social welfare is based on the notion of protecting all citizens of a society from the social costs of living in an industrialized capitalist market (Armitage, 1975; McGilly, 1998). From an institutional perspective, need is established based on the fact of need, without consideration of the cause of need. Thus, the emphasis is on the overall population health. According to Harold Wilensky and Charles Lebeaux (1965), the institutional approach:

...implies no stigma, no emergency, no abnormality. Social welfare becomes accepted as a proper, legitimate function of modern industrial society in helping individuals achieve self-fulfillment. The complexity of modern life is recognized.

The inability of the individual to provide fully for himself, or to meet all his needs in family and work settings is considered a normal condition: and the helping agencies receive institutional status. (p. 138)

More recent comparative social welfare state studies have produced a number of different social welfare state typologies organized according to the level of benefits, eligibility criteria, universal or residual character of social policy, gender equality, commitment to full-employment, and so on (Castles, 1989; Korpi, 1989; Korpi & Palme, 1998). One of the most cited typologies of the 1990s was developed by Gøsta Esping-Andersen (1990). An important contribution of Esping-Andersen's research is the proposition that the development of group interests, social stratification, and political mobilization yields distinct patterns of welfare provision. Esping-Andersen (1999) found that these patterns feed back positively to reinforce the political coalitions and class configurations that created them in the first place. The three basic patterns of welfare provision are liberalism, conservatism, and social democracy, as shown in Table 2.1 (Esping-Andersen, 1999).

Table 2.1

*Esping-Andersen's Social Welfare Regime Typology*

←.....→		
Liberal	Conservative	Social Democratic
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- means-tested programs</li> <li>- modest universal transfers</li> <li>- strict criteria</li> <li>- low-income clientele</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- more concerned about social order</li> <li>- preserves the family</li> <li>- stronger reliance on universality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- extension of benefits to middle class</li> <li>- highest degree of universal benefits</li> <li>- less reliance on the market</li> </ul>

### *The Liberal Social Welfare Regime*

According to Esping-Andersen's social welfare regime typology, the liberal social welfare regime includes countries such as Canada, the United States, and Australia (Esping-Andersen, 1990). As a result, their social welfare benefits are typically distributed either through means-tested programs, modest universal transfers, or social insurance plans. Esping-Andersen (1990) explains that the liberal welfare regime is also based on the work ethic norm. As a result, welfare entitlements are usually directed according to strict criteria to low-income clientele who are expected to enter the work force as soon as possible (Olson, 2002).

### *The Conservative Social Welfare Regime*

Alternatively, the typical conservative social welfare regime is found in countries that have a long tradition of a strong "corporatist" state and a Roman Catholic culture (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Gregg Olson (2002) observes that as these states developed their social welfare programs they did not share the liberal reliance on the market, but rather were more concerned about social order and status. For this reason, there is much less aversion in allowing the state to provide social assistance, especially programs that preserve the family. Countries with attributes of the conservative welfare regime are those such as Austria, France, Germany, and Italy (Esping-Andersen, 1990). This regime emphasizes the principle of universality only somewhat more than the liberal regime (Myles, 1998; Olson, 2002).

### *The Social Democratic Social Welfare Regime*

The social democratic social welfare regime is characterized by the highest degree of universal benefits (Esping-Andersen, 1990). This is primarily because of the extension of benefits to the middle class at middle-class standards. There is also less reliance on the market for the provisions and distribution of benefits. Countries that display strong attributes of this regime are Denmark, Finland, Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden (Abrahamson, 2000; Olson, 2002).

### Contemporary Social Welfare Discourse

While a new globalized world has emerged and the tradition of market-based distribution of resources appears to have reached its capacity to respond to the social welfare needs of Canadians in an adequate manner, a review of the literature reveals that contemporary social policy discourse is almost exclusively focused on mainstream Western distributive models of social welfare. For example, when existing social welfare policies fall short of their intended goals or emerging social issues are identified, the typical response is to increase the level of distribution. In other words, more of the same is prescribed. This is carried out in the present-day context of increased disparity between the rich and the poor, a monthly reliance on food banks by over three-quarters of a million Canadians, and a national homelessness crisis in which it is estimated that there are over 200,000 homeless people in Canada (Addario, 2003; Campaign 2000, 2003; Pollock, 2002; Rice & Prince, 2001).

What is of interest is that in spite of the failure of the current approach to adequately address the social welfare needs of Canadians, an alternative concept of social

welfare beyond distribution of market-based resources has failed to materialize (Dhruvarajan, 2003). While the growing number of individuals of traditional middle-class status left behind by market-driven transformations in the workforce have expressed increasing consternation, a call for a new vision of social welfare is noticeably lacking. With a few exceptions, academics have been unsuccessful in shifting the social welfare discourse beyond the prevailing distributive paradigm. As Colin Leys and Leo Panitch (1998) recently remarked:

We are living in interesting times. The tide of reaction is still flowing, but with diminishing confidence and force, while the counter-flow of progressive feelings and ideas gathers strength but has yet to find effective political expression. As the contradictions of unbridled neoliberalism become increasingly plain, fewer and fewer people any longer mistake its real character. “Stubborn historical facts” are breaking through the illusions fostered by neoliberal rhetoric—and equally through the pseudo-left illusions of “new times,” “radicalism of the centre,” and all similar dreams of a capitalist world miraculously freed from alienation, immiseration and crises. (p. 1)

### *The Need for an Alternative Paradigm*

Critical theorists argue that there is a definite place for distributive policies in addressing the shortcomings of a market-driven capitalist society. However, as observed by Peter Baldwin (1997) and Keith Banting (1997), the traditional equity and redistribution instruments and institutions that prevailed in the 1960s do not adapt to the new global economic context. Despite the positive intentions of the distributive approach,

it has proven to be quite ineffective in dealing with the growing inequalities and widespread poverty in Canadian society (Giddens, 1994; Handler, 1995; Leonard, 1997; Olson, 2002). The failure of the distributive approach is no more obvious than when one considers the history of Canada's Aboriginal peoples where a favored needs-based distributive approach to social welfare has done little to improve the overall social welfare status of Aboriginal people in this country (Royal Commission on Aboriginal People, 1996).

Several leading critical theorists (Leonard, 1990; Mullaly, 1997; Mulvale, 2001) share the view that social welfare reforms undertaken in this country over the past half century have failed to effect change upon the social structures and political institutions that are commonly accepted as contributing to the distribution patterns in the first place.

*Paradigmatic Inquiry: How Do We Know What We Know?*

Howard Karger (1983, p. 203) writes, "those who define the questions to be asked define the parameters of the answers, and it is the parameters of the questions and the ensuing answers that function as the lens by which people view reality." On this note, I call attention to the central epistemological question ("how we know what we know"), because by claiming the privilege of knowing, we fail to see the limitations of our current world-view. It is important that we engage in a social welfare critique with a sense of our knowledge of the external world as suspect at best.

*“Normal” social science discourse.*

Thomas Kuhn’s *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962) put forth the suggestion that our propositions about the world are deeply embedded within paradigms. This point is demonstrated in the following folklore story:

A man was found sitting in the middle of the desert in a contraption made of rocks, bits of lumber, and old, brown tires, which he was busily “steering” as if it were actually a vehicle in motion. Asked what he was doing, the man said, “Driving home.” “you’re never going to get there in this,” he was told. He said, “If not in this, then in what?” (Quinn, 1999, p. 11)

Kuhn maintained that, contrary to popular conception, typical scientists are not objective and independent thinkers. Rather, they are conservative individuals who accept what they have been taught and apply their knowledge to solving the problems that their theories dictate. During periods of what Kuhn termed “normal science,” the primary task of scientists is to bring the accepted theory and fact into closer agreement. He argued that as a consequence, scientists tend to ignore research findings that might threaten the existing paradigm and trigger the development of a new and competing paradigm.

Many fields of inquiry are wrestling with different perspectives as new paradigms being explored are based on new assumptions and unfamiliar world-views. Traditional Western scientific assumptions based on the belief that there is an objective universe are now yielding to new assumptions based on the notion of multiple realities and the connectivity of all life and events (Bourgeois, 1998; Karger, 1983; Ricks, 2002).

One of the many implications resulting from this epistemological shift is the growing questioning of society’s traditional governing structures, which were shaped and

put into place in a period of scientific thinking very different from today's. In the past few decades, a philosophical shift towards "democratic pluralization" has slowly emerged, raising challenges to the positivist view of science, the role of agency and the participation of community, and centralized bureaucracies that offer "one size fits all" policies. In contrast, advocates of a pluralist social welfare approach assert that the current distributive social welfare paradigm, constructed according to principles of universalism, hierarchy, centralization, and top-down decision making, is based on the need to maintain social order and has very little capacity to respond to the needs of people in different communities with varied histories, cultures, hopes, and aspirations (Dhruvarajan, 2003; Fraser, 1989).

### *The Social Construction of the Distributive Paradigm*

Social welfare policy, like any other dominant idea, can be understood as a paradigm. Social welfare policy paradigms, like other paradigms, have become entrenched and change slowly. Entrenchment happens as paradigms are embedded within the education and socialization of professionals and integrated in the public consciousness as general truths. Frank McGilly (1998) describes the power of institutionalized frameworks to limit our collective ability to think outside of the prevailing paradigm:

Members of a society operate within its institutional framework much as fishes swim in water—barely aware that it is there, but unlikely to survive if pulled out of it. Our social institutions lead us to take for granted certain things as relevant, and certain things as good. It is important for the student of social affairs to

challenge the conventional wisdom as to both relevance and goodness. Real understanding requires that one step back and take a careful look at the standards of right and wrong, of important and unimportant, that underpin the society in which one has grown up. Some will see the need for such change, some for little. What matters is that one exercises the responsibility to look critically. (p. 28)

Denise Breton and Christopher Largent (1996) explain how paradigms typically follow two kinds of developments, within and outside of the existing paradigm's framework. I submit that Canadian social welfare discourse is confined within the prevailing distributive paradigm. Consequently, policy discussions and reforms are restricted to and predicated upon the distributive needs-based residual model. Breton and Largent (1996) also point out that revolutionary shifts occur only when the dominating paradigm fails to solve the problems it was designed to address, but make it clear that paradigm shifts are not easily made.

The more the paradigm fails to do its job, the more old-paradigm scientists try to make it work. The paradigm is ripe for a revolution, but because they've forgotten that they even have a paradigm, scientists conclude that their world is falling apart. Solutions—alternative ways of doing science—don't exist....they're too paradigm bound to notice that they're stumbling over the limits of their own models. (p. 7)

As long as an existing paradigm remains invisible we remain stuck within it.

In a report submitted to the Belgian Presidency of the European Union, Esping-Andersen, Gallie, Hemerijck, and Myles (2001) observed the following in an attempt to

highlight the challenges that lay ahead for modern-day social welfare policy-makers in relation to the power of the traditional social welfare paradigm.

If we detect some paralysis in contemporary policy-making, this need not be blamed on the poor quality of our elected representatives. When change is unusually sweeping, we must make decisions with a great number of unknowns: many of the basic parameters that have guided policy in the past, no longer exist. Today's decision makers (and median voters) grew up in an epoch when it was safe to assume that families were stable, that manufacturing was the fountain of jobs and productivity, and that peoples' life course was fairly standard and linear. Politicians then adopted a menu of policy "basics"—universal education is the solution to class inequalities, the main social risks concentrate in old age or among families with large numbers of children and the chief priority is to safeguard the breadwinner because so many rely on his job and social entitlements. (p. 3)

*The Historical Roots and Limitations of the Distributive Social Welfare Paradigm*

The historical context of the Canadian social welfare state is very much rooted in ideological debate based on the conflicting paradigms of left and right—those who support government interference in the economy, and those who favour an unobstructed market. The reality, however, is that the post-World War II trend toward increasingly expansive and generous social welfare programs has been reversed over the past few decades. The contemporary social welfare standard is depicted by steady decline in

benefits to the vulnerable in our society, and heightened worry over fiscal responsibility (McGilly, 1998; Mulvale, 2001; Olson, 2002).

The development of the social welfare state in Western democratic countries over the past century is widely depicted as (a) a response to the crisis of the great depression of the 1930s, (b) a steady growth in the size and importance of welfare programs after World War II, (c) a considerable expansion of social programs in the 1960s and early 1970s, (d) the retrenchment policies of the 1980s and 1990s brought about by deepening deficits (though varying in bite from minor to major) in several major social programs, including child benefits, elderly benefits, federal social transfers to the provinces (for health, post-secondary education, social assistance, and social services), social housing, welfare, unemployment/employment insurance, and the Canada Pension Plan, and (e) a further retrenchment in social welfare spending in reaction to modern pressures associated with an emerging globalized economy (Ismael, 1987; Mishra, 1989).

#### *Pre-1930s*

The modern concept and practical application of social welfare policy in Canada dates as far back as the Elizabethan Poor Law of 1601 (Guest, 1997; Splane, 1965). Its transformation from a benevolent construct of granting handouts to the most destitute into a distributive framework of state-sponsored approaches and entitlements for broad portions of the population began in the late nineteenth century (Mulvale, 2001). The initial broad-based responses included the introduction of:

1. **Federal Subsidies and Unconditional Grants.** Introduced in 1867, the Federal Subsidies and Unconditional Grants is considered the first real Canadian “policy” to

address social problems. It took the form of subsidies or unconditional grants paid to the provinces by the federal government (Meekison, n.d.).

2. Government Annuities Act (1908). The Canadian Government Annuities Act of 1908, one of the earliest significant pieces of social legislation in Canada, was designed to encourage Canadians to prepare financially for their retirement. Government Annuities were purchased either by individuals or by employers as pension plans for their registered employees (Human Resources Development Canada, 2001).
3. Workmen's Compensation Act (Ontario 1914). The Ontario Workmen's Compensation Act of 1914 provided for compensation if a worker was injured or killed on the job. This protected employers from liability suits. The program also protected workers from wage loss because of accidents off or on the job (Building and Construction Trades Department, n.d.).
4. Mothers' Allowance. Mothers' Allowances were legislated in Manitoba in 1919 and in Ontario in 1920. They were sponsored by women's groups and unions protesting the poverty of families left fatherless after the war (Hick, 1998).
5. The Old Age Pensions Act (1927). Old age pensions were developed in the 1920s due to agitation from senior citizens who saw the government annuities as inadequate. The Old Age Pensions Act was passed in 1927, but eligibility was severely limited through the use of a complex array of rules and regulations (Hick, 1998).

#### *Post-1930s: The Keynesian Period and the Developing Culture of Capitalism*

In North America, social welfare developed in what Wilensky and Lebeaux (1965) refer to as the "culture of capitalism." Although not devoid of social value placed

on family, community, and humanity, the “culture of capitalism” is squarely rooted in the Keynesian Revolution, commonly understood as the rationalization of active government macroeconomic policy. The development of the social welfare state over this period of time can be considered in light of the following legislative developments:

1. Unemployment Insurance Act (1940). The Unemployment Insurance Act of 1940 was the first large-scale income maintenance program. It stressed the government’s priorities of industrial stability, justice in peacetime, and social security through an amendment to the BNA Act to establish UI on a national scale (Hick, 1998).
2. The Family Allowance Act (1944). The Family Allowance Act of 1944 was Canada’s first universal type of program. Widely called the “baby bonus,” it began a monthly payment to Canadian families with children, regardless of income (Canada, 2002).
3. Old Age Security Act (1951). The *Old Age Security Act* of 1951 replaced the *Old Age Pensions Act* of 1927. The new *Old Age Security Act* introduced a universal, flat-rate pension for people 70 years of age, with a 20-year residency requirement (Human Resources Development Canada, 2001).
4. The Hospital Insurance and Diagnostic Services Act (1957). The federal government introduced the Hospital Insurance and Diagnostic Services Act (HIDSA) of 1957 in order to encourage the development of hospital insurance plans in all provinces. Under the act, the federal government offered to share the costs of eligible hospital and diagnostic services with the provinces on a roughly 50-50 basis. As a condition for receiving federal money, the provinces agreed to make insured services available to all their residents, under uniform terms and conditions (Hick, 1998).

5. The Medical Care Act (1966). Following the initiative taken by Saskatchewan to provide public insurance coverage for all medical services, the federal government passed the Federal Medical Care Act (FMCA) in 1966 and implemented the bill nationwide in 1968. The FMCA was structured similarly to the HDSA with similar formulas for providing funding to the provinces (i.e., the 50-50 cost-sharing method was retained). The major addition was that provinces were now required to provide coverage for a comprehensive range of physician services outside of hospitals in addition to those services provided under the HDSA. In addition, the legislation required public administration, universal coverage, portability between provinces, and reasonable compensation for physicians (Madore, 2001).
6. Canada Pension Plan Act (1966). Responding to the need for a public pension plan that offered portability, a greater measure of income replacement, and insurance for families against the death or disability of a breadwinner, Lester Pearson's government introduced the Canada Pension Plan in 1966. This was a compulsory, contributory scheme for salaried and self-employed workers between the ages of 18 and 70. A sister program, the Quebec Pension Plan, was enacted in the same year to cover Quebec workers and their families (Human Resources Development Canada, 2001).
7. Unemployment Insurance Act (1971) and (1976). The 1971 legislation created the most generous UI program in Canadian history. The program was expanded dramatically in 1971 as part of Trudeau's "Just Society" program, coverage was broadened, benefits were increased, benefit periods were lengthened, and the amount of work to qualify was reduced (Human Resources Development Canada, 2001).

*1980s and 1990s: Post-welfare Period of Retrenchment*

The growth of Canada's social welfare system reached its peak in the early to mid-1970s (Mulvale, 2001). All through the democratic world, the economic slowdown of the 1980s and 1990s provoked a major backlash against direct government intervention through social welfare policies and the resulting social welfare programs (Battle & Torjman, 1993; Crane, 1994; Drache & Ramachan, 1995; Slava, 1996). Significant changes in Canadian social policy during the 1980s and 1990s included the Unemployment Insurance amendments of 1981, further changes to Unemployment Insurance of 1995/96, income limits on child benefits and senior benefits, and the reduction in transfer payments to the provinces. According to Mulvale (2001, p. 12), the retrenchment of social programs in the 1980s and 1990s marked the end of the Keynesian revolution as "a thirty-year aberration in the *longue durée* of unfettered and vicious capitalism to which we have now returned." This post-welfare period of retrenchment was very much at variance with the earlier optimistic postwar view of the welfare state as a new and permanent fixture resulting from the "natural" evolution of capitalism (Marshall, 1964; Titmuss, 1968; Wilensky and Lebeaux, 1965).

Defenders of the reforms undertaken in social welfare programs over the past two decades point to a variety of complex economic, social, demographic, and political contextual changes within Canadian society as justification for the retrenchment policies (Battle, 2001; Heiner, 2002). In an attempt to reconsider the idea of social welfare in the globalized world, Mathew Horseman and Andrew Marshall (1995) in *After the Nation State* suggest that we are entering a new epoch where capitalism runs over the state, leaving society to look more to localized units of power to address its social welfare

needs. Likewise, in *The End of Organized Capitalism*, Scott Lash and John Urry (1997) draw a picture of a postmodern world of “disorganized capitalism” in which the state is hardly mentioned and welfare is the concern of individuals within a wild marketplace. These views suggest that a new set of impulses is giving shape to the 21st century. Canadian society is not simply passing through a temporary turbulent time after which life will return to “normalcy.” Rather, is passing through one order of life to another.

*Present Period: Globalization*

As discussed in Chapter 1, “globalization” involves the most fundamental redesign of the world’s political and economic arrangements since the Industrial Revolution. Throughout the 1990s, Canada’s integration into the global economy has been, to say the least, quite considerable. As shown in Table 2.2, whether one looks at trade patterns, capital flows or foreign direct investment, all indicators seem to be pointing to the overall growing importance of the Canadian-global economic interface.

Table 2.2

*Canada in the Global Era 1989 to 1999*

	1989	1999
Trade in goods and services, as a percentage of GDP	47.7	78.9
Gross private capital flows, as a percentage of GDP	7.8	15.1
Gross foreign direct investment, as a percentage of GDP	2.4	6

*Sources: Statistics Canada (table 384-0002); World Bank, 2001 World Development Indicators.*

From 1989 to 1999, trade in goods and services as a share of GDP (here trade is defined as the sum of both exports and imports) jumped from 47.7 percent to 78.9 percent. Similarly, gross private capital flows as a percentage of GDP (including direct, portfolio and other investments) increased from 7.8 percent in 1989 to more than 15 percent in 1999. Foreign direct investment, which in this case includes both inflows and outflows of FDI recorded in the balance of payments, almost tripled over the same period (Breau, 2002).

These trends, according to Sebastien Breau (2000) reflect a series of initiatives and policies the Canadian government undertook in the mid-1980s and 1990s, aimed at securing the nation's economic prosperity in an ever more changing and competitive environment, one in which international markets and production were indeed becoming more global in scope. The first is the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement (FTA), which was signed in 1987 and implemented in 1989, thereby eliminating customs tariffs and barriers on the vast majority of goods and services traded between both countries. The second is the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which was implemented some 5 years later in 1994, essentially extending the FTA to the fast growing Mexican market.

In her analysis of Canada's place in the global economy, Maureen Appel-Molot (1994, p. 551) puts forth the argument that "Canada has become increasingly a North American political economy." She points out that from 1990 to 1999 alone, overall federal government spending as a percentage of GDP has dropped from 23 percent to under 19 percent. In a similar argument, Jim Stanford (2001) observes that up until the mid-1990s Canada still ranked in the middle of OECD countries in terms of program

spending, whereas it now ranks among the bottom third. Yet, in spite of the mounting concerns over the socio-economic and political impacts of “globalization,” it is indiscriminately accepted as the new norm that dominates national markets, states, and our understanding of civil society, community, and democracy (Courchene, 1992a, 1992b; Gill & Law, 1988; Ohmae, 1990; Reich, 1991). “Globalization has been asserted by its believers to be inevitable—an all-powerful god; a holy trinity of burgeoning markets, unsleeping technology, and borderless managers. Opposition or criticism has been treated as little more than romantic paganism,” says John Ralston Saul (2004, p. 33).

### *Efficacy of the Social Welfare Distributive Paradigm*

A review of the leading social and economic indicators used to measure the social equality status of Canadian society suggests that the current distributive approach to meeting the social needs of Canadians, regardless of ideological stance, has proven to be ineffective (Campaign 2000, 2003; Richards, 2002; Saul, 2004).

In assessing poverty, Campaign 2000 (2003, p. 1) points out that “the structural level of child poverty has hardly changed in almost 30 years”. In its 2003 report card on child poverty in Canada, *Honouring Our Promises: Meeting the Challenge to End Child Poverty*, it was reported (refer to Table 2.3) that approximately 1,071,000 children, or almost one child in six, remained in poverty in 2001. The report concludes that: The structural level of child poverty has hardly changed in almost 30 years. In 1973, the child poverty rate stood at 16.4%, slid to 15.7% in 1980 and decreased further to 14.9% in 1989. By 2001, the child poverty rate was 15.6%. Child poverty grew to a record high in the early 1990s as Canada experienced a deep recession and high unemployment.

Although the rate began to decline at the end of the 1990s, this did not happen as quickly or steeply as economic growth might suggest. (p. 2)

Table 2.3

*Child Poverty in the Provinces – 2001*

	Rate	Number
Canada	15.6%	1,071,000
Newfoundland and Labrador	21.6%	24,000
Prince Edward Island	12.5%	4,000
Nova Scotia	19.2%	38,000
New Brunswick	14.5%	23,000
Quebec	17.8%	276,000
Ontario	13%	355,000
Manitoba	22.5%	58,000
Saskatchewan	17.6%	42,000
Alberta	14.1%	104,000
British Columbia	17%	146,000

Source: Statistics Canada's *Income Trends in Canada*, 2001, 13F0022XCB.

In a related statistic released by Campaign 2000 (2000), the number of children living in unaffordable housing increased 91% from 1989 to 1996; and the number of households in Canada paying more than 50% of their income on rent increased by 43% (from 583,710 to 833,555 households) from 1990 to 1995. In 2001, almost 20% of renters, or 700,000 renter households, paid more than half of their income towards shelter costs. Forty percent paid more than 30% of their income towards shelter (Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, 2003).

Most alarming is the number of families using food banks. Graham Richards (2002) reports that over a 20-year period, food banks in B.C. and across the country have become an entrenched and institutionalized second tier of Canada's social assistance system, with over 726,902 people a month using food banks.

While there are no reliable method for counting the number of people who are homeless, conservative estimates are that there are some 200,000 Canadians—men, women, and children—who are homeless. Both the Canadian Council on Social Development (CCSD) and Statistics Canada have attempted to measure the homeless population on a national scale. In 1987, the CCSD estimated that 13,797 people used shelters nightly and that there were 259,384 Canadians (about 1% of the population) who were homeless at some point during the year. It also estimated that 25% of those people were children (McLaughlin, 1987). The figures were based on a count of people who used shelters on one night in January, including those at orphanages, foster homes, maternity homes, halfway houses, group homes, transition homes, overnight shelters and missions, refugee shelters, and temporary shelters for victims of natural disasters. Despite the fact that these numbers are merely estimates based on information about the use of shelters and soup kitchens across the country, Gladys Pollack (2002) explains that it is logical to assume that if there are about 100 homeless people in Calgary, 600 in Vancouver and 7,000 in Montreal, then Toronto's homeless must number between 15,000 and 20,000. When all these numbers are added up, the national homelessness figure is estimated to be somewhere in the 100,000 to 200,000 range.

A final Statistics Canada report (Heisz & McLeod, 2004) released in May 2004 examines income and low income in Canada's 27 census metropolitan areas (CMAs) between 1980 and 2000 using census data. The report revealed that the gulf between rich and poor in Canada has continued to widen, with "recent immigrants, aboriginals and lone-parent families" (p. 6) at the greatest risk of living in poverty. The report showed that the top 10% of the country's wealthiest families had a substantial gain in pre-tax

income to an annual average of \$131,000 in 2000 from \$111,400 in 1980. That growth contrasts sharply with that for Canada's poorest 10% of families, who saw average income rise to \$21,700 in 2000 from \$20,900 two decades earlier.

In his address delivered in the 1980s, entitled *Is Social Policy Dead?*, Michael Mendelson explained that the answer to the question lies in whether one chooses to think about social policy as a question of fact or a matter of intention (Panitch, 1994). His point was that society needed a new framework for the future social welfare state—a willingness, he explained, to escape the sterile debate beyond the “traditional lines of attack long beloved” of both the Right and the Left. According to Mendelson, the “do-gooder” approach to social policy that had dominated the field since World War II had essentially run out of gas (pp. 36–37). He also pointed out that a careful review of Canadian social policy over the past few decades had in fact revealed nothing new. Mendelson was suggesting that if society wishes to achieve the goals of humanitarianism, civic solidarity, and social equality on which the social welfare state was founded, then it must lay a new foundation on which a healthy society can be erected beyond distribution of market-based resources.

#### *Theoretical Assumptions Underpinning the Distributive Paradigm*

Drawing from this discussion, I shall undertake to identify five key assumptions that underpin social policy and welfare practices. It is these assumptions that I believe lock us into the distributive approach to social welfare. Such assumptions are social constructions, artificially created by historical processes. Therefore, I will critically challenge each of them.

The first of these assumptions rests within the individualistic (neo-liberal) and collectivist (social democratic) perspectives on social welfare, as both of these perspectives share a common assumption that society's social, political, and economic disparities can be discounted using distribution policies in one form or another (McGilly, 1998; Olson, 2002). Such a view, however, ignores the extensive efforts to explore how welfare policies are implicated in the production or reproduction of complex forms of social differentiation and inequality (Cochrane, 1993). Viewing welfare systems as income transfer machines delivers a narrow and economistic view of social policy. In the following definition, Richard Titmuss (1958, pp. 14–15), using the term “social development” that was common at the time he was writing, defines the scope of social policy as transcending the collective provision of individual welfare to emphasizing the connection between individual well-being and the social relations embedded in family and community: “Social administration may broadly be defined as the study of the social services whose object...is the improvement of the conditions of life of the individual in the setting of family and group relations.” For Titmuss, the social of social policy is about the recognition and development of reciprocal obligations in terms of promoting both greater equality and a more cohesive society, with a strong sense of community.

More recently, Nancy Fraser's critical social theory argues that the most prominent injustices in contemporary society cannot be comprehended by a social theory that focuses exclusively on either the “redistribution paradigm” or “the recognition paradigm” (cited in Benhabib, 2002, p. 69). According to Fraser, social theories that attempt to explain all injustices in terms of one or the other dimension of social ordering inevitably end up distorting the phenomena they are trying to capture and, perhaps more

worrying, end up recommending strategies of political action that may be ineffective or even counterproductive in fighting injustice. As a result, theories that attempt to reduce all social struggles and injustices to their political-economic roots will simply not have the conceptual resources needed to capture the important cultural, symbolic, and evaluative dimensions of social struggles to overcome inequity in social life (Honneth, 1995; Taylor, 1992; Young, 1990a). Worse, Fraser argues that such economistic theories may recommend remedies to rectify “maldistributions” that in fact have the unintended consequence of actually intensifying the patterns of misrecognition members of the oppressed group are already subject to: witness the backlash stigmatization suffered by the recipients of means-targeted redistributive welfare programs (Fraser & Honneth, 2003).

Writing from the contemporary context of the new global economy, Pierre Rosanvallon (2000) offers the suggestion that the traditional objectives of social welfare programs (redistribution of tax dollars to meet individual needs) have become untenable as a result of new forms of society and economy and puts forth the argument that we as a society must rethink social equality and social welfare in ways that go beyond the redistribution of economic resources. Rosanvallon argues that it is no longer possible to understand, through traditional social scientific reasoning, collective aspects of social and economic exclusion. “The long-term unemployed or overextended households are not populations in the traditional sense, nor are they part of a sociological group...Therefore, ‘counting’ the excluded is no use, for they cannot fit into a category for social action” (p. 98). More generally, “the traditional sociological approach, methodologically linked to intersecting tables of data ...is clearly worn out...social historians have also discovered the

quantitative approaches to be deadends” (p. 101). Rosanvallon concludes that we can understand the processes of exclusion only as it is experienced by individuals through biography – “restoring to the data their individual values” (p. 102).

Another fundamental argument against the market-driven social welfare distributive paradigm is offered by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA). According to the CCPA, social welfare expenditures through taxes and subsidies and the social programs they fund simply affect individual behaviour at the margin and do not affect the redistributed net wealth to the poor (Kerstetter, 2002). As a result, the Canadian social welfare state engages in a net redistribution of only a very small portion of the country’s total wealth. Thus, social welfare income assistance programs only tend to bring individuals closer to the poverty line, rather than pushing them over the poverty line. On this note, critical theorists argue that given the small amount that is redistributed, the current approach actually makes the poor worse off by destroying self-dignity, maintaining structural inequalities, and creating a destructive culture of welfare dependency (Kerstetter, 2002).

A second assumption is related to the view that the welfare state is a product of social policies crafted to help resolve emergent and pressing problems of modern day society. This assumption is allied with structural functionalist theory espousing the conviction that social welfare programs are indeed liberally established to serve the social well-being of “all” members of society (Davis & van den Oever, 1981; Parson, 1971). Functionalism, the orthodoxy of early post-war sociology and social policy in Canada, Britain, and the United States presuppose that societies were a normative order (Olson, 2002). The social policies of this era were constructed around norms and ideals of

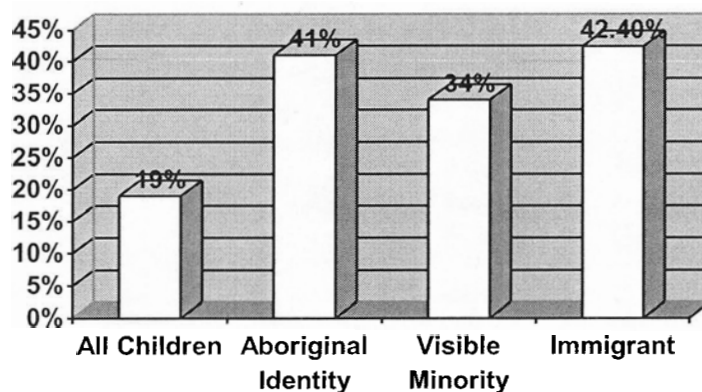
enhanced equalities of opportunity. Instead of individual destinies being determined by birth or inheritance, the ideal was that individuals would be enabled to take a place in society justified by their desires and talents.

From the structural functionalist perspective, social welfare states are understood in essence to emerge in response to the needs generated as societies develop and change and “serve to maintain modern social systems to the benefit of all members of society” (Olsen, 2002, p. 92). A structural functionalist approach also assumes a social ontology in which all human beings are essentially autonomous. This tradition of a “homogenous public,” or atomism, underlies many of our Western assumptions about social welfare.

The critical theorist rejects as illusory the notion of the current welfare state as a construct designed to benefit all members of society (Ife, 1997; Mullaly, 1997; Young, 1990a). For example, Paul Pierson (1991) points to the “double process of disadvantage” racial and ethnic minorities confront in relation to welfare state apparatuses:

First, their economically and socially less privileged position tends to make them more reliant upon provision through the welfare state. Secondly, this welfare state upon which they are peculiarly dependent treats them on systematically less favourable terms than members of the majority community. (p. 80)

In its 2003 report card on child poverty, Campaign 2000 (2003, p. 4) reports “the erosion of Canada’s social safety net has had a particularly negative impact on families that have historically experienced exclusion and disadvantage in society.” As shown in Figure 1, 41% of Aboriginal children living off-reserve, 34% of visible minority, and 42.4% of recent immigrant families live in poverty.



Source: Statistics Canada's *Canada Census 2001*

*Figure 1.* Poverty rate among Aboriginal, visible minority and immigrant children (0–14 years).

Critical theorists argue that in order to analyze the impact of redistribution policies on marginalized peoples, it is crucial to look at the historical and institutional legacies of different capitalist welfare regimes. An example of such a critique can be seen in the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996), which reported on the effects of Canadian social policy on Aboriginal people.

...the process by which Aboriginal peoples were systematically dispossessed of their lands and their livelihood, their cultures and languages, and their social and political institutions....[T]his was done through government policies based on the false assumptions that Aboriginal ways of life were at a primitive level of evolutionary development, and that the high point of human development was to be achieved by adopting the culture of European colonists. (vol. 3, p. 2)

A third assumption deals with the notion of social reality as fundamentally competitive (Abraham, 1988; Durant, 1961; Martindale, 1988). From this perspective,

society is viewed as a zero sum game with finite parameters, where what benefits the more powerful further disadvantages those with less power. While competition is certainly one of many dimensions of social life, historical experience does not necessarily confirm it to be the sole nor even the dominant factor for all of society's citizens.

Christopher Gill (1996) contends the prevailing notion of human being in ancient Greece differed somewhat from the contemporary Western concept of being competitive. He explains how the Greek concept was less centered on the individual than the Western concept that developed by the time of Descartes and Kant. The Greeks emphasized participation in interpersonal and communal relationships. From this perspective, to be a human being was to act on the basis of reason and to honor the obligations of membership in a community.

A similar view is put forward by physicist and ecological philosopher Fritjof Capra in the *Turning Point* (1982). Capra maintains that before 1500, the dominant worldview in Europe, as well as in most other civilizations, was organic. People lived in small, cohesive communities and experienced nature in terms of organic relationships, characterized by the interdependence of spiritual and material phenomena. For Capra (1982), the arrival of the scientific revolution of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, the notion of the natural world as an organic living thing and spiritual universe, was replaced by that of the world as a machine. This in turn led to a separation or dualism between Homo sapiens and the rest of the universe (Capra, 1982). This "mechanistic model" conceptualized the world as comprised of discrete components that could be isolated and examined (Capra, 1982, p. 54). The scientific method, arising from this principle, is therefore founded on the goals of rejecting false claims about nature in

search of truth based on examination. This method is similar to how a watchmaker might understand a watch: he would open it up, take it apart, understand what each component does, and put it back together. The “essence” or “truth” of the watch is defined by the sum of its parts (Capra, 1982, pp. 54–62).

The mechanistic view of the world—nature as “machine”—informed the work of Isaac Newton who, in his landmark *Principia*, sought to determine the physical, mechanistic laws by which the universe operated. These laws were founded on linear, causal relationships between material elements. “Physics,” the study of physical matter, became the science on which all other sciences were based, and the model of physical bodies of matter interacting in predictable ways became a model not only of the physical world but of the social world as well (Capra, 1982, pp. 62–72). The Newtonian model operates under a series of assumptions. These assumptions undergird the method of modern scientific analysis and collectively define what is termed a “Newtonian paradigm” under which much of the world—physical and social—is understood (Gadamer, 1975/2004, p. 307).

Conversely, under this paradigm, the Western construction of the person as unique and special gained prominence and persons were no longer equated with their social roles. These roles were no longer considered part of a person’s essence. Within this individualistic ontology, a person came to be understood as an individual entity with a separate existence independent of place in society (Gates, 1993; Klein, 1995; Smith, 1991). It is within this view of the self that social policies are defined in Western nations. Views of the self in eastern cultures and for Aboriginal people around the world, however, are distinctly different from those of the West (Colorado, 1988; Kitayama &

Markus, 1999; Tuhiwai Smith, 2001). In these cultures, the self is defined predominantly in relation to and interdependent with other people and group membership. This interdependent view of the self implies a vastly different set of goals that include fitting in and belonging. In contrast to the Western orientation toward autonomy and differentiation, the interdependent self focuses on connectedness to and harmony with others (Markus & Kitayama, 1994).

Given the increasing complexity of our social problems, a view of the world as reducible and finite is unlikely to produce the type of “ingenuity” that is required to solve its problems. Further, if social problems are defined in such a way as to beg straightforward, linear solutions, the solutions offered will likely be straightforward and linear and likely unsatisfactory.

A fourth assumption has to do with the perceived “emancipatory” nature of the social welfare state predicated on John Rawls’s (1999) *Theory of Justice*. Rawls’s theory of justice emphasizes the indifference of classical utilitarian theory with regard to how benefits are distributed. As an alternative to utilitarianism, Rawls offers the “difference principle,” whereby “social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are...to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged” (Rawls 1999, p. 65). At the base of Rawls’s theory of justice is the principle of universalism, which defends the notion that welfare provision should be viewed as a moral transaction based upon altruism rather than self-interest.

In her critique of Rawls’s theory of justice, Iris Marion Young (1990a, p. 15) posits that the principle of universalism is founded on a social ontology that carries with it a certain assumption about homogeneity, which “tends to ignore the social structure

and institutional context that often help determine distributive patterns” in the first place. For Young, social justice needs to address the degree to which a society contains and supports the institutional conditions necessary for the realization of the values necessary to live the good life. Those values include the ability for each of us to develop and exercise our capacities and express our experience, and to participate in determining our actions and the conditions of our actions. In contexts and societies where social group differences exist and some groups are privileged while others are oppressed, social justice requires explicitly acknowledging and attending to those groups’ differences to undermine oppression.

A goal of social justice, I will assume, is social equality. Equality refers not primarily to the distribution of social goods, though distributions are certainly entailed by social equality. It refers primarily to the full participation and inclusion of everyone in a society’s major institutions. (p. 173)

Critical theorist Michel Foucault (1977) argues that each universalistic institution operates a particular economy of inclusion and exclusion. Foucault points out, that institutions claiming to be universal are often in fact “white-only” or “male-only” or “property-only” institutions, whose actual *modus operandi* undermines their universal pretensions, and suggests that the social welfare state is no different. While this is a disquieting notion, even more disconcerting is his claim that any universal institution operates in its own distinctive economy of inclusion and exclusion that cannot be corrected, because any attempt to remedy the situation merely involves replacing one order of inclusion and exclusion with another.

The concept of social welfare as “one size fits all” has been challenged by the rise of new social movements such as feminism, gender liberation, and cultural pluralism over the latter half of the 20th century. This universalistic ideal, which assumes that equality equates to treating everyone according to the same principles, rules, and standards, cannot triumph in a world of difference. A more just approach to social justice must allow for greater flexibility and a much higher tolerance for diversity in the design and delivery of social welfare responses. The alternative position is to rethink social equality and social welfare in ways that go beyond the redistribution of economic resources and incorporate the rich diversity of human capabilities and needs and the variegated nature of individual and collective identities.

The final assumption deals with our sense of “self” as rational agents who make individual choices, compared to the view of “self” as a social construction. Despite the fact that the individualistic model of the self that provides the infrastructure for traditional Western theories may seem an obvious and natural one, it is not the only model.

An important metaphor for the Western understanding the self over the last three hundred years has been atomism. As such a powerful and useful model in the physical world, philosophers employed the same model as a metaphor to understand the self. The metaphor was applied in several ways by various philosophers, from the atoms being substantial minds in Descartes, to ideas in Locke, to monads in Leibniz (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Ontologically speaking, the atomistic individual is not formed from groups, but groups are formed from independent persons. It has been argued, however, that by failing to accurately recognize our place as social beings, we fall into theoretical

uncertainty that reflects and reinforces a dangerous individualism in our intellectual culture (Baker & Hacker, 1990; Bruner, 1995; Mulhall & Swift, 1992; Taylor, 1989). This failing is understood to have political implications, as it legitimizes the views that celebrate individual rights to freedom and privacy at the expense of the values of association and community.

### The Social Construction of Community

Within the literature, I found little consensus or agreement on what *community* is or what it looks like. As many seasoned scholars have suggested, it is hard to imagine a more elusive concept (Etzioni, 1993; Godway & Finn, 1994; Hillery, 1955; Mulhall & Swift, 1992; Van Den Abbeele, 1991; Wharf, 2002). As a term, *community* is at once both clear and complex, is both subjectively and objectively understood, and is surrounded by many different assumptions. Its principal characteristics have been formulated, reformulated, summarized, and debated within sociology, psychology, geography, and a host of other social and professional sciences. It signifies physical structures and spaces, and geographical location, and can be explained and understood as memories and images of places where we grew up and where we now live and work, as an association or affiliation with others, and as a deep-seated desire for connection (Fowler, 1991; Germain, 1991; Hill, 1994; Holmes, 1993; Ricks, Charlesworth, Bellefeuille, & Field, 1999; Wharf, 2002).

Because the notion of community has a “peculiar reminiscent force” (Van Den Abbeele, 1991, p. ix), it is often treated uncritically in the literature, with arguments being made on ideological more than empirical grounds. It is often loosely mentioned in

reports—for example, as in “this research originated in the community” (personal observation of this writer)—suggesting a unified and knowable community voice. Eleanor Godway and Geraldine Finn (1994) refer to community as a “catachresis,” a word that has no literal referent and that seems to come apart as it is articulated. Other researchers variously understand community as a process, an experience, a diffuse network, a site of common activity, a call or appeal, or a group characterized by comprehensive relationships (Etzioni, 1993; Leonard, 1994; Norton, 1993; Selznick, 1992; Singer, 1991; Ward-Whate, 1994). These understandings are not always mutually exclusive, and taken together they shed light on the complexity of community as a social reality.

#### *Historical Context*

The concept of community emerged in classical sociology as a manifestation of the ideological friction between “tradition and modernity” (conservatism and liberalism) that took place in the 19th century (Hoggett 1997, p. 5). This provides an explanation of why community has been defined on the basis of what it “should be,” rather than on an objective, analytic concept of what it actually “is.”

At the turn of the last century, German scholar Ferdinand Tonnies (1957, p. 46) developed a way of thinking about societies and social change that still applies today. Tonnies constructed the concepts of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, known in English as community and society. According to Tonnies, *Gemeinschaft* (community) suggest a “natural will” (*Wesenswille*, *Wesen* meaning “essence”), where the relations among people are governed by natural ties of kinship and friendship, by familiarity, and by age-

old habit and customary ways of doing things. Conversely, *Gesellschaft* (society) signified a “rational will” (*Kürwille*, sometimes *Willkür*) in which the relations between people are governed by deliberation and evaluation of means and ends, or the advantages that people expect to gain from others (pp. 103–104).

Remarkably, Tonnies anticipated the problems of modern society as he concluded that *Gesellschaft* would over time replace *Gemeinschaft*: “The less human beings who remain or come into contact with each other are bound together in relation to the same *Gemeinschaft*, the more they stand opposite each other as free agents of their free wills and abilities” (p. 46).

Emile Durkheim (1984), in his 1893 work *The Division of Labor in Society*, states that traditional societies (termed “mechanical”) are characterized by very general division of labor and modern societies (termed “organic”) are characterized by highly specific division of labor. He explains that in traditional societies, the collective consciousness entirely subsumes individual consciousness creating norms that are strong and behaviour that is well-regulated. Conversely, the result of increasing division of labor, according to Durkheim, is that individual consciousness emerges distinct from collective consciousness—often finding itself in conflict to collective consciousness. Thus, the rapid change in society due to increasing division of labor produces a state of confusion with regard to norms, leading eventually to the break down of norms regulating social behavior. Such a state of affairs Durkheim calls *anomie*, a term that refers to a condition of relative normlessness in a whole society or in some of its component groups. Anomie does not refer to a state of mind, but to a property of the social structure. It characterizes a condition in which individual desires are no longer regulated by common

norms and where, as a consequence, individuals are left without moral guidance in the pursuit of their goals.

For Weber, sociology was “a science concerning itself with the interpretive understanding of social action and thereby with a causal explanation of its course and consequences” (Weber, 1978, p. 4). As such, his work reflects a tendency to approach sociology from a cultural, historical perspective rather than a scientific process. For example, Lewis Coser (1977) suggests Weber believed that while behavior in the past had generally been motivated by tradition, affect, or value oriented rationality, in Western society it had changed to become driven by goal oriented rationality.

Whereas, Durkheim’s central concern was with institutional arrangements that maintain the *cohesion* of social structures, Weber’s primary focus was on the subjective meanings that human actors attach to their actions in their mutual orientations within specific social-historical contexts (Coser, 1977). Weber identified four major types of social action (a) purposeful or goal-oriented rational action, (b) rational action, (c) emotional or affective motivations, and (d) traditional action. Primarily concerned with modern society and how it differs from societies of the past, Weber proposed that the basic distinguishing feature of modern society was a characteristic shift in the motivation of individuals (Aron, 1970).

He saw much of Western history as the evolution from a society that was solidly rooted in the traditional to a society overwhelmingly characterized by the rational or bureaucratic. But unlike Marx, who sought the cause in the material, specifically the technological, Weber found his dynamic in the non-material, in the religious. He found in

the Protestant ethic the principal, but not the only cause of the transition from a patriarchal traditional economy to a rationalist capitalist economy.

### *Theoretical Perspectives on Community*

Theoretical perspectives on community can be organized around the central political question: Should we understand society as the product of individuals or individuals as the product of society (Mulhall & Swift, 1992)? This question represents two very different attitudes concerning the ontological status of the self. Social ecological and systems theories, for example, presume a model of self that is passive and atomistic. In the social realm, this atomistic conception of the self translates into the political notion of liberal individualism that lies at the core of the current Canadian social welfare state (Young, 1990a). An example of this can be found in the early efforts of Canadian charity workers, who took on an individualistic, person-by-person approach to problems of poverty in the mid-19th century (Armitage, 1975). This trend continued throughout the past century, with the administrative bureaucratization of the social welfare system and case management approach to addressing individual need (Wharf, 1992).

Both ecological and systems theories address the issue of individual-targeted interventions versus interventions that target external context by adding them together, resulting in the “person-in-the-environment” view of the human condition (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985; Haworth, 1972). Nevertheless, one can conclude that the individual remains either an “atomic particle” (systems) or a “cell” (social ecology) responding to social forces in the environment into which he or she is embedded. Community therefore becomes nothing more than an “aggregation of people

competing for space...in a competitive situation” (Warren, 1978, p. 208). According to Lawrence Haworth (1972, p. 184), the concept of community as an aggregate of institutions, functions, structures, or various organic components leaves a community “external and soulless.” Moreover, Michael Harmon (1981) cites this kind of theory as “conspiracy,” because it erroneously assumes that humans and communities are passively under the control of social forces external to them and are irrevocably subservient. In a similar manner, community activists Antonia Pantoja and Wilhelmina Perry (1992, p. 227) submit that systems and ecological models that postulate the idea of human freedom as dependent on atomistic individualism “deny and negate the tenacity of the human community and the inventiveness of people to sustain themselves within social groupings.” Herman Daly and John Cobb (1989, p. 385) also comment that “there is no genuinely human life when community is destroyed.” And Amitai Etzioni (1993) and Marcia Nozick (1992) observe that individual well-being is closely tied to community, since those who share in personal relationships and a sense of closeness with one another are psychologically much better off than those who do not.

In an attempt to rethink the individuation of welfare “subjects,” social construction theory offers an alternative vision of the social world that does not exist independently of the people who make it up (Giddens, 1991; Hummon, 1990). Social constructionism rests on the belief that reality is socially constructed not just in the sense that what we believe and how we behave are profoundly influenced by the social circumstances of our lives, but also because our very capacity to think and act is socially constituted (Gergen & Semin, 1990; Loseke, 1999). Allen Douglas and Ashok Malhotra (1997) explain that social constructionism is an approach to human inquiry that

encompasses a critical stance in relation to the taken-for-granted assumptions about the social world that often serves to reinforce interests of dominant social groups. It is an approach that reflects the belief that the way we understand the world is a product of an historical process of interaction and negotiation between groups of people. Most importantly, it includes community as the arena in which individuals find their identity as social beings; in essence, the community becomes the bearer of the self (Dean, 1993; Gergen, 1994, Young, 1990a). As such, the goal of selfhood is to contribute to the development of the community, providing a sense of social responsibility by contributing to the life of the whole and thereby enriching one's own self (Gergen, 1994).

From the constructivist perspective, Peter Leonard (1994) asserts that community "replenishes our character, our trust and solidarity" (p. 36). Similarly, Christopher Lind (1995) suggests that community is "essential to full personhood" (p. 91). bell hooks, a prolific essayist and emphatic critic of contemporary American society, claims that the most important basis for overcoming oppression is community, centred around mutual support, respect, and hope for the future (White, 1994). Building on Dr. Martin Luther King's challenge to the American people to go beyond their limited vision to work toward the "beloved community," bell hooks promotes in her writings the "love" ethic in building communities of care. Etzioni (1993) also refers to the moral role of community in terms of its ability to lay claims on and sustain the values of its members. Lawrence Blum (1994) draws attention to the link between virtue and community. Drawing on accounts of non-Jewish rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust, Blum (1994) argues that communities can shape members' ability to "sustain a level of virtuous conduct beyond what in some other contexts would be regarded as too much to demand. In doing so, they

illustrate both the “context-determining” and the “virtue-supporting” functions of community” (p. 160).

The concept of community can also be approached ontologically in terms of enhancing the meaning of life by providing stable values, rituals, and direction to people’s lives (Benammar, 1994). Norman Linzer (1978) noted that a Jew would be like a withered branch without his community, claiming that in connection to his people a Jew lives more deeply and at a level where all threads are woven together. Likewise, Nozick (1992, p. 6) observed that “community provides something essential and vital to humankind which is worth saving and building further—a home base, meaningful relationship with others, a personal identity, a mutual support system for our life endeavours, and the values of caring and sharing.” Karim Benammar (1994) writes:

The passion for community is the passion of our ex-static selves to transcend individuality and to project ourselves as members of a group, community, or society...the passion for community haunts our contemporary societies which are splintered into a myriad of individual rights and positions, fragmented into incommensurable and incommunicable claims, aspirations and satisfactions. (pp. 31–32)

Building on the work of the work of French philosopher George Bataille, Benammar (1994) explains that community is something that we are aiming at, that we are working towards. It is something we have to build, construct, and invent, since it is something to which we are drawn, something that pulls us away from our imminence. The “passion for community delineates *absence* of community” or in other words, a community yet to come.

By absence of community, we do not mean spaces from which community has fled, from which it has absented itself; the community is still to come. Rather, we indicate or point to a place where this absence is felt, which is haunted by the elusive promise of community...the absence of community craved by the ecstatic self constitutes a desire for being-in-common with the other, a continuous flight from imminence. (Benammar, 1994, p. 40)

This discussion is nicely summarized by Tania Li (1996) who notes that whether or not community exists as an over-romantic ideal or as an empirical reality makes little difference, since even idealized representations of community are “capable of producing strategic gains” (p. 502) and of powerfully influencing behaviour and attitudes. David Hummon (1990) refers to this phenomenon as community ideology, which “determines the cultural tracks along which popular discourse moves” (p. 120). These preferences are affirmed by many researchers who emphasize the intrinsic value of community, highlighting its potential contribution to a sense of identity, meaning, and belonging. Thus, empirical findings validate what many intuitively know: life in community can contribute to human well-being.

While these views are not a comprehensive reflection on community and may be seen as conveying a somewhat uncritical, empirically unverified vision of community, they do point to the fact that community is something of intrinsic importance to one's well-being and, therefore, the wellness of society. To the extent that the concept of community is connected to one's sense of self and personal well-being, then actively pursuing *community* as a central social policy objective can contribute to the social

wellness of a society, since social wellness (welfare) is primarily about enhancing the potential of the social environment to support the needs of human beings.

It is beneficial to closely link the discussion of community to the research and discourse on health promotion, population health, social epidemiology, and social capital. Each of these theoretical perspectives acknowledges in some way the multiplicity and complexity of factors that impact and interacts with each other to ultimately enhance or diminish individual, family, community and societal well-being. Embedded in these theoretical perspectives is the presence of the idea of community, although it is often implicit. Yet, what is meant by community has not been defined.

### *Health Promotion*

Much of the current literature on health promotion can be traced back to the 1974 federal government white paper on health known as the Lalonde Report (Townson, 1999). The report promoted the idea that health does not equal medical care and that medical care does not translate into health. The report stimulated the health promotion movement within the policy-making context of Health Canada and in provincial health administrations. It proposed that policies promoting changes in lifestyles and social and physical environments would be more likely to lead to improvements in health than would increases in spending on the health/medical care system (Jamieson & Simces, 2001). The underlying assumption, however, was that “changes in individual behaviour and lifestyle were largely a matter of personal choice” (p. 11).

In 1986, the First International Conference on Health Promotion held in Ottawa resulted in the adoption of the *1986 Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion*. The Ottawa

Charter identified five key strategies for health promotion practice and the “new public health”: “building healthy public policy, creating supportive environments, strengthening community action, developing personal skills, and reorienting health services” (Health Canada, 1997, p. 3). The Ottawa Charter formally recognized that health services should incorporate health promotion concepts such as community development, empowerment, and advocacy and called upon the health sector to move in this direction.

The Epp Report (1986), which was presented at the same conference, set in motion organizational change in Canadian federal and provincial institutional structures to better reflect health promotion in public policy making. While both the Epp Report and the Ottawa Charter targeted the escalating cost of health care, many credit these documents as influencing change in additional areas of public and social policy (Health Canada, 1997). However, the limited success of the individual behaviour change approach to improving health through lifestyle education has since shifted the focus of intervention toward more comprehensive approaches that address health as a social or community (shared) issue, and act on the social processes that influence personal behaviour. Placing the entire responsibility for change on the individual is now understood to be an insufficient response that blames the victim rather than addressing the social circumstances that lead to harmful behaviour (Lyons, Mickelson, Sullivan, & Coyne, 1998).

In 1984, the *Healthy Toronto 2000: Beyond Health Care* symposium inspired the creation of the international Healthy Cities movement launched in Europe two years later by the World Health Organization (WHO) (Health Canada, 1997). The movement has since spread across the globe, to more than 3,000 municipalities. The Healthy Cities

movement was conceived concurrently by the WHO's European office in 1986 (Kickbush, 1989) and in North America by Trevor Hancock and Len Duhl (1986) as a method of putting into action the global concepts of health promotion (Hancock, 1993). The Canadian version is called *Healthy Cities and Towns*.

As a result of the Healthy Cities movement, communities have successfully created healthy community lifestyles by increasing green spaces and play areas, removing cars from downtown streets, improving public transportation, and building community centres, walking trails, and bikeways. The Healthy Toronto initiative involves city support for neighbourhood initiatives, including a self-help project for homeless people, an urban food project, a street safety initiative, and a clean air project that combines public education and action to reduce air pollution (Healthy City Toronto, 1993).

The concept of health promotion in Canada is relevant to contemporary social welfare discourse in that it embraces the concepts of self-help, mutual aid, citizen participation, wellness, and community. For instance, it implies that a fundamental rethinking of the Canadian "social security" system is needed, including a reconceptualizing of the notion of social welfare as "Whole Health," which is broadly defined as "synonymous with personal, family, and community well-being, as well as the well-being and integrity of whole nations" (Four Worlds International Institute for Human and Community Development, 1998, p. 1).

### *Population Health*

The population health approach emerged in the early 1990s as researchers began to publish findings on activities initiated by the health promotion agendas in government

and health policy circles (Health Canada, 1997). In 1994, the population health approach was officially endorsed by the federal/provincial/territorial ministers of health in the report *Strategies for Population Health: Investing in the Health of Canadians*. The report summarized what is known about the broad determinants of health and articulated a framework to guide the development of policies and strategies to improve population health.

Population health is based on a body of research that has been emerging over the last two decades, mainly in the fields of epidemiology and public health, and that provides evidence that certain socioeconomic and environmental factors interacting with each other have a “determining” influence on the health of populations and sub-groups within populations (Health Canada, 1997). The approach is thus sometimes also referred to as a “determinants of health” approach.

In 1996, the Fourth Canadian Conference on Health Promotion, held in Montreal, resulted in the *Montreal Declaration: A Proposal for Research on the Complementary Dimensions of Health Promotion and Population Health*. The declaration was part of a national effort to develop an integrated framework for approaching research in health promotion and population health in response to the growing debate among researchers, policy makers and practitioners regarding the appropriate paradigm for enhancing the health of the people who make up our communities (Health Promotion Research Centre of Montreal, 1996). In *Population Health and Health Promotion: What Do They Have to Say to Each Other?*, Ron Labonte (1995) suggests that there are some assumptions in population health theory that may be at odds with those in health promotion, and that these assumptions should be debated. According to Labonte, these concerns include the

population health approach's emphasis on epidemiological methods, its economic conservatism, and its silence on ecological questions of overall economic scale. Nancy Hamilton and Tariq Bhatti (1996) acknowledge the debate between the concepts of health promotion and population health. However, rather than analyzing the similarities and differences between the concepts, they combine the ideas of both concepts to provide an integrated population health promotion model. As UBC epidemiologist Alex Ostry states:

The population health model represents a progressive move forward, in part because the socioeconomic context for health is so uncompromisingly front and centre in the explanation of differences in health outcomes. In health promotion "lifestyles" explanations for health inequality still dominate, encouraging both victim blaming policy and program solutions as well as a rationale for excluding the socioeconomic context. (Jamieson & Simces, 2001, p. 13)

A critique of population health that has also recently emerged questions its basic commitment to principles consistent with health promotion. According to Dennis Raphael and Toba Bryant (2002), the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research version of population health is embedded in epidemiological thought and methodology. As such, Raphael and Bryant submit that it eschews pluralism in methodology and discounts the value of ethnographic and critical forms of knowledge, as little note is taken of the role that power and politics play in health and illness within societies. They point out that there is also an emphasis on increasing understanding rather than action, noting that population health researchers are especially keen to carry out further research but strikingly silent on the policy implications of their work. Finally, they suggest that population health's lack of a critical perspective and concern with societal structures and

their influences upon health limits understanding about the way economic and social forces influence health and illness within societies.

### *Social Epidemiology*

Promoted by the need to recognize and document the wide spectrum of health determinants, a stronger tie between epidemiology and the social sciences has been forged in recent years. This shift from the micro level, where individual biological factors operate, to a macro level that expresses social conditions in which populations live, has given birth to “social epidemiology” (Krieger, 2001).

There is growing evidence that the relative distribution of income in a society matters in its own right for population health (Wilkinson, 1996). This thesis, which has become most closely identified with the work of Richard Wilkinson, has been replicated in nearly a dozen studies internationally. Although some questions have been raised about the international evidence linking income inequality to mortality, three recent studies have suggested that income inequality predicts excess mortality within individual countries (Ben Shlomo, White, & Marmot, 1996; Kaplan, Pamuk, Lynch, Cohen, & Balfour, 1996; Kawachi & Prothrow-Stith, 1996; Wilkinson, 1992, 1996). Carles Muntaner and John Lynch (1999) in a critique of Wilkinson’s work, argue that Wilkinson’s income inequality and social cohesion model has emerged as a leading approach in social epidemiology research. According to Muntaner and Lynch, it provides a sociological alternative to former models that emphasize poverty, health behaviours, or the cultural aspects of social relations as determinants of population health. On the other hand, they also acknowledge that Wilkinson’s research program has characteristics that

limit its explanatory power and its ability to inform social policies directed toward reducing social inequalities in health. They further point out that the model ignores class relations, an approach that might explain how income inequalities are generated and account for both relative and absolute deprivation, and they imply that social cohesion, rather than political change, is the major determinant of population health.

In an article written for the *Boston Review* entitled “Justice Is Good for Our Health,” Norman Daniels, Bruce Kennedy, and Ichiro Kawachi (2000) make reference to research that points to the correlations between income and health.

Moreover, and perhaps more surprisingly, universal access to health care does not necessarily break the link between social status and health. Our health is affected not simply by the ease with which we can see a doctor—though that surely matters—but also by our social position and the underlying inequality of our society... Suffice to say that, while the exact processes are not fully understood, the evidence suggests that there are *social determinants of health*... these social determinants offer a distinctive angle on how to think about justice, public health, and reform of the health care system. If social factors play a large role in determining our health, then efforts to ensure greater justice in health care should not focus simply on the traditional health sector. Health is produced not merely by having access to medical prevention and treatment, but also, to a measurably greater extent, by the cumulative experience of social conditions over the course of one’s life. (para. 4)

Raphael (2001), who has carried out a number of studies on the way government policies influence health, presents an exhaustive summary of what inequality in society

does for heart disease. Raphael makes the claim that the checks on maintaining socioeconomic justice have loosened and hierarchy has increased, resulting in Canada's health ranking, in comparison to other countries, dropping from second to seventh place. According to Raphael (2001), "one of the most important life conditions that determine whether individuals stay healthy or become ill is their income" (p. xi). He reports that cardiovascular disease is the disease that is most associated with low income among Canadians, and estimates that 23% of premature years of life lost before age 75 in Canada can be attributed to income differences.

An impressive body of evidence has emerged in the field of social epidemiology over the past few years, showing the nexus between poverty, environmental degradation, and health (Berkman, & Kawachi, 2000). The evidence shows how the health of populations is influenced by a conjunction of social/economic relations within society, the psychosocial impact of these relations, and experiences during sensitive periods in childhood that shape the coping skills and biological capacities of the developing individual. In particular, Marmot's studies of British civil servants exemplify studies of individual people (Marmot & Wilkinson, 1999), while the work of Richard Wilkinson (1992, 1996) and of Kawachi and Kennedy (1997) are examples at the aggregate level, showing that it is not so much the absolute level of wealth in a nation as the way incomes are distributed in a society that correlates with health indicators. These studies describe striking and important relationships, but they devote less space to interpreting how or why relationships between income and health occur, or what I would describe as a serious social action agenda. I suggest that the fact of an association between social status and health is no longer in dispute; indeed, it has been known since biblical times. The real

challenge is to trace the pathways down which the influence operates and to explain the links in the chain, in order to propose social policy reforms capable of altering them.

More recently, social epidemiologists have begun to use the idea of social capital to explain ill health (Kawachi, & Berkman, 2000; Kawachi & Prowthrow Stith, 1996). Jonathan Lomas (1998) provides a good review of the concept of social cohesion (or social capital) as “the product of the adequacy of the physical and social structure in a community,” the results of which are networks, norms, and trust that promote cooperative action. Lomas maintains that measures to increase social support and social cohesion would be as effective as more individualized approaches, such as certain traditional medical interventions. Lomas also suggests that the way we organize our society, the extent to which we encourage interaction among the citizenry and the degree to which we trust and associate with each other in caring communities is probably the most important determinant of our health.

### *Social Capital*

Social capital has been diversely defined over the years and has become a prominent concept in the discourse of contemporary social science, especially in social policy. Over the past decade, associations as diverse as World Bank Group (2002), government social policy departments (Human Resource Development Canada, 1998; Phillips, 2001), non-government agencies, and new social movements (Clutterbuck, 2001; Winnipeg Social Planning Council, 2000) have all turned their attention to the role of social capital in achieving social goals. There has also been an explosion of research on social capital over the past decade that has produced an impressive body of results

confirming the importance of social capital to the well-being of individuals (Brehm & Rahn, 1997; Venstrar, 1999), organizations (Coleman, 1990; Gabbay & Leenders, 2001), and nations (Bates, 1999).

Psychological research has increasingly broadened its analysis beyond traditional variables to include social capital to explain differences in population health patterns (Baum, 1999; McKenzie, 2000). In a similar fashion, epidemiological research has shifted its focus of inquiry to include the impact of social factors on population health status. For example, social epidemiology studies are now beginning to report on the link between levels of “social capital” and the rate of suicide, colds, heart attacks, strokes, and cancer (Berkman & Kawachi, 2000). Sociology experiments suggest that social capital reduces crime, juvenile delinquency, teenage pregnancy, child abuse, welfare dependency, and drug abuse, and increases student test scores and graduation rates (Coleman, 1988, 1990; Granovetter, 1995). John Hagan, Hans Merckens, and Klaus Boehnke (1995), for example, found that communities shown to have high levels of social capital experience lower levels of crime, child abuse, and other social problems. Political economists attempting to integrate economic with non-economic analysis have turned to social capital as a conceptual tool to help explain what makes workers more productive, firms more competitive, and nations more prosperous (Baron & Hannan, 1994). From an educational perspective, Jeffery Berry, Kent Portney, and Ken Thompson (1993) studied the connection of local community activity to the formation of social capital and found that neighbours who talk to each other in a face-to-face manner about topics like politics tend to forge bonds of friendship as opposed to developing self-interest groups.

*A historical review.*

The notion of social capital is by no means new. The lineage of the concept of social capital can be traced back as far as 1830s, to Alexis de Tocqueville's (1945) classic description of American communities. Tocqueville reported on the critical decision-making processes of the "common" people. However, it was not the *product* of decision making that Tocqueville found so interesting; rather, it was the notion of local citizens coming together in small groups to solve problems. Tocqueville discovered that as citizens engaged in "associational" processes, they were in essence creating the power to build their communities. It was the space between the individual and the state occupied by these associations that Tocqueville first mapped as the centre of the North American community. When Americans confront a problem, he noted, they don't fold their arms and wait for government to solve it. Instead, they get together with their neighbours, form an association—a "mediating structure" (e.g., extended families, churches, neighbourhoods, and voluntary associations) (Couto, & Guthrie, 1999)—and tackle it themselves. Tocqueville's analysis, with its emphasis on democracy as a social condition, raises some interesting questions about state-controlled social welfare interventions.

The concept of social capital emerged independently several times over the past century. It appeared in Henry James's (1985) novel *The Golden Bowl* in 1904, where he wrote about the social capital of a female character in referring to her social associations. In 1916, state supervisor L. J. Hanifan of West Virginia was the first to apply the term from an educational point of view, referring to the importance of community involvement in successful schools (Woolcock, 1998). It was not until some 40 years later that the concept surfaced again, when it was rediscovered by sociologist Jane Jacobs, who used it

to describe club positions of suburban residents (Putnam, 2000). It was once again recast by economist Glenn Loury (1977) in the 1970s in his analysis of the social legacy of slavery as an individual resource. Loury argued that social capital should be integrated as a standard variable in the explanation of income and human capital differences.

The first theoretically refined sociological analysis of social capital was not produced until the 1980s, however, in Pierre Bourdieu's (1980) "Le Capital Social: Notes Provisoires." Originally produced in German, the article did not gain widespread attention in the English-speaking world (Portes, 1998). Bourdieu criticized economic theory for focusing only on economic capital. Instead, Bourdieu (1986) proposed the development of a general science of the economy of practices, capable of examining capital, understood as power, in all its forms. Hence, in addition to economic capital, Bourdieu also identified cultural and social capital. His particular application of the concept of social capital relates to understanding how individuals draw on social capital to improve their economic standing in capitalist societies. In such societies, Bourdieu argues, economic capital is the fundamental resource, and his concern is with how social and cultural capital may be instrumental in increasing an individual's economic capital. This neo-Marxist model of social capital was defined by Bourdieu (1986) as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (p. 246).

The community was not the focal point of Bourdieu's attention in his advancement of the notion of social capital. Rather, it was the personal assets that provide tangible advantages to those individuals, families, or groups that are better connected

(Morrow, 1999). In Bourdieu's sociology, differential access to capital enhanced by social networks, not self-regulating markets or self-interest, shape both economic and social worlds (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Social capital here is a private good, which can be converted into cultural capital, real wealth, or "symbolic capital" that signals social status. This meaning is different from the one attributed by authors like James Coleman (1988), Robert Putnam (2000), and Francis Fukuyama (1995a, 1995b, 2000), who understand social capital as social networks of trust, solidarity, and reciprocity. For them it is a community asset, and by implication assumes the existence of a homogeneous community with common interests and shared values.

It is the work of Coleman (1988) on school participation in Chicago that is credited with sparking much of the modern interest in the notion of social capital. Coleman uses different terms to define social capital, employs the concept for a different purpose, and works within a different theoretical tradition, but fundamentally constructs the same theoretical concept as Bourdieu's. Coleman (1988) also defined social capital not by what it is, but by what it does: "The function identified by the concept of 'social capital' is the value of these aspects of social structure to actors as resources that they can use to achieve their interests" (p. 101). According to Coleman (1988), the "aspects of social structure" encompass obligations and expectations, information channels, norms and effective sanctions that constrain and or encourage certain kinds of behaviour and these "exist in the relations among persons" (pp. 101–102). "If A does something for B and trusts B to reciprocate in the future, this establishes an expectation in A and obligation on the part of B" (pp. 101–102). For Coleman, social capital consists of the sum of the "relational capital" several individuals hold, and is governed by norms of

reciprocity that are enforced by peer pressure, gain or loss in reputation, and the like. However, social capital may have positive economic externalities at the local level, by facilitating collective action. Coleman's definition thus lies somewhere between a public and a private good.

Coleman's (1990) application of the concept of social capital presented a challenge to traditional economic theory. He suggested that "there is a broadly perpetrated fiction in modern society" fostered by classical and neoclassical economic theory<sup>10</sup> and followers of the political philosophy of natural rights, which portrays people as seeking to acquire the maximum number of the things they think are useful to themselves before they seek for the benefit of others (p. 300).

Coleman also succeeded in broadening the definition of the "rational actor" from a self-sufficient or isolated individual to one fundamentally embedded in social context. Sociologist Mark Granovetter (1995) provided support for Coleman's claim, suggesting that both classical and neoclassical economic theory fail to recognize the importance of concrete personal relations and networks of relations, what he refers to as the "embeddedness of economic transactions in social relations," in generating trust, in establishing expectations, and in creating and enforcing norms. This notion of embeddedness is important, because it introduces into the analysis of economic systems social and organizational relations, not simply as a structure to fulfill an economic function, but as a structure with a history and continuity that give it an independent effect on the functioning of economic systems.

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<sup>10</sup>Neoclassical economists advocate this narrow pursuit of self-interest as they believe that the greatest good to society as a whole can be achieved by allowing these individuals to pursue self interest through the market economy (Etzioni, 1988).

While Coleman and Bourdieu both view social capital as a means to increasing an individual's resources, their interests are somewhat divergent. Bourdieu is primarily interested in social capital as a resource for economic capital for individuals, whereas Coleman is interested in how social capital in family and community functions as a resource for human capital for individuals. The key theoretical distinction between human and social capital, in Coleman's rendering, is that social capital inheres in relations between individuals and groups, not in individuals per se.

In *Making Democracy Work* (1993) and *Bowling Alone* (1995) Putnam makes the case for social capital's more heuristic value by challenging overly narrow economic models of development and democracy. Putnam defined social capital as "features of social life—networks, norms, and trust—that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives" (1995, pp. 664–665). For Putnam, social associations, particularly those featuring face-to-face, "horizontal associations" between people, generate trust, norms of reciprocity, and a capacity for civic engagement. Inspired by Coleman, Putnam (1993) studied the development of 20 new regional governments established in Italy in the 1970s. Putnam found that high voter turnout, newspaper readership, and membership of choral societies, literary circles, service clubs, and sports clubs were the hallmarks of successful communities and indicators of high levels of social capital. Putnam (1993) concluded that:

Stocks of social capital, such as trust, norms, and networks, tend to be self-reinforcing and cumulative. Virtuous circles result in social equilibria with high levels of cooperation, trust, reciprocity civic engagement, and collective well-being...Defection, distrust, shirking, exploitation, isolation, disorder, and

stagnation intensify one another in a suffocating miasma of vicious circles. This argument suggests that there may be at least two broad equilibria toward which all societies that face problems of collective action (that is all societies) tend to evolve and which, once attained, tend to be self-reinforcing. (p. 177)

In putting forth this argument, Putnam openly argues against public choice theory's view of non-market actors as little more than "rent-seekers," and suggests that strong networks of associations in fact have the opposite effect of making economic performance listless and governance problematic as these associations use their strength to curry favour from government at the expense of other groups or even the national interest (Buchanan, Tollison, & Tullock, 1980; Olson, 1982). Although the terminology again shifts somewhat, the definition effectively follows Coleman's and therefore Bourdieu's notion of social capital being those networks and norms that facilitate collective action. The main difference between Coleman's and Putnam's accounts of social capital is that Coleman developed a much wider and less focused understanding of social capital, whereas Putnam mainly points to social capital as a collective resource (Paxton, 1999; Portes, 1998).

Putnam's narrowness and selection of certain aspects of social relations that matter, namely generalized institutionalized values of trust and norms of reciprocity, make his formulation of the concept more measurable, testable, and easier to operationalize. However, the empirical measurement of social capital has been attacked for being reductionist, as it places too much weight on participation in voluntary associations, and assumes that reciprocity and trust will flow from this participation (Harriss & de Renzio, 1997; Putzel, 1997). Putnam is also criticized for prescribing a

linear causal link between civic engagement in voluntary associations and improved democratic institutions, rather than allowing for a dynamic interrelationship between the two (Harriss & de Renzio, 1997; Putzel, 1997).

Also taking issue with some of Putnam's ideas around social capital, Fukuyama (1995a) argues that it is not the decline in associational activity that may be a factor in reduced levels of democratic engagement and institutional disillusionment. Rather, Fukuyama argues that the key factor is the changing nature of associational activity. Fukuyama (1995b) is best known for his integration of social capital and trust, and for working within an economic framework rather than a sociological one like Coleman does or a political science perspective like Putnam does. Fukuyama draws on evidence that suggests that associational activity is on the increase, but it is of a qualitatively different kind—typically single issue-focused and often locally based. Activities of this kind, according to Fukuyama (2000), have a small “radius of trust” (p. 4). These new associational forms bind together small numbers of like-minded people, contributing to, and symptomatic of, what Fukuyama refers to as the “miniaturization” of community and morality.

Alongside the Western discourse on social capital, the same interest in the concept is emerging in the fields of development theory and policy of Third World economies. The World Bank, for example, has begun to explore a wide variety of ways in which social capital affects development (Collier, 1998; Francis et al., 1998; Grootaert, 1997; Schiff, 1995; Serageldin & Grootaert, 2000). A lack of developmental success over the last century has given rise to a serious critique of the pure economics models of analysis of developmental issues.

More recent world-systems and neo-classical growth theories have been criticized for adopting either nation-states or rational individuals as their units of analysis, and thereby ignoring the social networks mediating the space between states and markets (Woolcock, 2001). According to the World Bank's prominent social scientist Michael Woolcock (1998), "the idea of social capital is both appealing and promising precisely because it offers a potential strategy for obviating these concerns while bridging theoretical and disciplinary divides" (pp. 153–154). The Social Capital Initiative (SCI) was launched in 1996 by the World Bank to assess the impact of social capital on the effectiveness of development projects, and to contribute to the development of indicators for monitoring social capital and methodologies for measuring its impact.

The World Bank examines the notion of social capital from a post-Washington Consensus perspective.<sup>11</sup> Social capital is viewed as an important concept because it has the potential to enable decision-makers to make investments that increase the efficiency and probability of success for development initiatives (World Bank Group, 2002). According to the World Bank (2002), if social capital is amenable to being created, it would not just explain differences in success between projects or between communities, it could contribute to success:

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<sup>11</sup> The term *Washington Consensus* was coined by John Williamson (1999) to refer to the lowest common denominator of policy advice being addressed to Latin American countries by Washington-based institutions. Whereas the Washington Consensus advocated use of a small set of instruments (including macroeconomic stability, liberalized trade, and privatization) to achieve a relatively narrow goal (economic growth), the post-Washington Consensus recognizes that a broader set of instruments is needed to achieve much broader goals (e.g., increases in living standards, including improved health and education, sustainable development, maintaining a healthy environment, and more equitable development), in order to ensure that all groups in society, not just those at the top, enjoy the fruits of development (Stiglitz, 1998).

This analysis extends the importance of social capital to the most formalized institutional relationships and structures, such as government, the political regime, the rule of law, the court system, and civil and political liberties. This view not only accounts for the virtues and vices of social capital, and the importance of forging ties within and across communities, but recognizes that the capacity of various social groups to act in their interest depends crucially on the support (or lack thereof) that they receive from the state as well as the private sector.

Similarly, the state depends on social stability and widespread popular support. In short, economic and social development thrives when representatives of the state, the corporate sector, and civil society create forums in and through which they can identify and pursue common goals. (para. 5)

As the concept of social capital allows for different specifications of just what social capital is, Table 2.4 provides a simple summary of some of the key conceptual contours of the term. The table can be summarized as follows: (a) social capital is a resource to collective action; (b) that resource contains the norms and sanctions of trust and reciprocity that operate within social networks; and, (c) the structural components of networks, such as size, depth, and relational aspects such as inequality, shape the social capital capacity of a network.

Table 2.4

*Different Perspectives on the Concept of Social Capital*

Theorist	Conceptualization of Social Capital	Locus of Social Capital
Bourdieu	The way individuals draw upon social capital to improve their economic standing in capitalist societies	Treats social capital as a property of individuals or private good (i.e., individuals in class competition)
Coleman	Aspects of social structure that individuals can use as resources to achieve their interests	Emphasizes the benefits of social capital to the individual or to a network of individuals  Includes both vertical and horizontal associations: individuals in family and community
Putnam	Social networks (“networks of civic engagement”) and associated norms that have an effect on the productivity of the community	Emphasizes horizontal associations between people: trust, norms, and networks that facilitate cooperation for mutual benefit
Fukuyama	An instantiated informal norm that promotes cooperation between two or more individuals	Stresses social capital as a property of cultures (i.e., everyone has a similar predisposition to cooperate in all situations)
World Bank	The social and political environment that enables norms to develop and shapes social structure	Includes the more formalized institutional relationships and structures, such as government, the political regime, the rule of law, the court system, and civil and political liberties, in addition to the largely informal and often local horizontal and hierarchical relationships of the first four concepts

As revealed by this literature review, social capital remains a relatively under-developed policy resource. Nevertheless, the notion of social capital has proven crucial for drawing attention to neglected non-market aspects of social reality that arguably

constitute a needed corrective for the prevailing economic-driven distributive models of social welfare. Applying the concept of social capital to social policy discourse places individual action squarely in a social context. From this standpoint, policy makers are challenged to construct both community-building and people-supporting strategies to improve the overall well-being of society.

While the theoretical perspectives offered by health promotion, population health, and social epidemiology enable articulation of the effects of risk factors and determinants of health on populations of people, and argue for broader social policy responses to address the non-market social, political, and cultural forces that affect the well-being of large populations of people, they fall short of proposing routes of action. This is where social capital theory has much to offer. Social capital theory offers explanations for what else is needed in terms of policy changes to better connect people to their communities.

The literature review on the distributive social welfare paradigm draws attention to the need to rethink social welfare as primarily an income distribution system and to open up the boundaries of social policy as a subject, forging connections to other bodies of inquiry. Neither the distributive approach to social welfare nor a surging free market economy has solved many of society's persistent social problems. In fact, it can be argued that each has contributed in its own way to the decay of civil society and its "mediating" institutions.

From a critical perspective the review revealed that the distributive approach to social welfare undermines community by constructing users of the system as "deficient". It is this view that allows marginalized people to be pushed even further to the economic and social margins of their communities. This well-documented trend to reform deficient

individuals gives little or no attention to the role and responsibility of social welfare institutions as mediating structures in developing individual citizenship and a shared sense of community. I have come to the conclusion that while our social welfare institutions are important, they are not equal in their capacity to create a commonly shared sense of community good. In my experience, government and non-government social welfare institutions that consciously participate in the life of community affect their capacity to shape and embody a commonly shared sense of community, thereby reducing fragmentation and isolation. This view of social welfare institutions as embedded in community requires going beyond the conventional practice of dividing up organizations on the basis of their legal distinction as nonprofit, government or private and who does what to whom. The question remains “What needs to be understood to achieve sense of community?”

While the theoretical perspectives of health promotion, population health, social epidemiology, and social capital enable articulation of the effects of risk factors and determinants of health on populations of people, and argue for broader social policy responses to address the non-market social, political, and cultural forces that affect the well-being of large populations of people, they fall short of proposing routes of action. Perhaps they fall short because the governing ideology of neo-liberalism gives little consideration of the context of health which is the community.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

*The problem of phenomenological inquiry is not always that we know too little about the phenomenon we wish to investigate, but that we know too much. (van Manen, 2003, p. 46)*

To uncover or to illuminate the nature of the co-researchers' understanding of sense of community and how such understandings would help to inform models of community governance and community-based child welfare practice, I needed to develop a research methodology that fits the problem statement, research context, and objectives of the research question (Patton, 1990; Riessman, 1994). Similarly, Michael Patton (1990, p. 150) notes that "decisions about design, measurement, analysis, and reporting all flow from purpose." Crotty (2003, p. 2) presents a useful framework consisting of four questions, which he maintains addresses the crucial issues for a research strategy:

1. "What epistemology informs" the research?
2. "What theoretical perspective lies behind the methodology in question"?
3. "What methodology governs the choice and use of methods"?
4. "What methods will be used?"

In this chapter I define the logic of my research design within the parameters of these four elements of the research process. I begin with a brief discussion of the constructionist research paradigm that underpins this specific study. This is followed by considering the relationship between constructivism, critical theory, and phenomenological inquiry. Next, I explain the methodological approach of critical hermeneutic phenomenology and conclude with a description of the specific research

methods used to carry out the study, noting the congruence between the research paradigm, theoretical perspective, methodology, and research methods.

### Locating the Research in the Constructionist Research Paradigm

When seeking to understand the human condition qualitative research is typically used to answer questions about the complex nature of describing phenomenon from the participants' point of view (Creswell, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Merriam, 1991). From the constructivist viewpoint, meaning (or truth) cannot be described as "objective." But by the same token, it cannot simply be described as "subjective." Meaning is described from participants' constructions of reality as lived or experienced in their reality.

I wanted an approach that would allow my co-researchers to share their stories in a manner that took note of their importance. The co-researchers were all given the opportunity to "tell their story", relating their individual experiences, perspective and emotional responses regarding their lived experience of sense of community. I wanted them to know they were being heard and that what they said would be used to understand the essence of community and pose new options for community governance and service. My intention was realized and one co-researcher noted it this way in her journal. "I was thoroughly grateful for the opportunity to participate in the interview and have never conversed with anyone about the nature and purpose of community in such a deep and personally moving manner." She further shared how this experience "opened up feelings" about herself and her sense of community that she had not "consciously thought about before" or "shared with anyone".

### *Strength of the Constructionist Research Paradigm*

A constructivist approach captures both unique and common experiences of sense of community across gender, power (i.e., stakeholder groups), and cultural contexts. My emphasis was not to understand a simple, single reality but to capture the complex, multiple realities of the individual within community. The nature of the inquiry allowed the co-researchers to report on “the network of things and relationships that we rely on in our living, and on which, we believe, others rely, too” (von Glaserfeld, 1995, p. 7). As such, the knower interprets and constructs a reality based on his experiences and interactions within his environment. A recognition that reality is a social construction acknowledges that change is possible in and endemic to life, and that our existence has elements of “historicity” (past, present, and future) which shape and inform our lives as we shape the lives of others (Heidegger, 1996). This is an important point in that it moves us past the idea of life being concrete and static to a place where life in the world is co-constituted with the lives of others. This understanding allows that knowledge of the world is not constructed as individuals in the absence of other, but rather within the context of other in the community.

Rather than thinking of truth in terms of matching reality, von Glasersfeld focuses on the notion of *viability*: “To the constructivist, concepts, models, theories, and so on are viable if they prove adequate in the contexts in which they were created” (von Glasersfeld, 1995, p. 7). As Glaserfeld explains, this does not mean that there is no reality out there, only that we make sense of it in terms of the systems of representation. We do this by using the conceptual maps of meaning that we create to help us gain meaning from what is around us. The constructivist paradigm seemed to be an appropriate

approach to go beyond the rhetorical, and thus constraining ideology of individual responsibility, with which child welfare practice is now engaged, and move to a basis for practice and policy-making which depends on understanding “clients’” lived experiences within their respective communities.

### Drawing upon Critical Theory

Social constructionists’ arguments about the socially negotiated nature of knowledge and authority shares the viewpoints of critical theory. Like constructionists, critical theorists use a historical realist ontological perspective in which the world is not a universe of facts that exists independently of the observer (Ives, 2004; Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994). In this sense, critical theory<sup>12</sup> has adopted relativism as its ontological basis. The epistemological rhetoric of the critical theoretical perspective suggests that objective observation is impossible and that all knowledge is generated or justified in the context of the researcher’s framework and assumptions. In this regard there are clear similarities between the critical theoretical perspective and the constructivist research paradigms, as they both regard objective observation as not possible. In addition, critical theory argues for changing the status quo, as in emancipation and empowerment, whereas constructivist research can be regarded as more “neutral” and descriptive.

Critical theorists attend to understanding the relationship between societal structures (especially those economic and political) and ideological patterns of thought

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<sup>12</sup> “ Critical theory is a general term for new theoretical developments (roughly since the 1960s) in a variety of fields, informed by structuralism, post-structuralism, deconstruction, Marxist theory, and several other areas of thought. It encompasses many related developments in literary theory (which is often a rough synonym) and cultural studies, aesthetics, theoretical sociology and social theory, continental philosophy more generally” (Wikipedia, 2004).

that constrain the human imagination and thus limit opportunities for confronting and changing unjust social systems (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). They are committed to understanding the complexity of such relations, however, and distance themselves from what they see as reductionist Marxist approaches (Morrow, 1994). Moreover, they hold that these earlier approaches offered no ability to explain social change. As a result, they treat social policy as both a political event and a discursive event. It is a political event in that public policy is crafted within a political process. It is a discursive event in that public policy is constructed through a particular language, which, in turn, uses particular persuasive elements to both legitimate and validate itself (Cloud, 1998; Polsky, 1991).

Phenomenological researchers always run the risk of colluding with power, reinforcing the status quo, contributing to current problems, and blocking paths to progressive change. Critical theory can actively inform phenomenological research, preventing it from becoming just one more form of narrow-minded investigation.

In the face of crises of globalization, exponential poverty, dwindling support for welfare state policies, we must establish a critical relationship within academic research and disciplines (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Gitlin & Russel, 1994; Kemmis, 2001). Therefore, I intend to understand the phenomenon of sense of community as well as create an appropriate context for social transformation through the development of a deconstructing and empowering process for research participants. My methodology draws upon constructivist and critical science traditions in an attempt to better understand the co-researchers' view of the world as manifest in their own actions and their reflections on their positions within their worldview.

### *Shared Assumptions*

Having reflected on Crotty's (2003) first two questions in setting up a research design I will now discuss the shared assumptions held by critical theorists and constructivists who employ qualitative research methods as they relate to my study. Scholars in both constructivist and critical qualitative research traditions affirm that social relations, as well as analyses constructed by researchers, must be interpreted. Both traditions are more interested in offering interpretations than in elucidating natural laws of causality. Both, therefore, offer a challenge to logical positivism, arguing that dynamic social and cultural structures, rather than certain distinguishable variables, constrain human actions. Both assume the eventuality and inevitability of social change.

Both critical theorists and constructivists are concerned with and share a particular view on research bias. Constructivist researchers argue that bias should be reconceptualized in light of the subjective position of the researcher, viewed as that which informs and strengthens one's interpretation. Critical researchers, particularly those operating within post-colonialist and feminist paradigms, tend to insist upon a recognition of the power differential between research participants and those conducting the research, thus locating bias in social systems rather than or in addition to a particular research situation.

Both traditions stress that meaning and language are socially constructed, although critical researchers are quick to point out that while interpretations may be constructed, forces of oppression are real in their consequences to others and hence may be understood as such. Both are interested in how meanings may remain the same or change over time.

Scholars in both traditions are concerned with a reasoned analysis of social life although critical theorists expect a reasoned analysis to result in emancipation. They evaluate their arguments in light of a community of researchers of which they are a part. As a result of these last two commonalities, both are at some distance from the postmodernist view that is skeptical about whether reasoned analyses affirms radical relativism or is another version of authoritative consensus.

I embrace the ideas of social justice and critical social critique that are embedded in the constructivist and critical theory perspectives and have designed the research process to ensure that participants speak to and reflect on their experiences within their communities.

#### Turning to Phenomenological Inquiry

The focus of this section is the elucidation of the philosophical grounding that is employed in this critical hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry into lived experience of sense of community. In this section I focus on what critical hermeneutic phenomenology is and why I chose this methodology for my study. However, before I review the methodological structure inherent in phenomenology according to van Manen (2003), I present some of the key theorists and philosophical concepts of phenomenological inquiry to establish the relationship between the focus of investigation and phenomenology and the applicability of the phenomenological method to the specific research questions.

The term *phenomenology* was first coined by an 18th century German mathematician, J. H. Lambert, to describe the science of appearances (Scruton, 1995).

While important precursors of phenomenology can be found in the work of Immanuel Kant, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, and Ernst Mach, phenomenology emerged from philosophy in the work of German philosopher and mathematician, Edmund Husserl (Moran, 2000, p. 1).

The term itself was derived from the Greek verb *hermeneuein*, meaning to interpret (Caputo, 1987; Grondin, 1994). Wiehl (2003) depicts hermeneutics as an artful form of understanding. In a similar vein, Gadamer (1975/2004, p. 191) describes hermeneutics as “an *art* and not a mechanical process.” Caputo (1987, p. 115) portrays hermeneutics as the practice of *aletheia*, which is the early Greek word for truth or “the event of concealment and unconcealment.” Heidegger (1996, p. 202) referred to *aletheia* as the uncovering of hidden things, thereby “taking them out of their concealment.”

For Edmund Husserl (1970), the attraction of the phenomenological method lay in its promise as a new science of being. He considered phenomenology as a way of reaching true meaning by penetrating deeper and deeper into reality (Valle, King, & Halling, 1989). In this sense, phenomenology was seen by Husserl as a movement away from the Cartesian dualism of reality (Koch, 1995). Husserl worked towards the development of a *presuppositionless* philosophy that goes to the bedrock of experience, and that eliminates assumptions (especially hidden assumptions) to the greatest extent possible (Cobb-Stevens, 1994; Mohanty & McKenna, 1989; Welton, 1999). Husserl posits that once one has suspended all ontological commitments, assumptions, and presuppositions and once contingencies are bracketed, the structure of consciousness is revealed in its essence as being intentional.

Heidegger, a student of and assistant to Husserl, drops all Husserl's central concepts and confronts the basic idea of Cartesian dualism, putting forth the argument that there is no subject distinct from the external world of things, and introducing the concept of *Dasein*, which is essentially a "being-in-the-world" (Moran, 2000). Heidegger insists that "being-in-the-world" is characterized by a complementary dependence between *Dasein* and its world. The two are not separate from one another in our everyday existence, but only come to be separated when we encounter problems or attempt to theorize about ourselves (Barnacle, 2004). Heidegger (1962/2004) argues that *Dasein* cannot be comprehended without considering the world, since the world is an essential characteristic of *Dasein*. Heidegger's phenomenology advanced the thesis that the world comes into existence in and through our participation in it (Heidegger, 1962/2004). He argues that reduction to one's own private experience is impossible, and offered an alternative worldview from Husserl's beliefs regarding bracketing. In order to interpret our ordinary everyday experience of phenomena, Heidegger introduced the strategy of the hermeneutic circle as a way to understand our "being-in-the-world."

In Heidegger's view, consciousness is not separate from the world, but is a formation of historically lived experience. Koch (1995) outlined Heidegger's emphasis on the historicity of understanding as one's background or situatedness in the world. Historicity, a person's history or background, includes what a culture gives a person from birth and is handed down, presenting ways of understanding the world. In Heidegger's opinion, all understanding is connected to a given set of fore-structures, including one's historicity that cannot be eliminated. One therefore needs to become as aware or conscious in order to account for these interpretive influences. This interpretive

process is achieved through a hermeneutic circle<sup>13</sup> which asks participants to consider parts of the experience compared to the whole of experience and back and forth again and again. This process increases the depth of engagement with and therefore the understanding of the experience (Annells, 1996; Polkinghorne, 1983).

Heidegger's philosophical focus was fundamentally different to that of Husserl, whose focus was epistemological. Heidegger's philosophical concerns were ontological. Heidegger sought to understand the essence of "being" itself (Crotty, 1996; Heidegger, 1962/2004), and that is what attracted me to this approach. Drawing on Heidegger's philosophical view that there are many ways of the human being to be-in-the-world, I choose to include four stakeholder groups in an effort to uncover the potential range of perspectives of the experience of sense of community.

I found Gadamer's views on the significance of the researcher, the importance of historical understanding in all interpretation, and clarification of the concept of "fusion of horizons" very helpful in the formulation of my research process and data analysis. For Gadamer, the role of the interpreter is not to understand how to make understandings happen, but rather to explore the everyday happenings of understanding (Dooley & Keaney, 2001; Koch, 1996; Polkinghorn, 1983). In order to do this I engaged participants in a critical and reflexive dialogue with the text while being aware of their prejudices. I used my own pre-understanding of what is familiar to facilitate understanding. We did

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<sup>13</sup> "Heidegger's account of the hermeneutical circle at work in all understanding is a critique of 'the myth of the given' and a repudiation of foundationalist epistemologies. It is not that Heidegger denies that knowledge has foundations; it is just that the kinds of foundations he discovers render the ideals of foundationalist epistemologies futile" (Westphal, 1999, p. 417-418).

not separate ourselves from our own historical and cultural contexts, and we used the interplay within the hermeneutic circle to develop knowledge.

I agree with Merleau-Ponty's that the human subjective experience is the most valid stance from which a person's experience of self and the world can be described and studied (Edwards, 1998; Moran, 2000). From this point of view, people learn about themselves by reflecting on their being in the world. As such, experiences and memories are not only something we have, they are also something we are. In other words, there is no "inner self," in the sense of an entirely hidden property separated from other people; rather, the body as a self is expressive (Tiemersma, 1989).

Merleau-Ponty's philosophy posits that the life-world is experienced through perception as opposed to conceptualization and as such is experienced before even a conscious organizing of the world (Sadala & Adorno, 2002). This view led me to abandon my assumptions of the external observer and informed my decision to consider my participants as co-researchers. This required my co-researchers to both discover and create the phenomenon within "the phenomenal, intentional field" (Dahlberg and Dahlberg, 2004, p. 269).

Van Manen's (2003) hermeneutic<sup>14</sup> phenomenology combines, in a dialectical fashion, a phenomenological concern for describing our ways-of-being-in-the-world with a hermeneutic concern for interpreting the social-symbolic world (Geelan & Taylor, 2001). Van Manen (2003, p. 2) describes hermeneutic phenomenology as a human

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<sup>14</sup> Hermeneutics is derived from the Greek verb *hermeneuein*, which means to say or interpret; the noun *hermeneia*, which is the utterance or explication of thought; and the name *hermeneus*, which refers to the playful, mischievous "trickster" Hermes (Caputo, 1987; Grondin, 1994). The Latin word *hermeneutica* was introduced in the 17th century by the theologian Johann Dannhauer, and it has grown into different schools including the realms of the theological, juridical, and philosophical (Grondin, 1994).

science mode of inquiry that is “avowedly phenomenological, hermeneutic, and semiotic or language oriented.”

The phenomenological method of van Manen has been widely adopted by a range of health care professionals, sociologists, and social scientists (Munhall, 1994; Robertson-Malt, 1998; Schaefer, 1997) and best exemplifies a continuity of thought and reflection from phenomenology’s inception to its continued practice today. It is based on his belief that “the method of phenomenology and hermeneutics is that there is no method” (van Manen, 2003, p. 30) and that it should be “pre-suppositionless” (van Manen, 2003, p. 29). Rather, van Manen (2003, p. 30) offers a research structure that involves “a dynamic interplay among six research activities.” These include:

1. turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;
2. investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;
3. reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;
4. describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;
5. manipulating a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon;
6. balancing the research context by considering parts and whole. (pp. 30–31)

Van Manen (2003) concludes that:

To *do* hermeneutic phenomenology is to attempt to accomplish the impossible: to construct a full interpretive description of some aspect of the lifeworld, and yet remain aware that lived life is always more complex than any explication of meaning can reveal. (p. 18)

In keeping with van Manen's counsel, this phenomenological inquiry demonstrated an open, creative and flexible approach, by integrating a descriptive empirical inquiry of "the range and varieties of pre-reflective" everyday lived experience of *sense of community* and an interpretive reflective inquiry of "the aspects of meaning that are associated with this phenomenon" (van Manen, 2000b).

Finally, a critical approach to phenomenological research maintains that in order to facilitate communication, meaningful interactions, and commonalties of understanding, we need to examine the power structure that underlies aspects of social life and communication (Freire, 1994, 1998; Habermas, 1974; Misgeld, 1985; Healy & Neufeld, 1997; Robert & House, 2000). In his discussion on emancipatory education from this perspective, van Manen (1975) maintains that:

The theoretical base of empirical-analytical science is too narrow, not taking into account a more complete concept of social science inquiry, and it is inappropriate simply for reasons that it is essentially not critical in a more emancipatory sense. Emancipatory awareness leads to the possibility of self-determination with some degree of freedom from blind psychological, political or economic compulsions....It involves inquiry into the social origins, consequences, and functions of knowledge. (p. 17)

Critical phenomenology is closely aligned with Freire's pedagogical conception of a socially transformative praxis, in that it requires individuals to perceive their experiences in the world (Boyce, 1996; Bruss & Macedo, 1985; Freire, 1970/2005, 1973, 1982; Heaney, 1995). From this critical position, participants in this study were viewed as

co-researchers actively involved in seeking meaning and analyzing their experience of sense of community.

### *The Phenomenological Method*

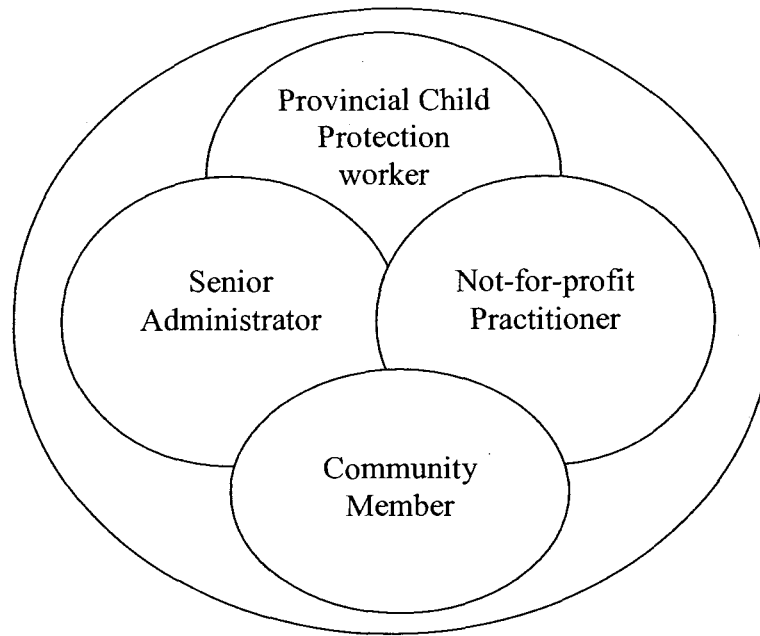
In this section, I provide a description of the process I used to conduct my phenomenological study. There are a variety of methods that can be employed in phenomenologically-based research, including interviews, conversations, participant observation, action research, focus meetings, and analysis of personal texts (Crotty, 1996; Holroyd, 2001; van Manen, 2003). These methods reflect two types of inquiry: empirical and reflective. The main purpose of the empirical inquiry is to explore examples and varieties of lived experiences, especially in the form of anecdotes, narratives, stories, and other lived experience accounts. Reflective inquiry activities aim to interpret the aspects of meaning or meaningfulness that are associated with certain phenomenon (van Manen, 2000c).

### *Co-researchers*

In this study a non-probability purposive, maximum variation sampling strategy was used to identify and select co-researchers from 4 different stakeholder groups for maximum variation (see Figure 2). Maximum variation sampling (sometimes called a maximum diversity sample or a maximum heterogeneity sample) is a form of purposive sampling in which the researcher deliberately selects cases (users) that add contrasting elements to the sample (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1990). Maximum variation

sampling is also considered an appropriate sampling strategy when the sampling size is relatively small (Patton, 1990)

Variation is also a good method for controlling sample bias (Mills & Huberman, 1994) and ensuring saturation of categories (Glasser, 1978). The variations for constructing the sample population in this study were senior social services administrators within bureaucracy and not-for-profit organizations, provincially mandated line child protection workers, not-for-profit line practitioners, and general members of the community. This variation was chosen for two reasons. First, the individuals were selected as co-researchers based upon the shared realm of common “lifeworlds” (van Manen, 2003) with this researcher (i.e., some connection to children in care and families in need), both as a fellow human service practitioner and as a human being. Secondly, they all share a common interest in the safety and well-being children, yet they operate from very different paradigms of care.



*Figure 2.* Co-researcher membership.

With these criteria in mind, the sample selection process began. Thirty-two persons from northern British Columbia, who had put forward their names in an earlier community-based study that I conducted (Bellefeuille & Hemingway, 2004) were invited to participate in the study. All 32 accepted the invitation. The sample comprised 24 women (75%) and 8 men (25%) and the mean age category was 40–50 (with an age range of 20–30 to 60–70). Twenty-three (72%) were Caucasian and 9 (18%) self-identified as non-Caucasian. Eight were from the communities of Prince George and Terrace/Kitimat respectively, and of the other 16, 4 each were from the communities of Dawson Creek, Chetwynd, McBride, and Quesnel (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1

*Demographics of Co-researchers*

Co-researchers	Sex	Culture/Ethnicity	Age	Sample Communities
N=32	Male N=8	Caucasian N=23	20–30 (N=3)	Chetwynd (N=4)
	Female N=24	Other N=9	30–40 (N=7)	Dawson Creek (N=4)
			40–50 (N=12)	McBride (N=4)
			50–60 (N=8)	Prince George (N=8)
			60–70 (N=2)	Quesnel (N=4)
				Terrace/Kitimat (N=8)

*Search for Exemplar Cases*

The purpose of selecting co-researchers for this phenomenological study was to demonstrate variation in the description of the experience (Munhall & Oiler, 1986). Phenomenological inquiry is not validated by numbers but by the completeness of examining the topic under study and the fullness and depth to which the interpretation extends understanding (Smith, 1991). “An adequate sample size in qualitative research is one that permits...the deep, case-oriented analysis that is a hallmark...that results in a new and richly textured understanding of experience” (Sandelowski, 1995, p. 182).

## Data Collection Methods

From the outset of my study, I felt it would be challenging for co-researchers to articulate their “lived” experience of community. This belief was reinforced through the literature, most notably by Godway and Finn (1994), who wrote that community is a “catachresis,” a word that has no literal referent and that seems to come apart as it is articulated. Therefore, in my study I used conversational interviews, reflective journals, and focus groups as a means of prompting the co-researchers reflections about community. Data was collected in three distinct phases, beginning with the

conversational interview and followed by the reflective journal and focus groups. The idea of employing multiple data sources, known as data triangulation, was used to strengthen the credibility (i.e., the convergent validity) of the study (Clarke, James, & Kelly 1996; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998a, 1998b; Koch 1998). Triangulation in research has been defined as the combination of two or more theories, data sources, methods, or investigators in one study of a single phenomenon (Denzin, 1989). Fielding and Fielding (1986, p. 13) expand on this explanation by noting that “the important feature of triangulation is not the simple combination of different kinds of data, but the attempt to relate them so as to counteract the threats to validity identified in each.” Three dimensions of data collection triangulation were employed in this study by using a maximum variation sample (Patton, 1990), multiple data collection strategies (i.e., personal interview, reflective journal, and focus group) (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998a, 1998b), and by using more than one strategy to analyse the same data (i.e., pre-reflective thematic analysis of personal interview and reflective journal followed by reflective focus group).

### *Phase 1: The Conversational Interview*

The first phase of data collection involved a conversational-style, face-to-face interview guided by a standard set of open-ended questions (see Appendix C). In phenomenological inquiry the interview serves a very specific purpose. It acts as a vehicle for developing a conversational relation with research participants (co-researchers) about the meaning of their experience. The interviews were conducted with each co-researcher between October 1 and December 14, 2004. The conversational

approach to the interview encouraged an open, interactive, reflective, and engaged discussion, which is considered to be consistent with phenomenological inquiry (Kvale, 1996; van Manen, 2003). Elliot Eisner (1991, p. 183) states that “conducting a good interview is, in some way, like participating in a good conversation: listening intently and asking questions that focus on concrete examples and feelings rather than abstract speculations...”

Following introductions, an initial 5 to 10 minutes was spent reviewing the purpose and process of our conversation. This helped to establish a warm atmosphere, encouraging the co-researcher to talk about his or her experiences. I began each conversation by inviting the co-researcher to share his or her definition of community, and then invited the co-researcher to share his or her experience of the community he or she described. A number of interview techniques were used to elicit further commentary on selected aspects of the co-researchers’ experiences (e.g., probing, reflection, silence, etc.). Flexibility was also needed. Many participants valued the new insights and meanings that arose in their discussions of various experiences. On average, the conversations lasted 30 to 40 minutes, concluding when the co-researchers indicated that there was nothing further to add. Typically, the co-researchers’ closing comments acknowledged their comfort and appreciation at being able to openly share, discuss, and reflect on their experiences with an interested and engaged listener.

### *Phase 2: Reflective Journaling*

The second phase of data collection, reflective journaling, sought to provide co-researchers with an opportunity to reflect more deeply on the heightened awareness of

sense of community generated by their participation in the conversational interview. Each co-researcher was presented with a journal notebook and was asked to record his or her daily experiences of, personal feelings and opinions about, and reflections on the phenomenon of sense of community as they were experienced over the 4-week post-interview period. The purpose of the journal was explained verbally and was also included on the inside cover of the journal (see Appendix D). In a hermeneutic inquiry the journal serves to locate the self in the research process (Gorman, 1993).

Street (1990, p. 1) argues that as a research tool, journals enable the researcher to access the “rich resource of raw data” derived from the lives of individuals and to “expose this for analysis and action.” He suggests that the action of writing serves a number of purposes, including making invisible actions and thoughts visible and “freezing the action” (p. 8) so that it can be examined in more detail. He also points out that when the process of journaling is combined with other processes, such as interviews or focus groups, it can enlighten respondents to the potentially hegemonic practices that “contribute to the development and maintenance of...unjust practices” (Street 1990, p. 31). In support of this view, van Manen (2003) asserts that:

Researchers too, have found that keeping a journal, diary, or log can be very helpful for keeping a record of insights gained, for discerning patterns of the work in progress, for reflecting on previous reflections, for making the activities of research themselves topics for study and so forth. (p. 73)

As illustrated in Table 3.2, 17 or 53% of co-researchers submitted journal entries. Co-researchers from all 4 stakeholder groups submitted at least one journal entry. The highest participation rate was found in the community and not-for-profit stakeholder

groups, with 5 co-researchers from each group submitting at least one entry. Four co-researchers from the child protection stakeholder group and 3 co-researchers from the senior administrator stakeholder group also submitted at least one journal entry. All but 2 of the co-researchers stated that while they did not make a written entry in their journals, they had thought a great deal about the interview and were anxious to participate in the focus group to further discuss their experiences of and reflections on the phenomenon of sense of community. One of the co-researchers could not be found as she had relocated from her community at the time of the interview and one was out of the country on vacation.

Co-researchers who made journal entries stated that the data collection strategy was effective in facilitating personal reflection. Some of the feedback suggested that journaling was a more “personalized and meaningful experience” and described a freedom to write more “openly.” They also indicated that they felt safe and that their journaling was under their own control.

Table 3.2

*Reflective Journal Participants (N = 17)*

Community	Not-for-Profit	Child Protection Workers	Senior Administrators
N=5	N=5	N=4	N=3

*Phase 3: Focus Group*

The third data collection phase involved focus groups via teleconference carried out between January 25 and January 28, 2005. Conducting focus groups via computers

and audio/video conferencing is becoming an increasingly popular method for collecting data (Oringderff, 2004; Underhill & Olmsted, 2003; Walstonn & Lissitz, 2000). A positive feature of this data collection strategy, according to Richard Krueger (1994), is that it provides a social forum, allowing participants to hear and consider other opinions. Developing this emphasis on interaction, Jenny Kitzinger (1995, p. 299) writes that “the idea behind the focus group method is that group processes can help people to explore and clarify their views in ways that would be less easily accessible in a one to one interview.” Focus groups also are an effective means of promoting dialogue and exchange that can help participants clarify their own ideas and opinions on a subject (Morgan & Krueger, 1993; Orbe, 1998). Michael Bloor, Jane Frankland, Michelle Thomas, and Kate Robson (2001) note that “focus groups provide a valuable resource for documenting the complex and varying processes through which group norms and meanings are shaped, elaborated and applied” (p. 17).

Unlike the first two data collection strategies, which were designed to capture descriptive accounts of the co-researchers’ lived experience of sense of community, the focus group method was designed to engage the co-researchers and me in a deeper hermeneutic phenomenological interpretation of the essential themes and structures that emerged from the thematic analysis of the conversational interview and reflective journal. The intention was to ascertain the co-researchers’ perceptions of the text as a whole, and to assist me in naming the emerging essential structures. It is important to note, however, that both descriptive and hermeneutic phenomenological approaches share a common view of the individual’s experiential relationship to the phenomenon in question (Astedt-Kurki & Nieminen, 1997; Benner, 1994; Colaizzi, 1978).

In four stakeholder focus-groups, co-researchers were brought together by teleconference. Co-researchers were individually contacted by phone or e-mail and given a pre-scheduled conference call time and toll-free number to call to connect with a conference operator. The focus groups, on average, lasted approximately 2 hours and were audiotaped for transcription. Twenty-three or 72% of co-researchers participated in one of the four focus group sessions (see Table 3.3).

Table 3.3

*Focus Group Participants (N = 23)*

Community	Not-for-Profit	Child Protection Workers	Senior Administrators
N=4	N=6	N=7	N=6

Focus groups were conversational in nature and framed by the opening invitation to co-researchers to speak openly and freely about how they experience sense of community before and after their involvement with the study and their personal reflections on and interpretations of the thematic analysis. As the principle facilitator of the focus groups, I was mindful of the role of the facilitation process in relation to the nature and quality of the data collected (Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub, 1996). On this note, Charles Basch (1987, p. 415) points out how important it is for the moderator to “create a non-threatening supportive climate that encourages all participants to share views, facilitating interaction among members, and interjecting probing comments, transitional questions and summaries without interfering too brusquely with the dialogue.” As moderator, I paid close attention to issues of power and domination by

keeping track of who spoke and for how long. I facilitated interaction by inviting each co-researcher to make comments (e.g., “Is this similar to your experience in Terrace?”). I also posed probing questions to draw out different points of view (e.g., “How does this experience of oneness relate to your experience of inclusiveness?”). This allowed co-researchers to move back and forth between the whole and the parts in order to elaborate meanings and to consider possible relationships between experiences on the fundamental phenomenon of sense of community.

Following the conclusion of the focus groups, co-researchers were afforded an opportunity to comment on their focus group experience. Overall, the co-researchers reported that they found the conversation thought-provoking and stated that they “gained personally from their involvement”.

#### Data Analysis Methods

The process of transcribing the tape-recorded interviews and focus groups into an electronic computer file began within 48 hours of completing the interviews and focus groups. I compared the transcripts with the audiotapes for accuracy. In addition to the electronic files, a hard copy of each transcription was maintained to provide protection in the event of computer access problems. Each co-researcher was given a pseudonym and all identifying information was omitted from the transcripts. The audiotapes, back-up floppy disks, and printed transcripts were numerically coded to facilitate cross-referencing and were stored in a locked filing cabinet in my office. All written records (journals) and electronic materials (electronic transcripts and e-mails) will be destroyed six months following the dissertation defense to protect participant confidentiality.

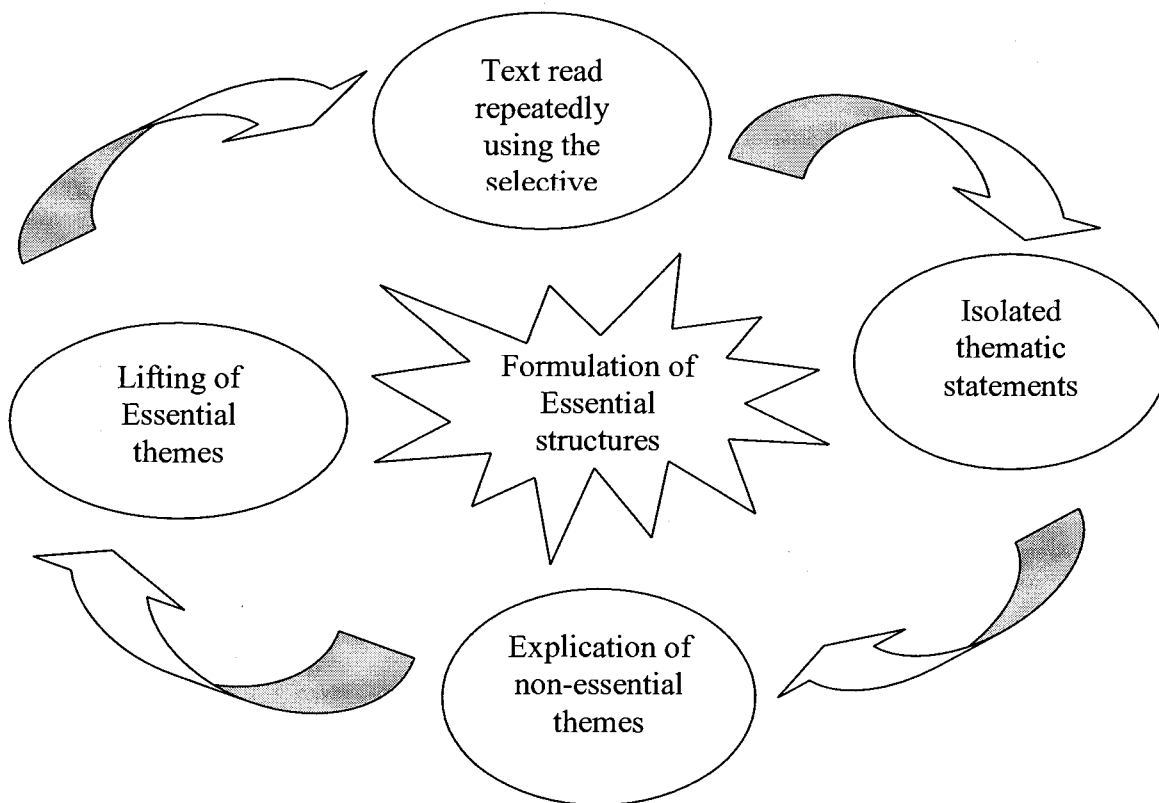
*The Harvesting of Interpretation and Understanding (Data Analysis)*

Data were analyzed using van Manen's (2003, p. 79) method of hermeneutical analysis. The analysis of data was also continuously informed by my personal experiences, reading of the literature, and discussions with similarly experienced colleagues. Analysis triangulation was achieved by using more than one strategy to analyze the same data set for the purpose of validation (Kimchi, Polivka, & Stevensen, 1991).

The first data analysis method involved a thematic analysis of the conversational interviews and reflective journals. This was followed by a process of thematic reflection (van Manen, 2002c) conducted collaboratively with co-researchers as a second-level strategy to achieve deeper insights into and understandings of the first-level thematic analysis.

*Level 1: Thematic Analysis*

The first level of interpretation involved a phenomenological thematic analysis of the face-to-face conversational interviews and reflective journals. While there is no one single standardized method identified for phenomenological research, van Manen (2003) provides a methodological structure that promotes freedom and initiative in the researcher's involvement with the dynamic process of phenomenological inquiry. The thematic analysis comprised four steps, which are illustrated in Figure 3 and further explained below.



*Figure 3.* Thematic analysis procedure.

Van Manen (2003, p. 77) states that “the purpose of phenomenological reflection is to try to grasp the essential meaning of something” by bringing into nearness that which tends to be obscure or evades the intelligibility of our everyday lives. As van Manen (2003) writes:

Making something of a text or of a lived experience by interpreting its meaning is more accurately a process of insightful invention, discovery or disclosure—grasping and formulating a thematic understanding is not a rule-bound process but a free act of “seeing” meaning. (p. 79)

First, the transcribed interviews were reviewed as a whole for an overall understanding of the text. They were read repeatedly to identify patterns of regularities, and recurring ideas and experiences that linked participants' perspectives.

Next, thematic statements or meaning units that seemed particularly revealing about the phenomenon under investigation were isolated and inserted into Column 1 of the data analysis worksheet (see Table 3.4 and Appendix E). The thematic statements could be one or several statements. This procedure was repeated for each of the five standard open-ended interview questions.

Table 3.4

*Column 1 – Data Analysis Worksheet*

Thematic statements or meaning units that seem particularly essential or revealing about the phenomenon or experience being described
e.g., It's people collaborating to work together
e.g., There is always someone who is there for you
e.g., Having a voice

Third, thematic statements were reflected on and clustered into incidental themes, which were recorded in Column 2 of the data analysis worksheet (see Table 3.5). According to van Manen (2003, p. 78), a theme is not a "frequency count or coding of selected terms in transcripts of texts." Rather, a theme is the "experience of meaning" and "at best a simplification" of the summary of the significant factor (p. 87). It is also not an "object one encounters at certain points or moments in a text," but is a way of "capturing" the phenomenon one is trying to understand (p. 87). In describing how themes come to "be," van Manen (2003) explains the "needfulness or desire to make

sense,” “the sense we are able to make of something,” “the openness to do something,” and, finally, “the process of insightful invention, discovery and disclosure” (p. 88). It is within this context that van Manen (2003, p. 90) states, that themes “are not objects or generalizations; metaphorically speaking they are more like knots in the webs of our experiences, around which certain lived experiences are spun and thus lived through as meaningful wholes.” In the holistic approach, the researcher attends to the task as a whole.

Table 3.5

*Column 2 – Data Analysis Worksheet*

Column 2 Incidental Themes
e.g., Commitment e.g., Forgiveness

Fourth, the phenomenological method “free imaginative variation” was used to differentiate between essential themes and incidental themes (see Table 3.6). Van Manen (2003, p. 107) describes this theme sorting process as follows:

In determining the universal or essential quality of a theme our concern is to discover aspects or qualities that make a phenomenon what it is and without which the phenomenon could not be what it is...In the process of apprehending essential themes or essential relationships one asks the question: Is this phenomenon still the same if we imaginatively change or delete this theme from the phenomenon? (p. 107)

Variant or essential themes, although not shared by all, are those that may assist in providing a more complete understanding of the phenomenon (van Manen, 2003). It is also worth noting that the essential themes identified are relative to the researcher's context of engagement with the text, and are therefore accepted as just one among many ways of understanding these experiences.

To be sensitive to the phenomenon in question, a descriptive, everyday language was maintained in the transformations (see Chapter 4). The thematic analysis was completed when no more new themes emerged.

Table 3.6

*Column 3 – Data Analysis Worksheet*

Column 3 Essential Themes
e.g., Relationships
e.g., Acts of Humanity

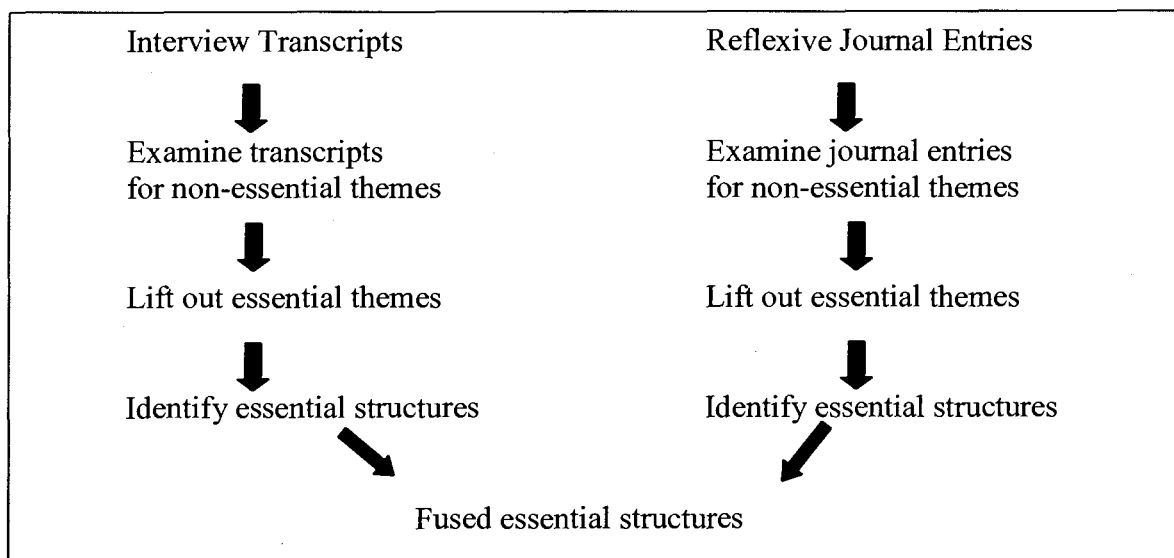
Finally, commonalities in essential themes between the various stakeholders were identified, uncovering the essences of the experience of sense of community (see Table 3.7). The inference in phenomenology is that there is an essence(s) to shared experiences (Patton, 1990). Essences generally refer to the intrinsic nature or quality of something. It is that element which makes something different from something else—it is the basic unit of common understanding of any phenomenon (Streubert & Carpenter, 1995). As further defined by Amadeo Giorgi (1997, p. 242), it is “the most invariant meaning for a context. It is the articulation, based on intuition, of a fundamental meaning which a phenomenon could not present itself as it is.”

Table 3.7

*Column 4 – Data Analysis Worksheet*

Column 4 Essences
e.g., Community Makers e.g., Changing Across Multiple Contexts

The data analysis of the reflective journal was undertaken in the same manner as the conversational interviews (see Figure 4) with the added dimension of the open-ended nature of the reflective journaling.



*Figure 4. Thematic analysis procedure.*

### *Level 2: Thematic Reflection*

The second level of data analysis shifted the focus from empirical inquiry, which sought to describe the range and varieties of pre-reflective lived experience of sense of

community, to reflective inquiry, which interprets the aspects of meaning or meaningfulness that are associated with this phenomenon. As van Manen (2003) notes, the strength of the hermeneutic method is found in its respect for the inquirer's capacity for self-knowing and ability to reflect on his or her knowledge, and in its methodological ability to encourage the inquirer to move past the description of an experience that the "text" first offers.

One of the greatest challenges that I faced in this study was the selection of a second data analysis strategy that was congruent with the interpretive principle of van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenological method. Van Manen (1997) points out that it is necessary to discover an approach that helps to guide inquiry and facilitates interpretation. In conducting the interpretive analysis, I adhered to the philosophical underpinnings of hermeneutic phenomenology with particular reference to three Gadamerian concepts, namely pre-understanding, prejudices, and fusion of horizons.

#### *Pre-understanding: The Condition of Self-Awareness*

As mentioned earlier, hermeneutic phenomenology is not the search for one best interpretation but rather the co-emergence of perspectives that result from a dynamic merging of boundaries or the "fusion of the horizons" by researcher and participants (Gadamer, 1975/2004). Interpretation emanates from a reflexive immersion in the data and by a close attention to biases or pre-understandings of both researcher and research participants (co-researchers).

According to Gadamer (1975/2004), pre-understandings become apparent through confrontation with different beliefs, such as the opinions of other researchers, colleagues,

or traditional texts. For example, he states that “to reach an understanding in a dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one’s own point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain who we were” (p. 371). In this study, I identified and reflected upon my pre-understandings on the topic of investigation in several ways.

The first step I undertook in an effort to better understand the structures of my pre-understandings was to examine my field of vision or the “horizon” in which I conduct my thinking. As part of my post-graduate program of studies, I undertook an exploration of the literature (see Chapter 2) on community and wrote two candidacy papers on the subject from a critical perspective. This enabled me to develop a comprehensive (yet evolving) understanding of the concept of community and to address my presuppositions in order to remain open throughout the whole process of inquiry. From this work, I formulated the questions that guided the phenomenological inquiry.

Next, I used an open-ended conversational focus group to gather information from the 4 co-researcher stakeholder focus groups on the thematic analysis of the combined conversational interview and reflective journal. Each co-researcher was presented with an electronic copy of the thematic analysis before engaging in the focus group. It included the following statement: This is what I understand you were meaning; this is what I learned from you—do you agree?

During the focus groups, I used a questioning approach that maintained a focus on their experiences, stakeholder group essential themes, and essential structures that ran across all four stakeholder groups. I prompted each co-researcher to reflect on his or her own experience of sense of community in relation to findings reported in the thematic

analysis. Van Manen (2003, p. 99) refers to this process as seeking to answer the question, “Is this what the experience is really like?” This collective approach allowed for a dialogue with and about the text that enabled the “hermeneutic circle” to operate. It also served to decrease bias and short-sightedness in the analysis of the text.

I made a conscious attempt to maintain a capacity for openness (for being surprised) throughout the research process by seeking the “otherness” of the phenomenon that was not already existing in my pre-understandings. This was achieved through dialogue with an open attitude (Gadamer, 1975/2004). He argues that we are transformed by having the conversation and that it is in the conversation that allows the phenomenon to present itself to the researcher as it really is (Dalhberg & Drew, 1997).

As each focus group unfolded, I was anxious that my concept of community might differ from those of the 4 co-researcher stakeholder groups. I was guided in my interactions by what the co-researchers had to say; each time the co-researchers mentioned some aspect of sense of community that I had not previously considered, I was encouraged, because I understood that my horizon of understanding was expanding, and I was experiencing a deeper understanding of this phenomenon.

### *Prejudice: The Art of Self-Knowledge and Understanding*

Embedded in the idea of understanding is the importance of being aware of one’s own prejudices, so that the text can present itself in all its otherness (Pascoe, 1996). For example, one prejudice that I carried into my study was a belief that not all 4 co-researcher stakeholder groups would experience community in the same manner. This prejudice, however, was challenged during the data analysis, as my horizon of

understanding intersected with the text (i.e., the conversational interview and reflective journal, and conversational focus group). Renewed understanding emerged from the fusion of these two horizons. This process involved continual questioning, reflection, and validation within the ongoing conversation between me and the texts. As I attentively listened to the text, I realized that although there were differences in how the 4 stakeholder groups participated in building community and in their perspectives about the capacity of the community to support its members, they all shared a common meaning of community.

It is paramount within a hermeneutic phenomenological study to bring forth assumptions for review. As van Manen explains, “It is better to make explicit our understandings, beliefs, biases, assumptions, presuppositions, and theories” (p. 47). In addition, Gadamer (1975/2004) points out that the hermeneutic method requires that the researcher present his or her own prejudices to readers, so that they can determine for themselves whether there is any new understanding-value to the research findings. Gadamer (1975/2004) suggests that being situated in one’s pre-understandings with attention to one’s own tradition makes “freedom of knowledge possible” (p. 354). He further states:

Knowing and recognizing [one’s tradition] constitutes the highest type of hermeneutical experience. It too has a real analogue in the I’s experience of the Thou. In human relations the important thing is, as we have seen, to experience the Thou truly as a Thou—i.e., not to overlook his claim but to let him really say something to us. Here is where openness belongs. Without such openness to one

another there is no genuine human bond. Belonging together always also means being able to listen to one another. (p. 355)

Therefore, before collecting the initial conversational interview and reflective journal data, I formulated a list of my prejudices. As shown in Table 3.8, this list of prejudices reflected my recent review of the literature on community which explored my pre-understandings within the context of my historical, cultural, personal, and professional background. The list served as an initial horizon of understanding.

Table 3.8

*The Researcher's Formulation of Initial Horizon of Understanding*

Historicity of Understanding	Prejudice
Nature of Community	Capacity to support and enhance the resilience of children and families A context of relationships Subjectively and objectively understood Something in common Something that we are aiming for
Nature of Bureaucracy	Reactivity, fragmentation, competition, knowing, rule-based
Nature of Globalization	Reduction in social expenditures Deepened patterns of inequality Loss of control over social policy agenda by Nation states
Welfare State	Distributive paradigm Constructed upon an individualized view and deficit orientation of need
Professional Stance	Current "professional" model missing the mark The Canadian child welfare system is harmful to children, families, communities and society at large
Personal Stance	Wellness vs welfare Learning vs knowing Social constructivist We are socially constituted

I also embraced Gadamer's idea that understanding calls for discriminating among prejudices, not eliminating them. Thus, during the data collection and analysis phases of my research, I attempted to maintain openness by staying as close to the co-researchers' experiences of sense of community as possible. The awareness of my horizon of understanding enabled me to generate open questions (Palmer, 1969) that "sought insight" into rather than confirmation of my beliefs. Questioning is inherent in hermeneutic inquiry, and the "essence of the question is to open up possibilities and keep them open" (Gadamer, 1975/2004, p. 298). Keeping the question open and alive throughout the research is crucial to the richness and sustenance of the interpretation. "Questions always bring out the undetermined possibilities of a thing" (Gadamer 1975/2004, p. 368). The dialectic process of question and answer is not to validate answers I may want to verify, or to have suspicions confirmed; rather the questioning "involves a laying open and holding open of possibilities" (Linge, 1976, p. xxi). It is essential, then, to keep open the orienting question about the meaning of sense of community, for it is the dialectical structure, the process of "give and take" that is important for meaningful conversation (p. 54).

A final strategy that was used to address the issue of prejudice involved keeping a reflective diary. According to Koch (1996), getting into the hermeneutic circle properly relies on maintaining a reflective diary. A review of my diary notes helped to reveal how my horizon was operating during and shortly after the conversational interview and focus group and prompted reflection on the horizon of the text and the prejudices that I brought, and continued to bring, to the analysis. My own mode of thought was not eliminated or bracketed. Data analysis was continuously informed by my personal and professional

experiences. This enabled me to bring my *pre-understandings* and prejudices into the research process, which is in keeping with the Gadamer's phenomenological method.

### *Fusion of Horizons: Co-creating New Understandings*

According to Gadamer (1975/2004), understanding occurs when there is a conscious act of fusing two or more horizons. The second level of data analysis therefore involved co-construction of the data with the co-researchers. The co-researchers and I worked together in a hermeneutic circle of understanding to achieve understanding through a fusion of horizons, "which is a dialectic between the pre-understandings of the research process, the interpretive framework and the sources of information" (Lavery, 2003). The result of this is not necessarily reaching agreement; rather, the meaning is created through the "coming together of different vantage points" (Koch, 1996, p. 177).

These three principles were adopted in this study as guiding principles and not as analytical steps.

### Ethical Considerations

Phenomenological research often involves the researcher exploring very personal experiences of other people, and in so doing the researcher must ensure that the rights of their human participants are not violated (LoBiondo-Wood & Haber, 1994). The proposal for this study was submitted to and approved by the University of Victoria's Human Research Ethics Committee. All co-researchers were provided with an information letter (see Appendix E) that outlined the process and purpose of the study and warned of potential risks. Co-researchers were assured of the voluntary nature of their participation

and that complete confidentiality and anonymity could not be guaranteed because of potential voice recognition in the teleconference focus groups. Co-researchers were also presented with a consent form that was signed prior to their participation in the face-to-face interview (see Appendix E). The consent form indicated that consent could be withdrawn at any time without penalty or need for explanation.

### Methodological Integrity

Regardless of the research paradigm, it is now commonly accepted that the quality of scientific research done within a paradigm has to be judged by its own paradigm's terms (Healy & Perry, 2000). The criteria of one research paradigm cannot usefully be applied to another research paradigm (Kuhn, 1970; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Winter, 2000). For example, Lorraine Watson and Francine Girard (2004, p. 875) argue that the quantitative paradigm notion of methodological rigour "is incongruent with the tenets of qualitative hermeneutic work." Van Manen (2003, p. 18) states that rigorous conduct should not only encourage the researcher to justify the relationship between the methodology and study design, but also encourage the end point of the research, the text, to "stand up for the uniqueness and significance of the notion to which it has dedicated itself."

For the purpose of this study I chose to use Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four criteria (credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability) for trustworthiness in qualitative studies within a critical or constructivist paradigm.

### *Credibility*

The notion of credibility in qualitative research, the counterpart of internal validity, depends less on sample size than on the richness of the information gathered and on the analytical abilities of the researcher (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998a, 1998b; Patton, 1990; Schwandt, 2001). It refers to the truth, value, or believability of findings as “known, experienced, or deeply felt by the people being studied” (Leininger, 1994, p. 105). It reflects the efforts made to address the issue of “fit” between respondents’ views and the researcher’s representation of them (Ray, 1994; Sandelowski, 1995; van Manen, 2003).

Credibility was enhanced in this study by engaging participants as co-researchers in the interpretive meaning-making process (Hull, 1997; Merriam, 2000; Seale, 2002). However, it is important to point out that this is different from the typical qualitative strategy of returning findings to the participants for validation (i.e., member check), in which the goal is to copy or reproduce the original meaning of the subjects’ responses. Rather, hermeneutics acknowledges that all things can be understood differently. In the case of this study, both researcher and co-researchers build on their pre-understandings as each reflects and interprets what is happening within and across the narrative.

Other procedures used to increase the level of credibility in the current study included prolonged engagement, persistent observation, broad representation, and triangulation (Guba, & Lincoln, 1994). Prolonged engagement gave me an opportunity to establish a rapport with the co-researchers, and provided the co-researchers sufficient time to achieve a learning culture and build trust. In this study, prolonged engagement was undertaken over a 3-month period, in three partially overlapping phases in which the

co-researchers participated in a face-to-face conversational interview, a 4-week period of reflective journaling, and a conversational focus group. Persistent observation allowed the researcher to identify characteristics and elements in the inquiry that were most relevant to the issue under inquiry. I engaged in persistent observation within the structure of conducting in-depth conversational face-to-face and group interviews and in the thematic analysis of the co-researchers' responses. Broad representation was achieved with the inclusion of 4 stakeholder groups of co-researchers.

Finally, triangulation (Creswell, 2002) was achieved by using a maximum variation sampling strategy. This included the use of different data collection strategies (e.g., conversational interviews, reflective journals, and conversational focus groups (Denzin, 1989; Morgan, 1998; Patton, 1990). An analysis triangulation (Kimchi et al., 1991; Patton, 1990) was also achieved by using more than one strategy to analyze the same data set for the purpose of validation (i.e., pre-reflective conversation and reflective journal thematic analysis followed by reflective focus group of thematic analysis).

### *Transferability*

Transferability (comparable with external validity) refers to the degree to which particular findings from an interpretive study “can be transferred to another similar context or situation and still preserve the particularized meanings, interpretations, and inferences” (Leininger, 1994, p. 106). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 124), transferability is “a direct function of the similarity between two contexts, what we shall call ‘fittingness.’ Fittingness is defined as the degree of congruence between sending and receiving contexts.”

In an attempt to increase transferability in this study, “thick descriptions” were provided so the reader could assess the potential transferability and appropriateness of the presented findings. This criterion was also achieved when the 4 co-researcher stakeholder focus groups, during which the results of the thematic analysis of the conversational interviews and reflective journals were presented, indicated that they echoed their experience of sense of community. It is important to point out that no claim for generalizability is made for this work. However, I suggest there could be a degree of “fit” between this work and other studies undertaken with similar purposive samples and in similar settings. While acknowledging the possibility of fittingness, the intention of this research is not generalizability, but to inform social policy development and to provide descriptive information about a subject in which little investigation has taken place.

### *Dependability*

Dependability (comparable with reliability) refers to the extent to which people not involved in the study can track the research process and determine which raw data were used to reach corresponding conclusions (Erlandson, et al., 1993; Schwandt, 2000). It also addresses the extent to which the research process is consistent across researchers (Benner, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Dependability can be ensured by providing a written audit trail or decision trail (Koch, 1994).

I kept detailed records of the data collection process and analysis procedures, allowing interested people to reference exact quotes and corresponding interpretations. In addition, I kept extensive notes during the analysis process. These notes consisted of my responses to the data, preliminary ideas of what the data might represent, and

documentation of discussions about the data among the co-researchers. They were also used to enhance dependability of the findings by helping to avoid bias, by illuminating misunderstandings in the analysis process, and by documenting the linkages of interpretations to the text. Finally, although returning to the participants for validation is recommended, it was not possible because of constraints of distance and time.

### *Confirmability*

Confirmability of an inquiry is defined as “the degree to which its findings are the product of the focus of its inquiry and not of the biases of the researcher” (Erlandson, et al., 1993, p. 34). According to Guba and Lincoln (1989, p. 243), confirmability is the degree to which “...data, interpretations, and outcomes of inquiries are rooted in contexts and persons apart from the [researcher] and are not simply figments of the imagination.”

A range of strategies were used to enhance the confirmability of the study. First, van Manen’s (2003) hermeneutic phenomenology was an appropriate theoretical framework to seek insights into the phenomenon of sense of community. Second, the data collection and analysis research methods were congruent with the philosophical foundations of this methodology. Third, all major decisions concerning research methods were made with reference to the methodological literature. Also the research findings were reported within the context of potential researcher biases or pre-understandings (e.g., assumptions, world views, biases, theoretical orientations, values, and epistemological stances).

### *Limitations of the Study*

Some of the limitations of this hermeneutic phenomenological study are implicit in the method and can be identified without difficulty, while others are less obvious and therefore not so easily identified.

In this study, a small non-representative sample of 4 stakeholder groups, namely recipients of services or have histories as volunteer workers in the community, human service practitioners employed in not-for-profit community-based resources, senior administrators employed in bureaucratic and non-bureaucratic organizations, and provincially delegated child protection workers, were selected through having prior contact with me. While the purpose of the maximum variation sample strategy was to give voice to various stakeholder groups in an attempt to understand their experiences of sense of community, the groups were small and the participants may have been uncharacteristic of the stakeholder group they represented. Further, although I conducted personal interviews followed by reflective journaling and focus groups, I found it frustrating not to have more interaction with the participants to go into more depth. This may have resulted in important themes and essences not emerging or relationships between themes and essences remaining unclear. Finally, it is a basic recognition of phenomenological research that lived experiences differ for individuals according to time and context. However, it was anticipated that the study would foster understanding of the phenomenon of *sense of community*, sufficient to form a basis for further research, as well as to contribute to a body of theoretical knowledge that could provoke new insights into community governance and services. Also, while hermeneutic studies are not generalizable, the collection of thick data is theoretically useful in order to increase

comparison of the study context to other contexts (Caelli & Mott, 1997). This study makes no claim that it is inevitable.

A further limitation of this study concerned how my experiences over the past two decades of involvement, both direct and indirect, in the field of child welfare might influence this research. Despite the fact that hermeneutic interpretation emphasizes the significance of pre-understanding and permits the researcher to be an active participant in the study, all scholars occupy a particular social location, and theories derived from that location might not be inclusive of voices from the margins, where culture or ethnicity are defining dimensions of the experience. Arbitrary formulations of pre-understanding or lack of reflexivity during the research process could have led to potential bias in the findings. To limit the reinforcement of prevailing and widely accepted patterns of domination (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), I have articulated my pre-understandings through a self-reflexive process that located me as a researcher in the discourse. This process of reflexivity necessitated the triangulation of intellectual ideas with personal experience and research findings to enable a rigorously reflexive interpretation of data. Nevertheless, I was ever mindful that the analysis of the hermeneutic text was limited by my own pre-understandings as well as my limited skills as a novice phenomenologist researcher (van Manen, 2003).

Another potential limitation involved the use of teleconference focus groups. While there are some obvious benefits of teleconference or online focus groups such as cost efficiencies in geographically dispersed population, quality of life issues in that there is no need for participants to leave their home or office, and (in an asynchronous format) participants can respond when it is convenient. These freedoms may persuade some

individuals to participate who normally would not, especially due to work-related scheduling problems (be they stay-at-home parents or oil platform workers). Participants who might feel uncomfortable revealing themselves for political, religious, or social reasons might be more inclined to participate in a non-face-to-face environment where their anonymity can be protected. Finally, from a critical perspective, the online or telecommunication environment can offer social equalization as individual socio-economic status, ethnicity, nationality and gender (all potential issues of contention in a face-to-face setting) may be unknown to other participants and can therefore serve as an egalitarian method of data collection. However, there are several potential disadvantages to teleconference focus groups that must be noted. First, the role/skill of the moderator in managing the discussion is crucial to the efficient operation of the group. I have considerable experience facilitating conference call discussions but found it taxing in this situation to pay close attention to the voices at the other end. I wonder the extent to which I was able to ensure that everyone was actively participating in the discussion while listening deeply to the conversations. Second, several limitations exist in the area of group dynamics. Lack of nonverbal cues and the absence of vocal cues (e.g., inflection and intonation) could have had a negative effect, as offense may be taken more easily and meanings misconstrued.

Finally, the overall approach and analysis of the data created additional limitations to generalization of any findings. These were, but were not limited to, lack of differentiation between male and female co-researchers in the study, no accounting for age, culture, and socio-economic status, and multiple roles of participants representing each of the four selected stakeholder groups.

This chapter demonstrated that the methods used to collect and interpret data in this study were congruent with the philosophical underpinnings of hermeneutic phenomenology. The methodological orientation of hermeneutic phenomenology permitted me to gather and interpret data in a manner that suited both the research question and my critical theoretical stance and constructivist worldview.

CHAPTER 4: PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS – TURNING TO THE NATURE  
OF LIVED EXPERIENCES

*...hermeneutics is a lesson in humility...it has wrestled with the angels of darkness and has not gotten the better of them. It understands the power of the flux to wash away the best-laid schemes of metaphysics. It takes the constructs of metaphysics to be temporary cloud formations which, from a distance, create the appearance of shape and substance but which pass through our fingers upon contact...and no matter how wantonly they are skewed across the skies there are always hermeneuts who claim to detect a shape...a bear here, a man with a long nose there. There are always those who claim they can read the clouds and find a pattern and a meaning.*

*Now, it is not the function of...hermeneutics to put an end to those games, like a cold-blooded, demythologizing scientist who insists that the clouds are but random collections of particles of water...its function is to keep the games in play, to awaken us to the play, to keep us on the alert that we draw forms in the sand, we read clouds in the sky, but we do not capture deep essences...if there is anything that we learn in...hermeneutics it is that we never get the better of the flux. (Caputo, 1987, p. 258)*

In this study, in order to grasp the basic meanings of sense of community as it was experienced by the co-researchers, data was analyzed at two levels. In the first level of analysis, emphasis was placed on a critical examination of the everyday lived experience of *sense of community* for each co-researcher through interviews and journals. This was accomplished by completing a thematic analysis (van Manen, 2003) of these conversational interviews and reflective journals. The second level of analysis involved a process of thematic reflection (van Manen, 2002) conducted collaboratively with co-researchers in the form of co-researcher stakeholder focus groups in order to achieve deeper insights into and understandings of the first-level thematic analysis. Selected reflections on five questions about the themes are reported, and then analyzed and presented to capture the deeper richness and meaning of what co-researchers are saying

about the essence of community. Finally, the co-researchers perceptions of the potential implications for community governance and community-based practice in the field of child welfare are presented.

#### Level 1: Thematic Analysis of Conversational Interviews and Reflective Journals

In determining the non-essential themes, lived-experience descriptions in the form of thematic phrases were lifted from the transcribed text of the conversational interviews and personal journal entries and inserted into column 1 of the data analysis worksheet (see Appendix E). Essential themes were then separated from the non-essential themes. A concerted effort was made during this stage to reflect critically on the choices made by repeatedly holding the identified theme against the overall context of the conversation and asking, does this interpretation fit the context not only of this particular section of the text but also of the text as a whole? (van Manen, 2003) Finally, commonalities in essential themes among the various stakeholder groups and across the five guiding interview questions were identified, uncovering the “essences” or essential structures of the lived experience of the co-researchers who have lived the experience of sense of community.

#### *Findings*

The findings are presented for each of the co-researcher stakeholder groups within the context of the inquiry of the five interview questions. Extracts from the transcribed text and journals have been selected to illustrate each essential theme and essential structure, including any differences of perspective or nuances within them. Each

transcription extract and journal entry is referenced with a code number representing the various co-researchers who participated in the study.

Many of the conversational interview questions asked of co-researchers had built-in redundancies. These redundancies were designed to obtain answers within the context of the specific questions being asked. For example, the first three questions respectively explored the nature and meaning of community, how co-researchers experience this sense of community in their lives, and how they build and/or participate in community. These three questions are inter-related and many of the answers provided were similar. In the context of the thematic analysis, the same themes appeared within each section or question. The fourth question explored absence of community and the fifth explored aspects of community that act against developing a sense of community. The reflective journals were non-directive, in the sense that the open-ended journaling instructions (see Appendix D) provided a range of ways for co-researchers to express their experience of sense of community. Findings of the conversation interviews are presented first, followed by the findings from the reflective journals.

#### *Aim #1: Meaning of Sense of Community*

Twenty-two essential themes (see Table 4.1) were revealed by the data generated by the first question: What is sense of community to you? For the purpose of illustration, the themes have been separated. However, each theme is an aspect of the experience that is linked with and dependent on the other themes to reflect the experience as a whole. They are nonsequential and dynamic and contain movement and energy (Benner, 1994; Sandelowski, 1998; van Manen, 2003).

Table 4.1

*Essential Themes: Meaning of Sense of Community*

Stakeholder Groups	Essential Theme	Thematic Statements/Meaning Units
Community	Sharing of Power	People collaborating; helping each other; people coming together to work as one, sharing resources; equal power between people and cultural groups
	Showing Up and Taking Action	Always someone who is there for you; I can depend on them; being helpful is a test of my belonging to that community
	Being Accepted	Having a voice; being heard; sharing of points of view; people that have respect for each other; fitting-in; feeling like I belong
	Relationships	Building relationships; making connections; people are the fundamental component of community; feeling of belonging
	Personal Involvement	You have to be involved; I think that we create community by are actions; brining people together; taking part in activities
	Consciousness	Knowing the people that live around me; it's how we interact in the world; our connection to the land; I'm always thinking about my community
	Acts of Humanity	Caring and compassion; genuine concern for the well-being of others
Not-For-Profit	Inclusive	Each and everyone of us that live in this community; feeling of connectedness, belonging
	Mutuality	Share sense of purpose; I care for others and in return I am cared for; collectively share in all resources
	Consciousness	I think it has to do with personal philosophy about why people choose to connect or not; paying attention to it
	Shared Values	About the make up of who lives there...and what common values they share; common values; similar beliefs
	Communication	About assisting each other and keeping each other informed; listening to each other

	Co-operation	Everyone working together; people helping each other
	Personal Responsibility	Personal responsibility; ownership of issues, concerns
Child Protection Worker	Personal Relationships	Personal attachments, starts internally; it's the makeup of those who live in it; about relationships
	Acts of Humanity	Caring about the well being of others; kindness; saying hello in the morning; helping out when needed
	Mutuality/Shared Values	Working towards the common good; people working together
	Commonality	Common interest; common values; share something in common; people listening to one another; respect
Senior Administrator	Connections	Community is the people within a community; circle of influence your part of; not bound by geography
	Mutuality	Common interest; you contribute and get something back
	Acts of Humanity	Caring for each other; being helpful
	Intellectualization	Are the people one relates with; a group of individuals; I look at it as a micro-macro thing; I really don't understand it, when you start to isolate the little bits and pieces you lose the connectivity around those pieces

Moving toward a phenomenological explication of the data, 4 essences of sense of community (see Table 4.2) were identified: community as the practice of care, community is an interpersonal process, community-makers, and sense of oneness. Table 4.2 provides a brief description of each essence, supported by examples of how each manifested itself in the lived experience of the co-researcher stakeholder groups.

Table 4.2

*Essences of Sense of Community*

Essences	Essential Themes
Community as the Practice of Care	Caring for each other; feeling safe; I care for others and in return I am cared for; collectively share in all resources; trying to find the best possible way to met the needs of the people; always someone who is there for you; I can depend on them; being helpful is a test of my belonging to that community; sharing resources; caring and compassion; genuine concern for the well-being of others; attachment
Community is an Interpersonal Process	Having a voice; being heard; sharing of points of view; people that have respect for each other; people collaborating; helping each other; sharing; people coming together to work as one; working towards the common good; people working together; assisting each other and keeping each other informed; genuine concern for the well-being of others; ...in return I am cared for; keeping each other informed
Community-Makers	Building relationships; making connections; it's not that simple, I think it has to do with personal philosophy about why people choose to connect or not; responsibility and ownership of issues, concerns; personal attachments, starts internally; it's the makeup of those who live in it; about relationships; I can depend on them; paying attention to it; working together; personal responsibility
Sense of Oneness	People are the fundamental component of community; feeling of belonging; you have to be involved; I think that we create community by are actions; bringing people together; knowing the people that live around me; it's how we interact in the world; our connection to the land; I'm always thinking about my community; feeling of connectedness, belonging; share sense of purpose; common values; sharing resources; equal power between people and cultural groups; being accepted; feeling of connected; common values; similar beliefs

*Community as the practice of care.*

Community as the Practice of Care was common to all co-researcher stakeholder groups. It was an essence underlying their experience that was expressed through the use of descriptions such as “genuine concern for the well-being of others” (community stakeholder group), “people helping each other” (not-for-profit stakeholder group), “caring about the well-being of others” (child protection worker stakeholder group), and “caring for each other” (senior administrator stakeholder group). There was a general consensus among the co-researchers that caring about another person was central to experiencing sense of community. This view was illustrated by one co-researcher who described how residents had come together without any prompting to help an elderly person move into her home.

*It was quite recently. A person was moving in next door. She was an elderly person and it didn't seem like she had a lot of help. It was interesting seeing myself and the neighbours come together to help her with this move. I mean a group of strangers to her, really. (Co-researcher #3)*

Another co-researcher spoke about growing up in a small village where everyone looked after each other.

*...and community, to me, is about people having common interests, caring and watching out for each other.... I'm saying all this because this is the kind of community I grew up in as a child....I grew up in Fullum in London, England and it's a working class community almost on the banks of the River Thames. It was just after the war. There were still bomb craters and bombed out buildings, a very working-class community. Most of the dads worked in factories, the electricity*

*power station, as it was called. We all played out in the streets, neighbours and relatives that lived in the street all watched over us. It was a real sense of belonging. There was a sense of belonging, there was a sense of feeling safe, that people were willing to really care for you. And we were poor but there was a richness of life which was almost like a sense of pulling together that people had during the war. But more so than that, the sense of community was, that the government cared about us. (Co-researcher #20)*

*Community is an interpersonal process.*

Community understood as an interpersonal process rather than an end product emerged as a central concept underlying the act of caring. Co-researchers spoke about the “interpersonal processes” of communication, dialogue, and collaboration as characteristically associated with a concern for care, responsiveness and taking responsibility in the maintenance of interpersonal relationships and the development of sense of community. One of the co-researchers tells a story about having a cup of coffee with the mayor of the community. The story articulates a view that sees the need for communication, dialogue, and collaboration as pervasive and ongoing in all our relationships, not only between the residents of a particular community, but between community residents and professionals, government officials and elected officials.

*I've sat down and had an hour coffee with the mayor about building swings over here. But he got my input. It's important on a personal level – I'm a single parent and having input into the community gives me strength because I'm allowed to speak. (Co-researcher #10)*

*I believe that community is based in relationships and I believe that in a relationship you have to listen and on the other side of the coin, you have to be heard, it's a two way street. And because I believe relationships aren't one-sided, if you're not being heard then I don't think you can feel like you're a part of the community. Not truly, because even the people that are active in their community need to be heard. They're doers that do lots for the community but they need to be heard, because if they're not heard, then they're just doers and are not necessarily involved. To be involved you need to contribute and to receive. It's circular. It needs to happen together. (Co-researcher #6)*

One co-researcher explained how keeping each other informed is mutually empowering.

*...community is about assisting each other and about keeping each other informed. You know that when you come here and you live in a particular community, wherever it might be, geographical or in your work community, that it's about communication and it's about assisting each other. I think those are probably the key, assisting in support and all those kinds of things... (Co-researcher #2)*

Another important insight that emerged was the co-researchers' need to be heard. Many of the co-researchers stated that a big part of feeling part of a community is not only having a voice but having that voice heard.

*That's a very interesting question because when I think about being in a group of certain people, I think of that whole balance of feeling like you're being heard and that you have an opportunity to express parts of who you are, your values,*

*your beliefs and you can be true to yourself....Sometimes when you're with a group of people you're still not in community. I'm sort of guarded. You know, you say the right things because you think that's expected in those situations, or you share parts of what you believe but when you're with certain people, and maybe this is way deeper than just community, I'm thinking of being real close with people you can generally share how you truly feel about things, and you just talk about things at that level. (Co-researcher #9)*

*Community-makers.*

Co-researchers from the stakeholder groups spoke about the personal sense of connection and sense of belonging that they yearn for, as not being the sole task of governments or community-based human service-oriented organizations. There was a general attitude that if “you want to have community in your life then you have to make it happen” (Co-researcher #32). Other co-researcher comments included the following.

*...community is an internal thing that must be born within and between people through connection and conversation and than carried outward. (Co-researcher #26)*

*The first thing that came into my mind is community is something we create. (Co-researcher #11)*

*I do and it takes a lot of work....From my own personal experience moving into a place that I have no connections I felt that I didn't belong. I had to work hard to*

*build up those connections to feel that I belonged and feel that sense of community. And it takes time. (Co-researcher #21)*

According to many of the co-researchers, creating community involves taking personal responsibility and being personally accountable.

*I understand community to be basically a two-part process: responsibility and ownership. So that's how I view a sense community, it's responsibility and ownership of whatever concerns may be there by families that for the most part are a part of and comprise many of our communities. (Co-researcher #8)*

*For my own community and my own family, I guess I try to demonstrate that as a way of life. I take responsibility and then through ownership have to deal with whatever issues or concerns my community is facing. So personally, at a family level raising four children, trying to demonstrate to them that they are not only part of our family, extended family and larger portion of the nation, but as individuals and members they also have responsibilities to build a healthy community. (Co-researcher #8)*

*Sense of oneness.*

Several co-researchers described the experience of sense of community as a moment of “being one” with others and the land. Descriptive words used were “wholeness,” “healing,” “inclusive,” “connectedness,” “spiritual,” “calm,” and “being one with the land.” Co-researchers spoke about the human condition longing to reach out and deeply touch others, throwing off the pain and loneliness of separation and isolation to experience togetherness with others.

*Community includes everyone. It doesn't leave people out due to their economic status, any other barriers or reasons that they may not be seen by others as productive members of society. I think community should be all-inclusive and trying to work with everyone with respect for challenges they may have. (Co-researcher #22)*

*Although we may share it in different ways, so for example, I love to kayak and I love to hike. So I know mountaintops and I know rivers. So when you ask me about community I have that very strong geographic sense to it because I walked it...In a spiritual way, I mean I just see myself as another spark of light. I'm surrounded by life, I'm surrounded by trees, I am surrounded by birds, and worms and bears, so obviously they're in community with me if you want to stretch a point. (Co-researcher #26)*

*I think of people cooperating together and people working together and having a sense of place together and to me personally also it's very tied to the land, like the landscape. So whether it be, you know, a place where people feel good or people farm or those sorts of things. Like what is the attachment to the land and their place there? (Co-researcher #24)*

*Aim #2: Lived Experience of Sense of Community*

As illustrated in Table 4.3, 17 essential themes emerged from the data generated by the second interview question: "Do you experience sense of community in your life?"

Table 4.3

*Essential Themes: Lived Experience of Sense of Community*

Stakeholder Group	Essential Theme	Thematic Statements/Meaning Units
Community	Diversity	Always made small group of friends; I'm involved in my church community; not only a physical locality; different communities; I belong to vary different communities such as the gay community, church community, political NDP community, school committee...
	Communal	Someone will cut my lawn and I will watch their kids; flexible about time; always there for me because I am a member of the reserve; gathering people together
	Showing Up and Taking Action	We get together and this community is called community networking services; getting involved and taking action
	Relationships	My personal community, my friendships, my relationships is very important to me. If it wasn't for the connections...I don't know where I would be
	Personal Involvement	Because I am so involved in the community; bringing people together; personal involvement with others
Not-For-Profit	Variety	I've deliberately gone out and tried to seek out different types of people; I experience different communities
	Non-Judgmental	You weren't perceived as a geek...everybody was at ease; just being present; down to earth people
	Change	Community is also about being able to be sustainable over time and nothing can sustain itself over time if it's not open to change; not about sameness; different everyday
	Small Steps	Simple ways...; making connections; acknowledge people
	Communication	To actually go over to the person across the street and say hello; including others in conversation
	Cooperation	Accepting one another; think of people as unique; working together; getting along regardless of differences
	Personal Responsibility	I'm congruent; responsibility to confront injustices; if I see someone I will offer assistance

Child Protection Worker	Choice	For fear of being rejected...I've chosen different friends; lots of different types of community; multiple communities; I can choose which community I want to belong to
	Reaching Out	We went out there and we just opened ourselves up, I guess it was about being available; need to be active; taking notice...
	Forging Personal Connections	Go over and give my neighbour things; get to know people; I get lots of clients that call me because I listen
Senior Administrator	Range of Connections	More to offer the various ages than it did then; I have my friends and theater I belong to; join things because you have an interest
	Third Person Account	The best example that comes to mind (gave an example of an Aboriginal community); people have to get involved (did not provide a personal example)

From this analysis, three particular essences (see Table 4.4) of sense of community were identified: changing across multiple contexts, making deliberate choices, and showing up for others.

Table 4.4

*Essences of Sense of Community*

Essences	Essential Themes
Changing Across Multiple Contexts	Always made small group of friends; I'm involved in my church community; not only a physical locality; in my neighbourhood there is no sense of community; more to offer the various ages than it did then; I have my friends and theater I belong to; join things because you have an interest; more potions today; online communities; not tied to the community I was born into; community is also about being able to be sustainable over time and nothing can sustain itself over time it it's not open to change; not about sameness; different everyday
Making Deliberate Choices	I've deliberately gone out and tried to seek out different types of people; I experience different communities; for fear of being rejected...I've chosen different friends; lots of different types of community; multiple communities; You weren't perceived as a geek...everybody was at ease; just being present; down to earth people
Showing Up for Others	Someone will cut my lawn and I will watch their kids; flexible about time; always there for me because I am a member of the reserve; gathering people together; we went out there and we just opened ourselves up, I guess it was about being available; need to be active; we get together and this community is called community networking services; getting involved and taking action; I am so involved in the community; simple ways; making connections; acknowledge people; I'm congruent; responsibility to confront injustices; if I see someone I will offer assistance; go over and give my neighbour things; get to know people; I get lots of clients that call me because I listen

*Changing across multiple contexts.*

For most co-researchers, the concept of community is no longer restricted to geographic co-presence of members. Today, it is more where one mind connects than

where one body resides. For example, many of the co-researchers indicated that experiencing a sense of community is no longer acquired by involvement with one's neighbours. One co-researcher stated:

*In my neighbourhood there is absolutely no sense of community. (Co-researcher #14)*

In a similar comment, another co-researcher commented that neighbourhoods are no longer the centre of community.

*Well, you know, it goes up and down in your life and when you think about your bucket being full and empty in relation to community. My bucket is very low in regards to community right now and part of that is I live in a neighbourhood where I have lived for a very long time, that's 18 years in the same house. I don't know my neighbours. I know their names, I know the basics about them, I could call on them in case of emergency, but I rarely do. They probably feel the same way about me. We speak occasionally outside of our houses, but that to me isn't community. There was a time when I had a lot of friends in this town and that was my community, outside of work. Those people would come to my place and we would visit on a regular basis and I would go to their place and we would meet together in different kinds of ways and that was community. (Co-researcher #2)*

Many of the co-researchers commented about how the forums and means in which people get together today are very different from their earlier childhood experiences. They talked about community no longer being "built in" their lives and having to find new forms of community.

*I think the community in town is more intra-spaced, right. You belong or join things because you have an interest in it and develop relationships with other people that are participating in that activity... (Co-researcher #32)*

*I think that to experience community you have to take ownership and get involved with the things that are going on in your community by being active and seeking out the information. I lived in a larger community, Vancouver, for a while and I used to feel that I never had a sense of connection and I don't know if it was bigger, but when I reflect on that, I didn't really do anything either. I kept myself somewhat isolated, just went to the gym. I moved to a smaller community, and I did feel that people were more open and friendly and those kinds of things. But I took the initiative to go out and get involved in groups. To seek out something so I met people. I think you can have the word community but you need to get involved and to be, to get that feeling of community. Maybe if I went and lived in a bigger community and did those things it would be different. (Co-researcher #7)*

*Making deliberate choices.*

A theme closely related to changing contexts was the idea of choice. Co-researchers observed that people today have more choice in the type and form of community that they choose to engage in.

*...because of fear of being rejected or people not sharing the same values as you have, I don't necessarily announce, hey I'm gay, because the generation that I grew up in had different values. I don't feel really safe with them although the community that I've established now, I've chosen different friends for that*

*particular reason because we shared similar values and it's very safe for me to be who I am. (Co-researcher #31)*

One co-researcher observed that people today have greater choice, that they are no longer defined by the community that they were born into.

*I enjoy the options I have today to create my own personal communities. I left my home town that I found oppressive on many fronts, values, attitudes, violence....I am not defined by where I grew up...I can choose to live and form relationships with who I choose today. (Co-researcher #14)*

*...there are different communities. There are communities of interests, there are communities that are specific to particular sort of operations, or particular organizations, or particular affiliations and that is what makes them communities. (Co-researcher #12)*

*Showing up for others.*

Showing up was mentioned as an important aspect of achieving a sense of community. Co-researchers described showing up as dropping by to see people unannounced, people of all economic and social class associating together without a sense of difference, and reaching out to others. One co-researcher stated:

*... if I was to really pinpoint when I actually felt community, it was in Newfoundland I think. Because in Newfoundland, part of the culture was that we never ever knocked on people's houses, we never phoned when we went door to door. People would always come in and they would always sit in the kitchen. I just think that reflects that people are really connected and care for one another. I*

*think economically in the class piece, we were all the same. And you actually did socialize. You didn't just come to drink, you were maintaining connections and letting each other know that you are always there for them. But you know, I remember in Newfoundland when we had parties in Newfoundland, there was always music, people danced, people sang. Whether you could sing or dance or not, men and women, you know. You weren't perceived as a geek. Guys weren't perceived as geeks if they got up there and did a little two-step or something. It was just everybody shared and everybody was at ease and everybody laughed, you know. (Co-researcher #1)*

Another co-researcher shared his experience living in a different country and culture where people were more open to supporting each other.

*Where I grew up, we grew up in a society where people are much more flexible about time. Somebody could come to your house and say that they were just passing by and visiting and if you were going to the garden you can always postpone it and talk with this person. The time is one thing. The other thing is that there are more family connections than there are here. People have their relatives taking care of children, the aunts, instead of having daycare. There's also the idea of people might think about the problems of their relatives or father's economic situation. Given that I come from Sudan, there are very many poor, not employed. Also, I also like to do unexpected help for those who are not employed. It could even like sharing, I came to you and you have such a nice job and I tell you that I don't even have anything to eat and I need some help. But here it's really hard in North America to expect somebody to help you. (Co-researcher #4)*

One co-researcher shared a personal story of reaching out to a neighbour despite not seeing an opening on the other side to form a relationship.

*A really big thing because I noticed that I've probably lived where I live for about maybe six years and I thought that this particular person was really miserable, sort of kept to himself. It wasn't until I opened myself up to him and made a point of talking with him; he's kind of grumpy but I'm going to persevere, because he's my neighbour and that's important to me. So when I made myself open to him and kept talking to him and being really friendly and sort of kept going over there, he started really warming up to me and so now he's returning that. (Co-researcher #31)*

*Aim #3: Participating in the Building of Sense of Community*

Twelve essential themes (see Table 4.5) emerged from the data generated by the third interview question: Do you participate in building a sense of community for yourself?

Table 4.5

*Essential Themes: Participating in the Building of Sense of Community*

Stakeholder Group	Essential Theme	Thematic Statements/Meaning Units
Community	Getting Involved at a Personal Level	Reaching out; gathering people together for the children's festival; going to be the best I can be in that particular community
	Seeing Self as Interdependent	I think world wide; our kids inherit this; it's being active within your community where you start to get something back
	Being Receptive to Others	Willing to dialogue; communication; accepting others
Not-For-Profit	Path of Hope	Need to see difference as an opportunity to grow; to live together in a peaceful kind of way; take risks; about hope for the future
	Dialogue	It's about communicating; listening; being vulnerable with each other talking about things that are deeper
	Fulfillment of our Most Basic Human Needs	By sharing you're only going to benefit; it originates inside of me; how wonderful that would be to just feel that connection; part of being human; reciprocity kind of thing going on; about connection with the world
Child Protection Worker	Risk Taking	I always go around to different agencies and introduce myself. I opened myself up to him...he's kind of grumpy, but he's my neighbour; in other to design a community there has to be one-on-one interaction with people
	Critical Being	Not turning a blind eye; every chance I get I speak out...; get in there and take care of it before all the disaster hits
	Open-Minded	I've gotten in trouble for doing things outside of my little box; accepting differences; non-judgmental attitude is the key
	Hearing Each Others' Stories	Everyday I am learning new things; can't always have the values line up so need to educate; I'll just sit there and listen; taking time; they may even have different views (co-workers) but once you get to know them on a personal level, then you care about them

Senior Administrator	Social Involvement	Involved in civic politics; member of the social planning council; make my voice heard at political events
	Living with Ambiguity	What puzzles me, is who comes up with these ideas [gov. policy]; how can we put something in place that isn't just throwing money at it; I'd like to see more social workers out there; governments move the agenda along

From this data, three essences of sense of community emerged (see Table 4.6):  
critical reflection, ethic of connection, and relational worldview.

Table 4.6

*Essences of Sense of Community*

Essences	Essential Themes
Critical Reflection	Not turning a blind eye; every chance I get I speak out...; get in there and take care of it before all the disaster hits; I've gotten in trouble for doing things outside of my little box; everyday I am learning new things; can't always have the values line up so need to educate; willing to dialogue; it's about communicating; listening; being vulnerable with each other talking about things that are deeper; I'll just sit there and listen; taking time; they may even have different views (co-workers) but once you get to know them on a personal level, then you care about them; involved in civic politics; member of the social planning council; make my voice heard at political events; what puzzles me, is who comes up with these ideas [government policy]; how can we put something in place that isn't just throwing money at it; I'd like to see more social workers out there, if I had the money
Ethic of Connection	Reaching out; gathering people together for the children's festival; going to be the best I can be in that particular community; taking risks; I always go around to different agencies and introduce myself. I opened myself up to him...he's kind of grumpy, but he's my neighbour; in other to design a community there has to be one-on-one interaction with people; Willing to dialogue; communication; accepting others
Relational Worldview	I think world wide; our kids inherit this; it's being active within your community where you start to get something back; Need to see difference as an opportunity to grow; to live together in a peaceful kind of way; by sharing you're only going to benefit; it originates inside of me; how wonderful that would be to just feel that connection; part of being human; reciprocity kind of thing going on; about connection with the world; validates who I am

*Critical reflection.*

The essence of critical reflection demonstrated an awareness of forms of power present in everyday life and a commitment to work with others to challenge the

legitimacy of such forms of power. Operating outside of the “box” was the most often cited expression by the co-researchers. One co-researcher said:

*Like I said, I've gotten into trouble a few times doing things that are outside of my little box of what I'm supposed to. I'll spend a lot of time on the phone trying to find the right service for somebody. (Co-researcher #6)*

Another co-researcher stated:

*I personally think sometimes you have to get out there and fight for things. I mean seniors ought to be outside the hospital carrying placards saying keep our... (Co-researcher #32)*

Critical worldview also reflected the articulation of one's self-defined standpoint.

For example, consider the following statement made by one of the co-researchers.

*...there are some people who think because we deal with high risk women, that we are sort of the marginalized section of a community that we're not really. I mean we're part of it on one level, but we're not sort of an integral part of what goes in this town. We're just a segment that people have to deal with because we're there, right. So when I think about community, I think about our role and our responsibility as citizens. I mean, do we have a privilege, or on the other hand, do we have an obligation. (Co-researcher #1).*

Other comments of this nature included:

*Again, I don't think you can have the community as a whole in our community here in Prince George, I mean there's lots of different types of community, but if I came to work everyday and did my job and went home and didn't do anything else, no one's going to hold me accountable for not doing anything else. No one's*

*going to say, how come this didn't happen?. And I don't know. That's a really good question. I mean, there are things that I have to do, right, if I want to live. There are financial commitments that I have. I have to have a job. I have to do that sort of stuff to have a job, but I don't have to be involved in my community. I don't have to commit any of my time if I don't want to, right. And it depends on the paradigm, on how you feel about community, what you think community is because some people have an emotional, maybe social commitment to that. (Co-researcher #5)*

*There are multitudes of social structures that call themselves communities when in fact they aren't. The test of the strength of the relationship is what defines community is whether people can come together to help each other. I think part of it is being human and the other part is to give back to the community. (Co-researcher #3)*

*Speaking on general terms, it could be a variety of things. People could have different value systems. Economically, there could be hardship there which might create in which they don't have the time or the resources to form the sense of community. Something negative could have come into the community and destroyed it. Now it needs to be rebuilt. I think there are a lot of different reasons why there could be a lack of sense of community. Or there might be a perception there's a lack of sense of community. Maybe one person is seeing community as a whole when really you should divide it into little pieces, there would be a different structure of community, different views of community. (Co-researcher #11)*

*I think, worldwide because I think that things that affect other places are also our concern. The people that are struggling in other areas are also, we need to be concerned about as well... There's certainly a lot I don't know or understand. I'm willing to dialogue to understand further. But yes, I think in community there are those barriers and if there aren't opportunities or people aren't willing to dialogue or to learn, then yes, there are those barriers. It comes down to dialogue and whether it's a formal type thing or informal. I think in many areas people in this community work fairly well together. But there's people who think black is black and white is white and they can be generous in this area but don't touch this over here. And you see that as well. (Co-researcher #23)*

*Ethic of connection.*

The sense that we are all connected and participate with all things in the universe was a common thread that ran through each stakeholder group. This sense of connection was articulated in different ways. A large number of the co-researchers expressed it as acceptance and tolerance of difference.

*...we need to see difference as an opportunity to grow and change and move forward. It's an evolution and community needs to be a living system. It can't be a closed system. (Co-researcher #13)*

Other comments focused on the need to form connections as a way into community.

*From my own personal experience moving into a place that I have no connections and felt that I didn't belong yet, didn't have any connections to anything, I had to*

*work hard to build up, that I belonged, to build up that sense of community. And it took time. (Co-researcher #11)*

The sense of connection was also thought of as common ground and need to share resources.

*So that, big things that are happening, people realize it's going to affect the community as a whole and I said before, it's a group that shares resources, hopefully, that's in my mind what community means. You understand that there's a certain amount that goes around and it's not a scarcity mentality, it's more that if we give, there's more to give kind of thing. You understand that by sharing you're only going to benefit not only others but yourself, ultimately. (Co-researcher #13)*

Those who spoke about seeking out connections with others did not always know what the outcome was going to be. According to the co-researchers there was an element of risk taking in which personal connections were initiated.

*I first started getting this feeling why is nobody connecting, this is nuts. I went around and talked to all these different service providers and they all looked at me like I was quite insane because I was with government. And I said, we should all be together and talking about stuff. Eventually we did, and now three years later we have the community services network. I love that, because there's my real sense of community. (Co-researcher #13)*

*I think feeling safe and I don't know, I mean I think for me I have to feel pretty good about myself and where I'm at. I think sometimes you make yourself vulnerable when you do open yourself up to that because you know you could*

*easily be rejected or whatever. I guess I have to be feeling okay about myself and think there are risks involved in that but am I willing to take the risks? (Co-researcher #31)*

*Relational worldview.*

The relational worldview is reflected by the majority of the co-researchers. An example of a relational worldview was provided by one co-researcher who noted:

*An example of connection to land would be when I was involved in helping getting a farmer's market going here years ago, and it's huge now. It's one of the biggest farmer's markets because we have land where you can grow things. I wrote a piece on this in the newspaper, what goes on at a community market, is not only are we exchanging goods and money but we're visiting and we have connection to the person that grows our food that goes onto our tables that we feed our kids and there's something very community building and healthy about that. That connects you to people and people are connected to the land and that's huge for me. This is a very important thing that's been out there for awhile about food sources for a number of different reasons but as you speak about community that's a really strong, good connection that people have been able to build. That goes right back to respecting the land. It is a living thing. It's about relations. It goes beyond everything. It's how we interact in the world and if it is respectful, then it's whether it be animals, plants, you know, I mean you have to teach kids how to treat animals and they have to teach kids how to treat plants and you have to*

*teach kids how to be with people. When we have community interacting, we can see all these relations going on. (Co-researcher #23)*

Another co-researcher also spoke eloquently of the earth as a living, self-regulating system with “a community-of-beings” worldview.

*Community is like a living entity so it's operating around me whether I'm connecting to it or not. The Terrace community is living and breathing and doing its day whether xxxxxx is watching TV or actively connecting with the community two dozen times that day. I'm a very friendly guy so I tend to say hi to shop keepers and nod to kids on the street. I see you and recognize you in the coffee shop I'll pause for a moment and we'll have a conversation. (Co-researcher #26)*

#### *Aim #4: Absence of Community*

Ten essential themes (see Table 4.7) emerged from the data generated by the fourth area of inquiry: “Do you ever experience absence of sense of community?”

Table 4.7

*Essential Themes: Absence of Community*

Stakeholder Group	Essential Theme	Thematic Statements/Meaning Units
Community	Indifference	I don't feel comfortable to go in and sit down [speaking about government services], too formal; people don't have time anymore; nobody really seems to care about us
	Isolation	I don't know anyone; lonely being poor
	Professional Boundaries	Our circle of friends is very small; stress and pressure and you just want to be alone
	Lack of Involvement	I need to go to a smaller community where I can participate; not comfortable joining groups
Not-For-Profit	Fear of Rejection/ Discrimination	People aren't educated and don't understand and aren't accepting; I'm a single mom and lots of people look down on me
	Lack of Intimate Connections	That's the part of community that is missing for me; lack of close friendships
	Take no Notice	I don't know how I got to that point; I don't think about it
Child Protection Worker	Powerlessness	In this job...so restricted; frustrated; when you want to advocate for clients its really hard; very little at work; isolate themselves; kind of shut down
	Fear of Persecution	As a lesbian women...need to be cautious; too redneck
Senior Administrator	Take no Notice	I spend no time thinking about it; never really thought of it

Three essences emerged from these data: professional disconnect, a new revelation, and feelings of intolerance of difference (see Table 4.8).

Table 4.8

*Essences of Absence of Community*

Essences	Essential Themes
Professional Disconnect	You don't feel comfortable to go in and sit down, too formal; our circle of friends is very small; stress and pressure and you just want to be alone; In this job...so restricted; frustrated; when you want to advocate for clients its really hard; very little at work; isolate themselves; That's the part of community that is missing for me; lack of close friendships
A New Revelation	I don't know how I got to that point; don't think about it; I spend no time thinking about it; never really thought of it; I need to go to a smaller community where I can participate
Feelings of Intolerance of Difference	People aren't educated and don't understand and aren't accepting; I think part of that, I'm a single mom; as a lesbian women...need to be cautious; lonely being poor

*Professional disconnect.*

A vast majority of the co-researchers mentioned having felt a degree of disconnectedness from their communities. Some talked about having to maintain a distance because of their professional roles in the community. For example:

*...because when you go downtown, a lot of times you see parents of kids you deal with and they want to talk about the school. They want to talk about your kids.*

*When I leave my office, I leave my office. I don't bring that home with me, and my private life, my personal life I want to be really separate. I don't want to be reminded again of all the stuff that goes in my office or in my work so that's kind of basically where it is. My wife is a principal. She shares the same view. (Co-researcher #15)*

In particular, community stakeholders spoke about feeling a rejecting attitude from the professional community. As one co-researcher put it:

*When I lived in Prince George, it wasn't the same aspect of community where you had someone to go and talk to and stuff...there wasn't as much open resources...By open I mean like you don't feel comfortable to go in and sit down, too formal. (Co-researcher #10)*

Others focused on the arms-length relationship professionals are required to maintain with their "clients." Several child protection stakeholders offered similar comments in this regard.

*...with this job we're restricted in what we can do and can't do. Sometimes when I want to step out of the boundaries of a social worker and I don't know, help people a little more, I'm kind of shut down and say no, that's not your job. (Co-researcher #15)*

*...frustrated with the work community...when you want to advocate for clients it's really, really hard. People aren't willing. It's not in their job descriptions, and to me that's what community is all about. It's doing what you can when you can do it. (Co-researcher #6)*

*...Very little at work...I think stress and pressure (of child protection work) and you just want to be alone. And you don't even sometimes want to be out there in your environment where you can be making relationships with other people. (Co-researcher #19)*

*A new revelation.*

The second essence of absence of community that emerged involved a revelation among many of the co-researchers brought about by the conversational interview—of simply not having thought about it. This point is highlighted in the following examples:

*...let me just think about it a second. We assume the community exists just by the mere status quo of the situation. (Co-researcher #3)*

*When you think about the sorts of lives people live and what their interests are, I guess because when I'm always thinking about community, I'm always thinking about trying to improving what's on the bottom as opposed to what's on the top. But in the everyday people's lives, how much they think about others in the community when it doesn't relate to them, I don't think that's a high percentage. (Co-researcher #23)*

*I spend no time thinking about it, I don't consider it which may be indicative of something, but I don't...and yet I would see myself as being involved in it. (Co-researcher #8)*

*Feelings of intolerance of difference.*

A critical essence of the feeling of absence of community was the co-researchers' perception of not being accepted because of community intolerance and prejudicial attitudes. One co-researcher shared her experience of being a single mom:

*I don't sense it. And I think part of that, I'm a single mom and I'm 42 years old. And I think it's because of what I carry as my own label: single, female, 42, one kid. (Co-researcher #13)*

A second co-researcher spoke about her experience of being a lesbian women.  
*As a lesbian woman, absolutely, like we see on the news all the time where people are being persecuted, are being beaten to death so you need to be very cautious (Co-researcher #31)*

*Aim #5: Outside Influences that Affect Sense of Community*

Six essential themes (see Table 4.9) emerged from the fifth question: What outside influences affect sense of community?

Table 4.9

*Essential Themes: Outside Influences that Affect Sense of Community*

Stakeholder Group	Essential Theme	Thematic Statements/Meaning Units
Community	Indifference	Getting use to the idea; seems like the youth don't care; individualistic society
	Demanding World	It's easier to use drugs; people don't have time; as your responsibilities become less demanding, you have more time
Not-For-Profit	Fear	People are afraid; didn't want to know them; not feeling like they're members of society
	Consumerism	We don't encourage community anymore; individualism; msn
Child Protection Worker	Ignorance	Lack of education; prejudice; labelling
Senior Administrator	Demanding World	Good grief, the speed at which things are moving; competitive world

In the discussion about outside influences that affect sense of community, two main essences emerged (see Table 4.10): indifference to the plight of others and rising above personal fear.

Table 4.10

*Essences of Sense of Community*

Essences	Essential Themes
Indifference to the Plight of Others	Getting use to the idea; seems like the youth don't care; we don't encourage community anymore; individualism; lack of education; prejudice; labeling; good grief, the speed at which things are moving; competitive world
Rising above Personal Fear	People are afraid; didn't want to know them; not feeling like they're members of society

*Indifference to the plight of others.*

Many of the co-researchers perceived that the public has become desensitized to the plight of those in need. One co-researcher described that amidst the growing privatization of everyday life, communities are under too much stress to care for their members.

*I'm talking about B.C., that the new government has come in with all the restrictions on funding and stuff that has made it very, very difficult. I wonder sometimes now about how in the very beginning when all the cuts were made by the government, people were really up in arms, talk shows and you name it, I'm wondering now, are people forgetting about that now? Are they getting used to the idea that there isn't going to be any more funding or different programs, or whatever. Are they accepting that now? Where is the spirit that said at that time initially that we're not going to accept this. You can't do this. There are people who are suffering, there are people on the medical system, in the health system, in the education system and we're always trying to change things to adapt to less funding. (Co-researcher #14)*

Another co-researcher linked the effect of an indifferent society to socially disengaged youth.

*Our youth doesn't have as much respect as it once did. Why is that? I think that society has changed our youth in the way that they're more apt to do things that we would never think about doing because of the way the laws are and stuff like that. And it seems like the youth don't care. I have a 23 year old son and for years, he was just lost. (Co-researcher #10)*

*Rising above personal fear.*

Personal fear was also considered to be a major factor underlying absence of community. Fear was discussed as coming from a variety of places. One co-researcher spoke about how fear incites us to hide behind walls to maintain a sense of security, only to result in a sense of loneliness and grief.

*People are afraid. People are afraid to die, yet we're all going to die. So we spend a lot of time trying to avoid anything that will threaten our personal existence. So if it comes down to me having to choose to not be part of some kind of community initiative because if I do, it's going to possibly put me in conflict with my job, then I might not choose to do that. (Co-researcher #13)*

According to another co-researcher, fear prevented her from wanting to meet her neighbours.

*...when I bought my house and moved into that neighbourhood, I didn't want to know my neighbours. Listen to this, I didn't want to get to know them too well because what if they were the kind of people who were over at your house all the time, wanting to go on and on about this and that and just dropping in all the time. And what are you going to do? Sell your house and move away? So I decided not to get to know them very well. I look back on that now, that was 18 years ago, right and you know I did that by design. I happen to be in a neighbourhood where I think everybody seems to operate the same way. Now I hear about people who have Saturday barbeques every week and you know on and on. I mean some neighbourhoods people are in and out of each other's houses all the time. I happen to have chosen where it seems to be okay to be the*

*way that I am. But that is definitely a holdover from the way I grew up. And so not only do I accept that, I created it. Part of it is about the work that I do. I talk about congruence and all of that because this is probably the most incongruent thing in my life is that this is my work and this is who I am and all of that and this is my neighbourhood, my home life. And it's so very different. And I happen to be in a profession where I'm on the giving end more than the receiving end, and so when work is done, I want to have relationships in my life, balanced relationships in my life where I'm not always the giver. Sometimes it hard to find a whole lot of people to be giving to you. Where's the chicken or the egg, I want to know. Because maybe people who are like that happen to go for professions where you can do that all day long. I don't think I went to school and learned how to do this. I think it was just kind of who I was. (Co-researcher #2)*

One co-researcher suggested that many young people use drugs to deal with their fears of disconnectedness in today's world.

*I think one of the huge things is substance abuse. That's one of the things I see as a huge barrier, such an evil situation that youngsters get into, because they're not connected to their community. (Co-researcher #22)*

The co-researchers' experience of sense of community as revealed by the conversational interview disclosed 13 essences of sense of community and 3 essences of absence of sense of community. Part of the experience of community was the paradoxical experience of "absence" of community.

Comparing and integrating the data from the reflective journals with the themes revealed from the conversational interview, three additional essences were discovered.

These include forgiveness of self and others, critical self-reflection, and willingness to reclaim the time to think about and be-in community. These essences were very personal disclosures that only emerged in the journals.

*Forgiveness of self and others.*

Many co-researchers had a visceral experience as a result of their participation in this study. For example, in their journals co-researchers emphasized the necessity for self-forgiveness and compassion in their relationships with others. One co-researcher said “I realize now that my absence of community is tied to my inability to forgive those who broke my trust in one way or another over the years.” Self-forgiveness was demonstrated by one co-researcher who talked about taking personal responsibility by “letting go of the past” and moving on in the present:

*I choose to speak positively to this person and not focus on past arguments. (Co-researcher #19)*

Another co-researcher acknowledged that she was a good person and talked about the value of taking personal risks in meeting new people.

*After the interview I started thinking that I am going to make an effort to meet more people and join more community events. (Co-researcher #30)*

*Critical self-reflection.*

A second additional essence that emerged from the journal data was the importance of critical self-reflection. According to the co-researchers, the act of maintaining a reflective journal allowed them the opportunity to examine their personal

values, judgments, and beliefs and to critically explore how these informed and affected their relationship with community. For example, one co-researcher indicated that he was more mindful of the community in his life once he engaged in the journaling process.

*My sense of community, my experience, and my definition has changed somewhat since our first meeting. I see community so much more clearly, it is less prescriptive than I thought. It is about... (Co-researcher #26)*

Another co-researcher noted that she “just never thought about it (community).” She went on to say that “*I cannot believe how empowering it is to finally see community in action*” (Co-researcher #22).

*Willingness to reclaim the time to think about and “be-in” community.*

The third additional essence of sense of community that emerged from the journal data was termed willingness to reclaim the time to think about and “be in community. Many of the co-researchers spoke about how the experience of journaling opened up a whole new level of awareness.

*...it has encouraged me to think more deeply. (Co-researcher #4)*

*...the weekly reflections useful in my opinion. (Co-researcher #1)*

They began to ask questions about their willingness to take the time to reflect on the importance of community in their lives.

*I can see that I will need to reclaim it for myself.....being aware is the first step. (Co-researcher #26)*

I found the thematic analysis of the reflective journal to be very helpful in shedding additional light on the co-researchers’ experience of sense of community. The

findings also demonstrated that the practice of reflection was both powerful for developing personal insight into one's lived experience and an effective tool for revealing the totality of the co-researchers' experience of sense of community. Moreover, the act of reflection was understood by the co-researchers not only as a research tool for advancing knowledge and practice within the human sciences, but also as a consciousness-raising activity with the potential of renegotiating issues of knowledge, practice, and eventually roles and power within the current organizational culture of child welfare.

In summary, 15 essences of sense of community and 3 essences of absence of community (see Figure 5) were revealed by the thematic analysis of the co-researchers' personal interviews and reflective journals.

Essences of Sense of Community
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Community as the Practice of Care</li> <li>2. Community is an Interpersonal Process</li> <li>3. Community-Makers</li> <li>4. Sense of Oneness</li> <li>5. Changing Across Multiple Contexts</li> <li>6. Making Deliberate Choices</li> <li>7. Showing-Up for Others</li> <li>8. Critical Reflection</li> <li>9. Ethic of Connection</li> <li>10. Relational Worldview</li> <li>11. Professional Disconnect</li> <li>12. A New Revelation</li> <li>13. Feelings of Intolerance of Difference</li> <li>14. Indifference to the Plight of Others</li> <li>15. Rising Above Personal Fear</li> <li>16. Forgiveness of Self and Others</li> <li>17. Critical Self-Reflection</li> <li>18. Willingness to Reclaim the Time to Think About and "Be in Community"</li> </ol>

*Figure 5.* Conversational interview/reflective journal summary of essences of sense of community.

## Level 2: Collaborative Analysis of Co-Researcher Stakeholder Focus Groups

The second level of analysis involved a process of thematic reflection conducted collaboratively with the co-researchers to achieve deeper insights into and understandings of the first-level thematic analysis of the conversational interview and reflective journal data. As noted by van Manen (2003):

Collaborative discussions or hermeneutic conversations on the themes and thematic descriptions of phenomena may also be conducted by a research group or seminar—these too are helpful in generating deeper insights and understandings. There are many formal and informal ways that researchers or authors seek collaborative assistance in their writing. The research group or seminar circle is a formal way for convening and gathering the interpretive insights of others to a research context. (p. 100)

### *Findings*

A significant amount of information emerged from the co-researcher stakeholder conversational focus groups. The conversation was focused around questions such as, “What essential *themes* and essences are particularly meaningful for each of you in your experience of sense of community?”, “Is there an aspect of your experience that has not been captured in this study?”, and “Is there an essential theme or essence that does not fit with your experience of sense of community?” In order to offer insight into the process of analysis, excerpts of conversation from the focus group transcripts are included in the findings reported below.

*Aim #1: Meaning of Sense of Community*

The first four essences of community—the practice of care, community as an interpersonal process, community-makers, and sense of oneness—were generally accepted by all four co-researcher stakeholder groups.

*I found that most of the themes, even though the thematic statements were different they sort of fit together. (Child protection practitioner stakeholder group)*

*This outline is very comprehensive and it captures I think what to me community is. The essences are intertwined and that's really interesting because it makes me think about what do we really define a community than really as. (Community stakeholder group)*

*I thought that it was quite interesting to read the comments here and I think that on most levels we all think alike about community...the difference is in how we say it. (Senior administration stakeholder group)*

There was, however, some discussion around the essence of oneness.

*One of the interesting phenomenon we see is, let's look at the tsunami right now, because it is sort of a global sense of oneness and community where people are all pulling together, but I think it is so sensationalized and there is so much media hype around it, it does almost feel like it is commercialized. I know that you can't buy the sense of community but in some ways that's where people are feeling that sense of community right now by contributing to that and feeling that they are somehow helping people. (Child protection practitioner stakeholder group)*

*I think that the tsunami is a huge example of opportunity, opportunity for community they give people kind of a catalyst or a lighting rod to act on their values of identity and connection. You get exactly the same thing if a house burns down in the city or your neighbour's child is sick. You get the opportunity to connect with them if you want to. So all of these things are opportunities for people in their own way to connect to them. (Child protection practitioner stakeholder group)*

A co-researcher also identified the propensity of the senior administrator stakeholder group to discuss their experience in a much more “intellectualized” manner than the other groups, as was captured in many of the themes related to this particular group.

*I was really struck all the way through in terms of the senior administrator responses. They kept articulating the experience at a distance. That was pretty consistently throughout the responses. The senior administrators were very different (Community stakeholder group).*

I then shared my experience of struggling to engage the senior administrator group at a personal level, “saying all the right things, talking in the third person most of the time, and portraying a sense of knowing versus a more general awareness” (Interviewer).

#### *Aim #2: Lived Experience of Sense of Community*

The essence of openness drew the greatest amount of discussion from all four stakeholder groups. One co-researcher questioned the term, suggesting that *showing up*

*for others* might more accurately reflect the themes that informed the framing of the essence of openness.

*When I think about creating community, I think of personally getting involved and taking initiative...when I lived in Vancouver I felt quite isolated...when I moved to P.G., for whatever reason I was more inclined to look up groups and get myself involved and take the initiative. (Senior administrator stakeholder group)*

This remark led to the suggestion by one co-researcher that openness might be more about seeking out commonalities.

*What I think from this co-researchers' comment is I see openness as being more in-tune to where the commonalities are than the differences (Senior administrator stakeholder group)*

This comment generated a discussion that produced the following statements from two other co-researchers. The first spoke about the experience of being accepted into a community. The second dealt with the experience of one co-researcher leaving a community after 6 years because of a lack of commonalities with that particular community.

*The experience that I remember is people with whom I had very little in common noticing something that was common in values and that is where the acceptance began...they were able to see in me and my family things that they did value as apposed to what they didn't value... just to be more specific we were perceived as radical hippies when we moved in. But what they saw was a work ethic. Once we got the acceptance from that particular group, then it was almost a "carte blanche" acceptance all across the board. It seems to happen here that people*

*will move in and they feel very isolated until that type of connection that isn't necessary a personal friendship connection happens and then they seem to get some kind of blanket approval to be part of the community which means that they are welcomed and accepted in various activities but don't necessarily form personal relationships. A lot of people have commented on that phenomenon, they first feel very very excluded here and then there is something that happens.*

(Senior administrator stakeholder group)

*I was in Terrace for six years and I never really felt included in the community at all... I guess that thing never happened for me...my partner is from the Maritimes...her grandfather just died and she is really fighting on whether to back to the community because she knows that if she does there is going to be [distraction because she has a same sex partner]...it is the place she feels the most welcome and yet the least welcome. (Senior administrator stakeholder group)*

This discussion highlighted the tension that exists between concepts of community based on commonalities and social justice discourses that aim to attend to difference.

A co-researcher from the not-for-profit stakeholder group saw the term as more of a passive statement.

*I wondered, Gerard, about the term openness because for that seemed like a passive statement that people where open and when I read through some of the statements it was more that engaging in the openness, so to me it was a little more interactive. (Not-for-profit stakeholder group)*

This was followed by another co-researcher suggesting that it's "more like a mutuality and vulnerability" (Not-for-profit stakeholder group).

A co-researcher from the child protection practitioner stakeholder group questioned the essence of community-maker.

*I don't know if it is a matter of community makers because I think that everybody when they interact with community is making it. It depends on the kind of community they are making. (Child protection practitioner stakeholder group)*

For co-researchers from the community stakeholder group, the essence of changing context stimulated the most discussion. For example:

*The idea of changing context to me not only speaks of a new context in this point in time, in my experience it speaks to that changing of that context as we experience community how it changes, how we concretized this idea of what community means to us right now and if we define it to firmly we become disillusioned because it inevitably changes. (Community stakeholder group)*

*I found something similar, I found it was almost nostalgia by people thinking on neighbourhoods in way things used to be. Now it's changing more because of bigger cities and people are changing their ideas of community, so the definition is changing of community from what was thought as a location. (Community stakeholder group)*

From this discussion emerged the question of self in relation to one's definition of community:

*To go back to the bigger question, if my perception or definition of community changes I do change myself as well. (Community stakeholder group)*

I found this particular point quite interesting, because many of the co-researchers who spoke about making community for themselves appeared more content than those

who spoke about the absence of community in the workplace and neighbourhoods and were struggling to experience sense of community in their lives.

Finally, one co-researcher talked about the essence of choice.

*The whole choice thing really resonates for me. I was one of those people who said that my neighbourhood is not where I get my sense of community even though I lived in that neighbourhood for 18 years. And, I hear other people talk about how they really get their sense of community from their neighbourhood but that never happened in my neighbourhood, so I get to choose my community from a variety of places, and it doesn't necessary have to be right in my neighbourhood, so that whole choice thing really resonates for me and I think that's very 21st century, because our parents didn't have those kind of choices. One of the things that happened in my life is that I ended up being really connected to the gay and lesbian community in PG...that's really interesting because I talk to lots of other heterosexual people in this community who don't even know that it exists here. So that is definitely about choice and some other things...it is very interesting to look at how community has transpired for you and to realize that for somebody else in lots of ways may look exactly like you, their community is totally different than yours. (Not-for-profit stakeholder group)*

One of the co-researchers expanded the discussion to address the issue of being personally ready to exercise choice in joining a community:

*I was reading that in terms of personal responsibility...we think about making a choice at a conscious level to join or participate in a community. I think for me you have to be personally ready to be doing that and some of the words that stood*

*out for me was some people talking about the risk and fear of rejection. There is an element of being ready to do that or you are personally aware to be moving in that direction. (Not-for-profit stakeholder group)*

*Aim #3: Participating in the Building of Sense of Community*

In speaking about the essence of “critical-being,” a co-researcher from the child protection practitioner stakeholder group said:

*When you work in an area where there are some really fine lines about what you can do or can't do and in a big bureaucracy there are some very detailed structures, I think that it would be very stifling. It would be almost impossible to do anything outside of that. I think now that it is going to change. I think that knowing the structures and knowing where the borders are is actually quite beneficial because then you know what you need to do to get past them. In my job knowing where those fences are helps me because it helps me to be creative to figure out what I need to do to get over them. (Child protection practitioner stakeholder group)*

Another co-researcher spoke about the issue of personal place and personal power in the larger world.

*I think that some of us might think in bigger terms in order to make a change that it is really impacting. Whereas others see things in the way that we create change in a small way and maybe won't be seen so easily. But I think when you see yourself from the perspective of being just a little spec on the earth you are still fully conscious of your world, that the world is big and huge, you also see it as*

*your community. It gives you a different perspective on things; I think its all perspective and the way people see themselves in the world. (Community stakeholder group)*

*Aim #4: Absence of Community*

Many of the co-researchers from the child practitioner stakeholder group commented on the essence of powerlessness. One of the interesting insights expressed by one of the co-researchers was his ability to overcome this sense of powerlessness by connecting with like-minded people:

*Maybe it's the word, it's a degree of powerlessness...Before I even decided to come work here at the ministry, and do this kind of stuff, I already had a sense of what the community was like here...you hear things, right! When you get here its almost like you got this idea of how restricting it's going to be...there's bureaucracy and there are policies and there are things you have to follow, so there is that sense of powerlessness. When I got here I looked for people who were liked minded individuals and I was fortunate enough to have quit a few of them on the same team. But, those things kind of build...You need to decide what you are going to do, because tomorrow I can decide to not do anything that I usually do. I could just follow policy and I can do my job and I would be fine... It is about joining yourself with the people who think that way. (Child protection practitioner stakeholder group)*

Following this comment, another co-researcher from the child protection practitioner stakeholder group offered this insight into his experience of power within the

context of practice of child welfare and how power-over dynamics impedes the sense of community from the worker and client perspectives.

*I think that you're close to the truth actually... I think that you are touching on something there. For me there is a difference between the community of work and the larger sense of community. The community of work for me is at most a community of interest, I mean we share a language, we share a task so certainly we share lots of things like camaraderie. But I don't think that it goes past that...the sense of self and power in the broader community tends to be individual, people take you for who you are. You may be seen as more or less powerful person with different skill sets or things that you bring to the table or to the interaction. But at work I think your idea of power interfering with community, or certainly having an effect on it, is an interesting one because power is such a presence at work. It's a hierarchical setting. You know who is going to have the last word. You know who has power and who doesn't, and how far you can stretch it. That changes a little bit because some supervisors are more that way than others. But the system in which we all work brings that out to a huge degree. So in addition to a sense of power there is also a sense of powerlessness, and one that reflects truly the condition of our clients in the community. So I am not at all surprised that our clients don't get a sense of us working with them in community. For example, you're having trouble Bill let's see if we can organize the community around you to help you through this crises in your life. I think Bill probably gets the sense of 'I got a good social worker or a bad one, I got a good service or a bad one', but I don't think Bill thinks that he is really partaking in*

*community a whole bunch. I don't think that most of the time that we see ourselves as a reflection of community when we do our work. And, I think to the extent that we don't, our work loses some of its authenticity as social work. (Child protection practitioner stakeholder group)*

A co-researcher from the community stakeholder group pointed out that, of the four stakeholder groups, the group that experienced the least amount of absence of community was the senior administration group. This statement followed:

*I think that part of the fact that they[senior administration stakeholder group] might not be thinking about it as much is because they may not be experiencing it...It was like a disconnect, they are the ones with the influence and so to me that really hit me...if these are the power makers. (Community stakeholder group)*

*Aim #5: Outside influences that affect sense of community*

In discussing the essences of fog of indifference and hiding behind walls of fear, co-researchers from all four stakeholder groups acknowledged that they were in fact distracted from community. For example, one co-researcher said:

*I like that word distracted because I think if you look back on years and years ago, I am thinking of farmers and stuff, that was just what you did. Everybody worked together. There was just an enormous sense of community. I think that we are very distracted today and that we are so concerned with our jobs, mortgage payments just surviving that we do become distracted. (Child protection practitioner stakeholder group)*

One co-researcher offered an explanation as to why fear and indifference takes hold, noting that the underlying issue is that they do not know what to do, which creates an appearance of fear and indifference.

*One of the things too is that people don't have methods. They don't know how to react when they sense the powerlessness or they sense a problem or they sense a mounting issue, increasing fear in the community. So fear is one response and indifference is another. They exist along side people not knowing what to do....They read an article in the newspaper about globalism, sitting there and you are a poor person and you really need a job. You have really no idea about how to get a job. All of these things make people detach in some way. I think one of the things about great leadership is that it generally shows you a way....It's where somebody posits the idea and people go oh!....that's why the response to things like the tsunami are so easy because people go there's a problem and I know what to do, I can give money...so the response is quite tremendous. I think that lots of social problems don't get that response not because people aren't concerned about them. They appear indifferent. They appear immobilized by fear because they do not know what to do....People take on a whole lot of stuff when you give them a way. People took on a tremendous amount of danger in India simply because they figured out passive resistance. (Child protection practitioner stakeholder group)*

In responding to a comment made by another co-researcher on the issue of being personally ready to engage in community, I offer the following critique of her life.

*I was just thinking about my personal readiness to engage in community in different ways and one of my struggles is because my job specifically is about connecting with community and I selected that. I mean I went out and I sought out that kind of work. What I find myself doing is when I disengage from work and I am back on the home front, I am not participating in community as much as I should be...I think that I just get burnt out. I go home and I don't want to give anymore. Yet it eats me up in a way I am thinking , why am I sitting here sort of isolated when what I do from the 9 to 5 Monday to Friday which is what I love doing is all about connecting and then I completely disconnect in my personal realm and I struggle with that. And I don't think it is because our culture has separated out the work from the personal. And really they shouldn't be. (Not-for-profit stakeholder group)*

### Reflecting Critically Upon the Focus Group Findings

This section will consider the understandings that emerged from the focus group discussions by bringing together the wider meaning of the co-researchers' reflections on the essences of community. These understandings are presented as seven major insights on how the findings might be useful for child welfare community governance and community-based practice.

#### *Insight #1: Being-In Community is More Than Being Community-Based*

The co-researchers observed that there is a *difference* between, “living” the experience of community and simply “knowing” about the experience of community.

They pointed to the *Intellectualization* theme that emerged from the senior administrator stakeholder group as a potential explanation of being too removed from the reality of community to effectively understand what community governance and community-based practice could be. For example, one co-researcher stated:

*There are lots of things you can learn about community but you really don't get a grasp of community until you experience it...I think the same is for a lot of stuff, like community governance, you can read about things and they sound great and you go to school for four years in the social work program and you read these books and there are all these wonderful ideas but I don't think that your any closer until you go out and you do something...you got to get your hands in there, you got to feel what its like...when people pick it up and run with it, the reason they do is because they know what its like, they felt it before, so now they are like hey I know what to do, why, because I'm a product of it. I have the experiences. The reason I think community governance isn't working is because it is not being driven by the community. It's being driven by someone who came up with a model called community governance. I am not saying that's bad, but it is not being driven from the bottom. It's not being driven from where the people are. Like truly (speaking about the recent effort by the ministry of Children and Family Development to establish Regional community-based governance authorities), I know they went around and talked to people and they went to the communities. I think that each community got twenty minutes or something like that. Bearing that in mind, you're not going to get a good sense of it. If all they wanted to do was to write a paper on community governance I think that they would probably*

*have it. To build community governance, these people need to be involved in planning the structures, with the people who are effected by it, the people who know what it is like to have community and to not have it. (Child protection practitioner stakeholder group)*

This description of living community versus knowing community was picked up by another of the co-researchers from the child protection practitioner stakeholder group, who added:

*And, they have to believe that it is going to happen. Because if you go back to the whole feeling of powerlessness again and our lack of sense of community [pause] we have people that don't think that their voice is going to make a difference, and then nothing is going to change. It almost seems like the more we talk about this, it's like a vicious cycle. (Child protection practitioner stakeholder group)*

One co-researcher from the not-for-profit stakeholder group made the observation that it was difficult for her, as a professional social worker, to think about community at a more personal level.

*I remember that happening in the interview, the language that I used about community was driven by my profession I think. (Not-for-profit stakeholder group)*

A co-researcher from the community stakeholder group said that many, if not most, professional buildings exclude community by their “power-over” nature. Community members are seen as “clients” and have no real place in these buildings other than in the role of “client.” Speaking specifically about the child welfare system, this co-researcher stated:

*The community already has an impression of that building...I think that going into the schools may help....take the signs down...take down the high counters...take the locks of the doors...into a place where people would feel that they are not being locked out or locked in...it would be a comfortable safe place. (Community stakeholder group)*

This view of “place” was also commented upon by a co-researcher in the not-for-profit stakeholder group.

*We’re looking at another place that is being used by a community group right now and it is what people identify with. Parents talk to me and families talk to me about this all the time, about a safe place to go, a place where there aren’t as many physical or attitudinal barriers to access. (Not-for-profit stakeholder group)*

Another co-researcher in the community stakeholder group echoed this sentiment, adding:

*As we discussed before in the interview I guess a sense of community will be imposed by the structure the organization at your end... (Community stakeholder group)*

Drawing on my personal experience of being-in-community, I am reminded of my time spent as executive director of Awasis Agency<sup>15</sup>, and the countless number of days in remote First Nation communities. I am reminded of how different it “felt” to be in the community as opposed to my office located in the city of Thompson Manitoba. I am reminded of how important it was to me to understand the wants and needs of each community, and to develop relationships with the people making up these communities. I

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<sup>15</sup> Awasis Agency is a First Nations child welfare agency in Northern Manitoba.

recall saying to a Provincial Commission investigating changes to the legislation that the “Act” is a framework that mostly outlines the legal procedures to bring children into care. I suggested that their focus should be placed on organizational leadership that focuses less on skills and behaviors for apprehending children, and more on relationship skills for working with children, families, and communities.

“Being-in” community and having a presence in community is different than spending time in community. The latter points only to physical presence. Being-in the community means having the opportunity to interact, and form relationships with other community members. It is the act of being in community, thinking of others and ourselves in relationship that changes the way we perceive life in general, which ultimately should lead to a more responsive system of human services. In essence, being-in community reflects the idea that community is not an object that can be “managed”. Such an interpretation represents a fundamental challenge to notions of arms length authority over structures, rational strategic planning process, and rigid decision-making structures, all dominant features of the bureaucratic governance paradigm. The practice wisdom of being-in community demonstrates a need for senior administrators to reposition themselves in the associational life of a community.

*Insight #2: Community Governance is Much More Than Community Government*

Governance is about the performance of several processes and the interrelationships between and among a variety of individuals, families, communities, organizations and sectors. One co-researcher expressed the view that community and bureaucratic governance simply are opposing paradigms—the assumption being that the dominant administrative bureaucratic governance paradigm, which operates primarily through the principle of “rationality,” is highly constrained in its ability to create individualized responses to local need. She explained:

*I think that they are two opposing terms. When I think of community governance I think of a structure...not a group of people who have an ethic of care (i.e. share these essences of community). I see the two terms opposing. I also think that for the process of community part of it is the ability to mobilize to affect change. I think that is what we see with the tsunami thing. One community mobilizing to help another community. I don't really feel part of the community where the tsunami occurred, but I do feel part of the community that mobilized together to make a difference for that community. I don't see community governance as a structure being able to affect change in my community. (Child protection practitioner stakeholder group)*

This means that the challenge of forming a community governance approach for child welfare involves more than appointing a board of local representatives, holding public information meetings, operating within the traditional bureaucratic structures based on local knowledge of the issues, or to assume a “community” approach to governance to push the limits of the non-community bureaucratic paradigm. Co-

researchers proposed that need communities need to be able to put things together differently and create their own governance structure; a structure that reflects the nature of the community process. Community governance would reflect a community of learners approach—“for citizens to gain some understanding of the complexities” of a particular service field or client group and “some appreciation of the impact of factors” that touch on the services and the needs and circumstances of users and care providers (Wharf, 1993, p. 224).

In order for community governance authorities to become a model of community learners, provincial and federal governance models also need to change. Community governance principles might include the following:

- **To be Inclusive:** This involves thinking differently collectively and involving everyone: citizens, businesses, nonprofit organizations, and all the workers across ministries who need to come together to address social issues and take action. All players need to reorganize themselves to be part of and collectively responsive to the work community that includes the work place and the community in which the work takes place.
- **To take risks:** This involves experimentation, innovation and acknowledges that it will sometimes need to take risks. Each community has different needs that may dictate the need for major restructuring of how they work, with whom they work, and the objectives of their work.
- **To develop trust:** This involves community members discussing how to work together so as to not fragment the service and compete with each other. In other words, all players need to participate in identifying the values for working

collaboratively toward common objectives. These might include values such as inclusion, collaboration, creativity, safety, compassion, and equity, to cite a few

- To show leadership: In showing leadership, the government must seek to reconcile, to balance and, in the final resort to judge the diversity of views and interests.

*Insight #3: Community Governance is About Having Conversation, Not  
Providing Information*

For one co-researcher, community governance should not be so much about structure as an ongoing dynamic discussion between government and community. What becomes clear from this discussion with my co-researchers is that “being-in community” is synonymous with being on a journey “to community.” A journey of people engaged in meaningful conversations with one another. A journey, in which people are seeking community begin to learn about community.

*This is not rocket science. We keep pretending it is but it's not. The province obviously has a role, they obviously have a role in standard setting, but there has to be a dynamic discussion between the two. That's where it always breaks down. I would love to see a community governance thing happen in BC. But only if the communities that were able to also organize the way that they have in Ontario with the Ontario Association of the Children's Aid Society so that they have a composite group that can negotiate with the province on a real level so there not getting always yoyo up and down with the provinces willingness or unwillingness to balance their budgets on the backs of social services. So, in answer to your*

*question...I think our social work wisdom tells us that the closer we get to a problem the more accurate we get at solving it. But we never follow through with vigor and true beliefs on our values. (Child protection practitioner stakeholder group)*

Another co-researcher made a similar statement.

*It needs to start at the municipal level. You have people coming into the community from Prince George and nobody recognizes them, therefore nobody trusts them, and they may not even show up for these community capacity building sessions. (Child protection practitioner stakeholder group)*

Thus, methods and processes of empowerment, participation, and democracy need to be defined, and enacted within local-meaning frameworks grounded in the power of true conversation among diverse people that transcend the limits of personal perspectives. True conversations would reveal bigger pictures and deeper wisdom making it possible to co-create solutions. Meaningful conversation goes beyond facts and information; it is a quality of inquiry characterized by interest, listening, respect, and draws heavily on feelings and values. It is about creating safe spaces for community members to share their perspectives and concerns.

*Insight #4: Community Governance is a Process of Empowerment and Change, Not Just a Mechanism for Service Delivery*

It was quite evident from the focus group discussions that community governance was more about community empowerment and community change. In other words, it must possess the authority to introduce necessary structural changes as well as redirect

spending based on the priorities defined by the community. This means building on existing community leadership and respecting current networks and collaborations. And, for community governance to succeed, the community must have some real authority and not be at the mercy of political appointments tied to the provincial bureaucracy. It also involves recognizing others' expertise and discussing how that expertise can contribute to the community well-being.

*I think that's why you see different responses as different child protection workers are trained in different models. It isn't the best to be removing children from their families, and there is hope and vision for a different way of doing things, and we can see it in the future. To get people there as a large group of people is the challenge. (Child protection practitioner stakeholder group)*

This approach signals five important points:

- That virtually all local governance authority activities have the potential to strengthen or conversely weaken communities.
- That there are many parts to the puzzle and many players in the process.
- That the concept of community governance is inextricably linked to community development practices and principles; local democracy; and social policy.
- That community governance implies that power should be exercised as close as possible to citizens and local communities. This is because the most useful learning takes place at the grass-roots level. Also, with the rapid pace of change and variation in circumstances from place to place, it is essential solutions are adaptable and flexible. Hence, they must be as close to citizens and local communities as possible.

- That community governance requires good mechanisms for vision building and conflict resolution at the community level.

*Insight #5: Transcending Together*

The co-researchers described a need to have the time and support from management, and their supervisors to practice within a community-based approach. One co-researcher said:

*Supervisors need to recognize the social workers that are out on the front lines who are making steps towards more strength-based practice, more family development response, more community level stuff, are going to need time. And, it's making allowances for that because there are so many things in this job that are deemed as the most important and almost all of them centre around some form of paper work...the time needs to be there. People need allowances for time because if you don't get it no matter what you think about or no matter what kind of paradigm you come from, it's going to be a lot harder to try, and do all that work and still meet those operational requirements and deadlines. Saying to the workers, we are committed to strength-based practice, and we value the fact that's it's going to take time. (Child protection practitioner stakeholder group)*

Another co-researcher commented that:

*...you can get overwhelmed quite easily in this job and really lose focus very quickly. I think that's why it is so important to have a good team. (Child protection practitioner stakeholder group)*

A community stakeholder group co-researcher spoke about the professional community needing to “spend more time in the community.” Adding to this, a co-researcher stated:

*...not only with the patients or clients for that matter but anything that encompasses that person so that be a community, that be a family member, that be their home environment...rather than looking at them from a single point in time you would look at their whole life. (Community stakeholder group)*

Development of the full potential of community governance will require more than just the insights to process. It will require a degree of tolerance, patience, and understanding amongst the different stakeholders and their beliefs and values. This will require people to think, to learn, and to live in new ways that transcends the views we have of each other in order to create relationships of trust, empathy and interconnection between humans and the world in which we live. This evolution of our individual and collective consciousness is perhaps the most crucial contemporary challenge we face if we are to take this community governance project seriously. We will need new skills of inquiry, of consciousness, and for dialogue.

#### *Insight #6: Sharing of Power*

A co-researcher from the community stakeholder group re-emphasized the need to be heard, by speaking out and being given voice.

*To be true community practice there has to be voice given, to have a voice... What I noticed in the reviewing all of the stakeholder groups, the community stakeholder group was the only group that said anything about the sharing of*

*power. So I think that's the voice...I don't consider that we currently do as community practice is the true meaning of community. Because it's not the people who are building up the practice. They don't have any say in how that practice gets set up or very little. There may be a little community group where people get together or community forums where people are asked for input, but very seldom do people feel that they were heard. (Community stakeholder group)*

A co-researcher from the not-for-profit stakeholder group also spoke about the lack of sustainable funding which devalues the role of many community groups.

*I think maybe one part of it is the lack of validation of all the community providers. At the very base level is lack of sustainability and secure funding. When we go to these network groups, part of everybody sitting around the table whether it is the school district or health or non-for-profit group, there is sustainable funding and priorities. So I think there is all that undercurrent of [insecurity, authors insert] (Not-for-profit stakeholder group)*

This comment stimulated the following:

*When we're at the table, when not-for-profits are at the table, and all you can think about is whether or not you're going to have the funding continue for this program next month, and the other people at the table know nothing about that, than that is a really tough place to come from. One of the things that I have been seeing lately is that in the bureaucracy they are becoming more familiar with this. Now I have a manager in public health talking to me about how to write proposals, and all that sort of stuff, because they need to do that, And, I say OH MY GOD, don't tell me that we're going down the road where we're going to*

*become more alike. They're going to have to take on the things that don't work for us. I would really like us to figure out what works in a bureaucracy and what works in a community and put that together and stride for that as a model. (Not-for-profit stakeholder group)*

*I think we need to have more discussion around community, and even asking these questions. I was really inspired going through this process, and that's why I wanted to explore this, but even the questions that came up, and how much commonality I felt with many of the responses. Some of the responses really surprised me. So I think at a community level when we're using the word like 'oneness' and 'community' that means very different things for different people. Even to start a dialogue around that and having some direction with that. I agree about the sustainability for programs, and the ability and the time for people to sit down and reflect on this above and beyond all the day to day stuff because I think as part of building community it is our personal readiness for it. We have to be honoring that or acknowledging that because that's happening for people. The part that was a little bit disconcerting for me was the senior administrators, my sense of their distance from that because those people are a lot of the decision making people or the people who are advocating for our community programs. (Not-for-profit stakeholder group)*

These comments suggest to me that despite the rhetoric from governments to share power with community, communities remain on the margins of power in most local governance initiatives to date. In my personal study of regional governance, I found that although government officials believed they were sharing decisions when they asked the

community for input, the people's experiences were that their input was worthless because senior administrators and their planning consultants made the ultimate decisions.

*Insight #7: It's About Doing It Differently, Not About Less Money*

When I asked whether community practice and governance cost less, co-researchers responded:

*I think it's about doing it differently...but right now so much needs to be done to get it to a healthy place... (Community stakeholder group)*

*I agree with that at some point given that we are able to really understand and practice from a community way then it should be cheaper. But I would say that it's a possibility just thinking about it from the top of my head that it may be more expensive. I think that any movement from part A to B should have a lot of attention paid to it. I don't think that it is usually cheaper to start to move things...understanding the connection and trying to build community practice, we're relying on the community to respond and that takes time and it takes education. A few professionals thinking that they have an idea what community is, is one thing but a community responding in a way that makes this efficient and a way of providing services that make any sense at all, is another thing.*

*(Community stakeholder group)*

On this point, a co-researcher from the not-for-profit stakeholder group commented:

*You know, we used to know clearly who was in community and who wasn't. It's more trendy to be of community now in our work...with the realization of health*

*and having health boards and a health authority...like for instance Northern Health talks a lot more about community workers and that kind of thing than the ministry of health did when they were delivering health services in the community. So it has gotten a bit confusing now about who is community and who isn't, and I think that we've gotten to a place where we think, OK you want to be community, great then were all community, but there are certain things you have to be if you are going to be community. Some of the things that immediately come to my mind flexibility, the ability to speak over and above your bureaucracy, like not in conflict with the bureaucracy but you have "a voice" and its not just the voice of the bureaucracy. Those are the things that I see when we sit around tables now with people who are health authority employees and people who are community people...in order to try and create oneness there are certain elements that have to be in place and flexibility and immediateness, and the ability to speak with a voice that somehow is separate from the bureaucracy. (Not-for-profit stakeholder group)*

A shift to community in no way suggests that governments should retreat and abandon their social welfare role to the good graces of the elusive community. Rather, it is a more complex recognition that there are real limits to the tasks and outcomes we can expect government to achieve, that we need to determine a new role for government, and that we need to co-create new approaches based on a new paradigm of community governance. An authentic community approach cannot be achieved by absorbing the idea of community into the massive organizational structures of modern society, nor can it be achieved by incorporating the language of social capital, health promotion, and wellness

into social policy statements. Any serious shift towards a community governance paradigm must empower citizens to participate in and govern their institutions, which are essentially local in nature.

It's apparent from the co-researchers reflections that sense of community is about being engaged in the process of being and learning rather than structure. Further, the co-researchers reflections on the essences of community have helped me to see the deeper significance of the issue of difference as an aspect of the phenomenon of sense of community. The following discussion on difference come out of the co-researchers reflections and are raised in a reflective spirit pointing to issues that warrant further consideration, reflection, and research.

*The Difference: Is in How We Say It [Community]*

While there was overwhelming agreement amongst the co-researchers on the essences of sense of community, upon further reflection of the co-researchers' comment that "the difference is in how we say it" is an interesting one. Based on the hermeneutic interplay of the whole and the parts, when I consider this comment they are speaking about how the language we use reveals much about the way that we think, view our reality, and act. Awareness models (Ricks, 1989) posit that language is reflective of thought and behaviour, thereby suggesting that people's thinking is confined by their language. If the world view and behavior of people are affected by the structure of language then, is a shared understanding of community a realistic goal? In my work with the Awasis Agency of Northern Manitoba we attempted an alternative approach to apprehending children. First, we met with a group of respected elders. It was at this

gathering that I came to understand that the word ‘child’ in Cree is the product of parenting and nurturing an independent and separate physical being. This of course had severe implications for child welfare practice in First Nation communities because to remove the child from the home was an incomprehensible idea since child and parent were inextricably connected thoughts.

In this particular study, the senior administrators were found to have a very disconnecting way of speaking about community. This may not be too surprising if one considers the impersonal nature of the bureaucratic language and how this influences the bureaucratic command and control mentality. Those who work in bureaucracies are not permitted freedom of speech in public dissent from policies and learn to submerge their own convictions and values to those of the organization.

By reflecting critically on the different language of community, perhaps we could uncover the various contradictions, agendas, values, and interests suppressed far beneath the surface of our elusive sense of community. Such revelations offer hope and promise for change because it is not possible to change what we do not know or understand.

*We Realize Our Need for One Another Through Our Differences, Not What We  
Hold In Common*

One of the more animated discussions that took place in the focus groups involved the issue of difference. For example, one co-researcher indicated that she never really felt included in the community, “that thing never happened for me”. She then went on to say that when her same sex partner went home to her dying grandfather in the Maritimes it was a place that felt the most welcome and the least welcome. This

particular co-researcher experienced both a sense of community and a sense of absence of community at the same time. Perhaps this captures the community dilemma of having many things in common, while not knowing how to deal with differences in emergent beliefs, values, and lifestyles. Could our intolerance of differences be an opportunity of differences. Difference offers alternatives, other ways, other perspectives, other views, other life styles; difference is endless! Differences could actually open the door for change rather than be seen as the obstacles or barriers for getting along and getting things done.

We need new ways to understand difference. Our use of the word “difference” primarily to address issues of racism, classism, sexism, and other oppressive isms has blinded us to the fact that difference is a vast fact of life, deeply embedded not only in humanity but in natural systems and in the very fabric of the universe. Relationship, community, interdependence, mutuality, and freedom are all dependent on difference. If I want to “be myself” and “do things my way,” I have to live in a culture that respects difference and diversity. Our challenge, then, is to create families and organizations and communities and cultures and democratic institutions where everyone involved knows that difference is a treasure.

*The Difference in Interpreting Community as a Verb Opposed to a Noun*

The contemporary community as a context for human service practice must find a way to move beyond the somewhat simplistic and romanticized view of community characterized as stable, enduring, and concrete, a view that represents community as a place of warmth, intimacy and socially cohesive. This interpretation of community is one

centered on community as a noun—a descriptive word regarding fixed characteristics and universal ideals.

On the other hand, approaching community as a verb encourages an interpretation of community as an act of creating meaning—an ongoing process constantly shifting and changing. Through this lens, community is seen as highly complex and contextual, unstable rather than certain, and never a “given”. As such, building sense of community becomes an experience of ongoing engagement with others. This suggests a move away from fixed theory of community to the realm of participatory action style learning where realizing community becomes an ongoing learning experience within the context of others.

In conclusion, where the notions of community deviate is when greater emphasis is placed upon defining the commonality of being, rather than on what Jean-Luc Nancy (1991) refers to as the being in common. For Nancy this latter is a mode of being that presupposes that there is “no common being, but that there is being *in* common” (p. 1). I find this an exciting and potentially transforming idea. In a sense Nancy is referring to community as a call to becoming of something yet to be defined. Thinking about community in this way initiates conversation and prompts the exchange of ideas.

There was a strong sense of the becoming of being-in-community voiced in this study. As I see it, the challenge in future conversations about community while rethinking child welfare governance and practice is to overcome the need to select from the static and repetitive conversations at one end of the pendulum swing of Child Welfare to the other. Such dialogue is bereft of care, creativity, forgiveness and different viewpoints drawn from our differences in perspectives, histories, beliefs and values. Such

conversations are simplistic and need to be, in order to work for all the people all of the time....a goal of governance. Local conversations would allow for what being in common means within each community, and offers some hope for real difference in governance and services based on differences.

## CHAPTER 5: MOVING FORWARD

*A person experiences life as something separated from the rest - a kind of optical delusion of consciousness. Our task must be to free ourselves from this self-imposed prison, and through compassion, to find the reality of Oneness.*

—Albert Einstein

In this chapter I present my co-researchers and personal reflections of our joint investigative journey into the lived experience of sense of community. I then take the liberty to share some personal reflections on what I think are possible options for child welfare policy and practice and future research in light of my co-researchers lived experiences of the essences of community.

#### The Co-Researchers' Journey

This was a journey about revealing and becoming. My co-researchers found that learning was meaningful through interactions with one another in which they modified their ideas through reflection and action. Their journey has brought them to a better understanding of their sense of community as they search for the meaning of community in their lives. As they began revealing the essence of their sense of community they came closer to uncovering their sense of self. When they discovered that they truly had a choice about the meanings “to being in community” they were overwhelmed. However, they also began envisioning what kind of community they wanted to create for themselves and others. The analogy of a “journey” as a long and winding road of discovery, with each “co-researcher” taking his or her personal route to the final destination was found to be representative of the co-researchers’ experiences. The journeys described were unique to

the co-researchers, yet many issues raised were reflected in literature on community. The personal and professional changes that the co-researchers experienced enabled them to develop a clearer perspective both on their personal lives and on their collective existence in the world.

For example, in reflecting upon his experience as a co-researcher and six months of sharing lived experiences of community with his fellow co-researchers, one co-researcher spoke of a voyage back into what he phrased as an unknown self. He said, “My own identity and place in my ‘community’ has been fractured since joining this process.” This comment was made as we were winding down the final focus group and it drew a collective phenomenological nod by the other co-researchers taking part in the discussion—Yah, Right On!, Yes, I can certainly relate to that, can we do more of this?

This is clear evidence that for my co-researchers, as a result of wandering-out into the phenomenological journey of sense of community their sense of safe and “normal” had wavered. Touched by the “Other”, they were challenged at many levels. Another co-researcher said in her reflective journal, “I must sadly admit, I am thinking more about what community means to me and how I experience it for the first time in my life. This process is really causing me to question who I am and how I contribute to this world.” They have stepped away from their independent sense of self and in the face of the other and have come to recognize a deeper obligation to build community for themselves and others.

As Freire (1970/2005) contends, social change will come about as individuals realize their oppression, and transform their world as they transform themselves. In other words, a shift in perspective is more than a change in political parties and their respective

ideologies. It is a shift in consciousness and a way of thinking. A shift in consciousness involves a knowing inwardly or “to know with” (Goswami, 1995). To “know with” is a community attitude of learning and working together, rather than competing to win over others.

On reflection, it is reasonable to suggest that as the inquiry developed, the co-researchers moved into deeper awareness of their experience of sense of community, and paid closer attention to their experience of each other. As one of the co-researchers said, “I think that we need a universal course to help everyone think about community because we are simply tuned-out in our society.” (Community Stakeholder Group)

### My Personal Journey

While this study was an inquiry into the meaning of sense of community, and the way such meanings are translated into the governance and practice of child welfare, it was much more. Although it was not my intention at the beginning of the study, what has emerged during the span of the research has been as much a methodological and personal journey as one that was focused on the phenomenon of community. Some journeys include physical travel, and others involve a more philosophical journey, such as searching for meaning about a particular event in our lives, like divorce, illness, or death. Like other journeys in my life it now makes different sense to me as I reflect back on it.

As I moved through the research process, I did not always trust what I was doing. However, I relied heavily on my intuition, which requires a certain amount of confidence and trust in myself as well as trust in my methodology. I took solace in knowing that phenomenological researchers share this uncertainty.

In brief, there is no prescribed procedural manual. The most precise and formal description of method is a ... circle constituted by a series of “back and forth,” apparently circular, encounters that invariably moved the researcher more deeply, and with emerging clarity, into the phenomena under study. Hence, the analogy of “journeying along a path” seems an appropriate metaphor for describing how this study progressed. The phenomenological mode of inquiry compels us to study a phenomenon such as the process of becoming at home as a “lived experience.” In other words, we are challenged to “see” anew, to discover, and to search for thematic understanding while we live the experience—all of which cannot be forced or approached too aggressively or rapidly. (Million, 1992, p. 66)

Engaging in phenomenology involved being with my co-researchers and openly receiving their words. As van Manen (2003, p. 30) asserts, “It is in and through the words that the shining through (the invisible) becomes visible.” It necessitated getting at the essence of the lived experience of sense of community, and making that essence explicit. Dreyfus (1991) explained the importance of dwelling in the language to reveal essences:

Once one has been socialized into a community’s practices, as long as one dwells in those practices rather than taking a detached point of view, words are simply heard and seen as meaningful. Only dwelling in our linguistic practices reveals their sense. (p. 219)

Entering the lifeworld of my co-researchers by being with hundreds of pages of transcripts while paying attention to my pre-understandings, and staying oriented to the phenomenon was very demanding. I often feared that I was not delving deeply enough

into the complexity of my co-researchers' experience, but reducing their experience to conform to my narrow pre-understandings. Van Manen (2003) writes:

Phenomenological projects and their methods often have a transformative effect on the researcher himself or herself. Indeed, phenomenological research is often a deep learning, leading to a transformation of consciousness, heightened perceptiveness, increased thoughtfulness, and tact, and so on. (p. 163)

Through the writing and in conversations with my co-researchers, I began to understand something about my "community-self" in that "The other voice thereby becomes a moment in my own understanding and self-understanding" (Jardine, Clifford & Friesen, 2003, p. 176). For example, when one co-researcher describes her self-forgiveness towards a more genuinely sense of "being-in" community, I found myself exposed. When writing-through my co-researchers' experience of "showing up for others", I wondered about my own status as one who shows-up. In these moments, my co-researchers were teaching me about my community-self. It is in these moments, that I recognized the tremendous possibility of community in my life.

In my work as an assistant instructor in a School of Social Work, I question my commitment to community. I attempt to construct a place for community in the classroom by asking my students to reflect on their own community-self and to relate what they are learning in the classroom to their lived experience of community. However, at the same time, I struggle with finding opportunities to heed my own advice. Four years after joining the university, I continue to feel a profound loss of community. During this time, while I have talked to my students about community camping, I feel like an outsider. I do not know the community that is present for me today. I am a speaker of community.

While my students have been appreciative of my knowledge of community and extensive practice background in community, I miss the feeling of speaking from community as I am living it in the moment. Reflecting on the journey with my co-researchers on the phenomenon of community, I now know that my pedagogy demands a being-with my students in community. While the system promotes isolation from community, I have to consciously position myself in community through my research and service requirements.

Phenomenology has also transformed the way I look at research by calling into question my pre-understanding of research as a set of methods to be applied in a fashion “that flattens and literalizes the world” (Chow, 1999, p. 40). In turning from the traditional sense of research, my research moved beyond the filters of method to seeking an understanding of the lifeworld. I discovered that interpretive inquiry takes place in the lifeworld, not as an object of conversation, but as something that we intensely and personally enter. Van Manen (2003, p. 8) observes that “There is a difference between comprehending the project of phenomenology intellectually and understanding it ‘from the inside’.” I feel through my own experience of “being-with” my co-researchers that I too am finding ways to be in the most genuine way I know. I am learning to “let learn.” Moreover, phenomenology has taught me that practising phenomenology means being a lifelong learner, because there is so much more that can be uncovered, so many more phenomena to be opened and understood at a deeper level.

Finally, as I reflect on this study, on my co-researchers and on my digging in the dirt of their lived experience, I wonder why more educators, policy-makers, senior administrators do not do the same. Many of them go days, weeks and even months without any direct contact with community. Tucked away in a central office, the only

time they see the faces that make up a community is as they drive to and from work. Located away from community, they are not part of it. In producing regulations and policies they operate within the bureaucratic system. What does this mean, if anything?

### Moving Forward

Hermeneutic phenomenological studies do not produce conclusions (van Manen, 2003). Rather, they provide such rich descriptions and interpretations of the essence of being that the reader cannot walk away without feeling compelled to act on what she or he just read. For instance, van Manen (2003, p. 13) writes that it is “inappropriate to ask for a conclusion or a summary of a phenomenological study.” Instead, describing original experience is primal telling. “Language that authentically speaks the world rather than abstractly speaking of it is a language that reverberates the world” (p. 13). For this reason, I do not engage in the following discussion to impose one best interpretation on the findings, but rather to express the co-emergence of perspectives that resulted from an active merging of boundaries or the “fusion of the horizons” (Hekman, 1986, p. 145) by researcher and co-researchers.

### *Reflections for Child Welfare Policy and Practice*

Several important reflections for child welfare policy and practice can be drawn from this study: collective responsibility of the entire community to re-create itself, research based in an ethic of community, leadership based in an ethic of community, and moving beyond “quick fixes” to systemic change.

*Collective Responsibility of the Entire Community to Recreate Itself*

A collective approach of the entire community to recreate itself implies something much deeper than the current system of professional and human services organized around the needs of the community, no matter how community-based they may be. It implies “openness” towards others and a new way of learning and being together. A collective community responsibility approach also resonated with much that has been written in recent times about the idea of learning communities and communities of practice. These movements are both about rebuilding the foundation for the society that has been fragmented by the combined forces of globalization of the economy and bureaucratization of all of our major social, political, and educational institutions. The underlying principle that they share is how we learn determines the kind of society we build.

The prevailing view in our society is that learning is something that individuals do. Furthermore, we often assume that learning has a beginning and an end, is best separated from the rest of our activities, and is the result of teaching. A learning communities approach asks how would communities look if we took a different approach? How would they look if learning is social and comes largely from our experience of participating in daily life?

In this study, while all of the co-researchers completed high school and many of them had post-secondary experience, it was their engagement in this collective learning experience that brought them to a different place in their understanding of self and community. Although their life histories were different, they discovered that through the process of leaning together they were able to co-create an understanding of community

by negotiating with one another in communities of knowledgeable peers. This of course is the fundamental assumption of social constructivism; that knowledge is built by learners as they build collective frameworks to make sense of their world. Knowledge, is therefore not universal and absolute, rather it is local and historically changing. We construct it and reconstruct it, time after time based upon our collective experiences in our life worlds.

This study speaks to how community governance and a community-based approach to delivering services might be different. First and foremost, it reinforces the social constructionist view of knowledge as not being transferred in an authoritarian structure from government or service oriented organization to community, but rather as something that local governments and service organizations and communities work interdependently to develop. This view fosters active learning over passive learning, cooperation over competition, and community over isolation.

The indifference of community, presumably encouraged or at least permitted by hierarchal, command and control style leadership, the distrust engendered by the competitive contracting process and often unrealistic outcome-based reporting, and the isolation that exists for large numbers of non-profit community-based agencies, are some of the major criticisms of the pedagogies of our time. An inclusive participatory learning model of community governance may be one way to change our ways for constructing knowledge and in turn, how we do things.

The scholarly work on child welfare reform is questioning, in one way or another, our dependence on the bureaucratic paradigm in thinking through new ways to deliver child welfare services. It seems to me that child welfare is in the midst of a crisis of

confidence and legitimacy because professional knowledge is mismatched to the conditions of practice. The problems we have to solve in child welfare are complex and ill-formed. The issues are not simple and yet we hope and speak earnestly about improving services by turning to the “community” as if it is just a matter from moving things from one place to another.

### *Research Based in an Ethic of Community*

The prevailing approach to research relies largely on “technical rationality,” which is concerned with finding best means to predetermined ends, on the assumption that higher quality processes lead to higher quality products (Schön, 1983). This model fits the rational management system favoured in government. Perhaps more than ever before we urgently need a more inclusive view of what it means to conduct research; one that calls for learning communities to generate their own knowledge.

Leading thinkers in the field of organizational learning such as Peter Senge, Arie de Geus, Edgar Schein, Timothy Gallwey share the view about changing our perspective from discovering knowledge that lies in reality “out there” to creating knowledge that lies within human interchange. For example, in his book *The Fifth Discipline*, Senge (1990) calls for “a shift of mind—from seeing ourselves as separate from the world to connected to the world, from seeing problems as caused by someone or something ‘out there’ to seeing how our own actions create the problems we experience” (p. 12).

### *Leadership Based in an Ethic of Community*

An ethic of community, when internalized as a basis for leadership practice, leads to a style of leadership that is clearly distributed and based first and foremost in interpersonal and group skills, such as listening with respect, striving for knowing and understanding others, communicating effectively, working in teams, engaging in ongoing dialogue and creating forums that allow all voices to be heard. The idea of leadership based in the ethic of community is useful in mitigating one of the perennial problems of “traditional” research in bureaucracy – the unrealistic assumption that the “heroic”, social planner can provide the vision and expertise to overcome the many challenges facing communities.

### *Moving Beyond “Quick Fixes” to Systemic Change*

The results of this study confirm that community cannot be manufactured; it is not a commodity or the reliable outcome of any professional activity. Rather, it arises when valued personal involvements within a network of others give rise to purposeful action, involvement, and celebration. As many of the co-researchers indicated, sense of community can be promoted if we develop the competence to overcome our habits of segregation, professionalization, and bureaucratization on even the smallest scale.

According to the former mayor of Toronto, John Sewell (1998), we lack local governing institutions that attend to the whole of community, where common values are deliberated, resources allocated, and organizations join with citizens to achieve common goals. As such, he advocates that we approach the concept of community in terms of achieving sustainability.

In viewing the concept of sustainability as a public process, Neil Roling and Annemarie Wagemakers (1998) state that:

...society can overcome the momentum of what we have constructed in the past...only by reaching consensus about what action to take next, i.e. not on the basis of controlling things (instrumental rationality), not on the basis of beating competitors or opponents (strategic rationality), but on the basis of shared learning, collaboration, and the development of consensus about the action to take (communicative rationality). (p. 13)

From a sustainability perspective, a community approach to governance and practice would empower citizens to participate in and govern their institutions, which are essentially local in nature. Thus, achieving genuine community governance will require more than simply transferring responsibility to communities. It will require the transfer of adequate resources and, perhaps more importantly, new mechanisms for meaningful community control. "In the absence of those two critical elements, any reorganization, no matter what language is used, remains, in effect, just another floor plan change" (Bellefeuille, Hemingway, & Schmidt, 2004, p. 1).

### *Reflection for Further Research*

This phenomenological inquiry had the modest attempt to understand the phenomenon of sense of community from the lived experiences of community members in Northern British Columbia. In the process, it identified several essences of community that might extend this understanding. It also revealed that while the language of community is tinged with nostalgia for a simpler past, we in fact live in a new world that

has been radically altered by the impact of globalization. In addition, it revealed that communities are not static and inert but are multiple, open, and overlapping and an individual's relationship to community is flexible, active, and intentional. One can choose one's affiliations.

This research has raised many questions. For example, what is the role of universities in shaping learning communities? What are the ethical issues in learning communities? What are the implications for leadership training and social service education?

### Conclusion

The significance of this study is underpinned by the rigorous attention to the philosophical directions of critical hermeneutic phenomenology, its inquiry processes, and findings that emerged from the two iterative layers of analysis. The study achieved its aims, and a clearer understanding of community has been achieved through the use of a phenomenological approach. The descriptions, interpretations and reflections presented in Chapter 4 provide an insightful understanding of the complex nature and meaning of sense of community. Previously unexamined insights into the essences of community highlight the significance of its presence, power, and potential. These insights have the potential to inform and transform child welfare models of community governance and community-based practice. Specific reflections may be useful for other contexts, but require careful review for other settings.

This research hopefully will encourage readers to reflect on their personal sense of community; and for those who work in government bureaucracy, consider questioning

how the work might be transformed and wonder about how community governance might be lived differently. The full significance of such reflection would ideally promote further inquiry about this and related phenomenon. This phenomenological quest has not been conclusive: it has led to more inquiry.

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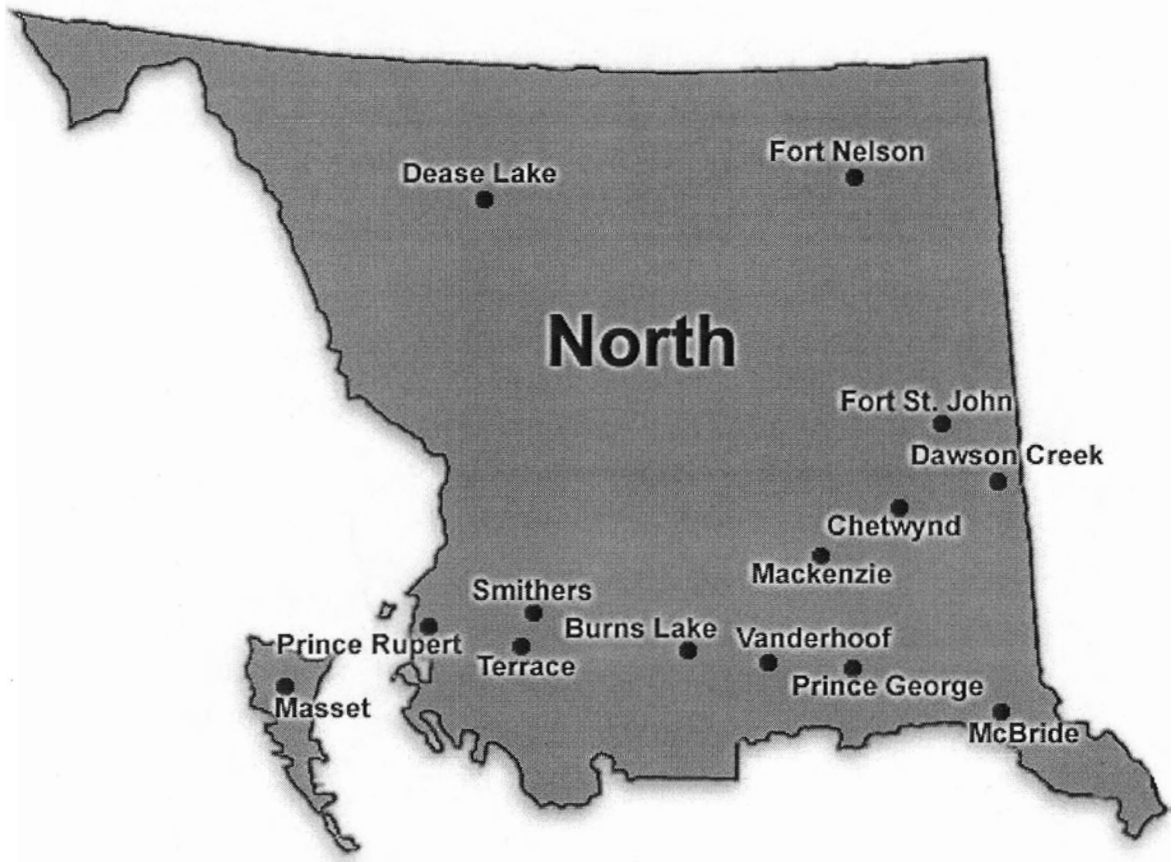
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## APPENDIX A: CASE STUDY COMMUNITIES

Community	1999 Population	Location Within North Region
Prince George	80,845	Large Urban Centre
Quesnel	8,500	Moderate Size (South)
Kitimat	11,672	Moderate Size (West)
Ft. Nelson	4,777	Small (North)
Chetwynd	3,059	Small Rural Centre
McBride	757	Towns (East)
Valemount	1,362	Towns (East)

APPENDIX B: NORTH REGION



## APPENDIX C: CONVERSATIONAL INTERVIEW OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

1. What is sense of community to you?
2. Do you experience sense of community in your life?
3. Do you participate in building sense of community for yourself?
4. Do you ever experience absence of sense of community?
5. What outside influences affect sense of community?

## APPENDIX D: JOURNALING INSTRUCTIONS

The main purpose of keeping a journal is to record your experiences of community or absence of community over the next four weeks. The journal gives you the opportunity to capture your experiences of community in the actual moment of experiencing it. There is no one “right “ way to organize and to capture your experiences of community. You can write, draw pictures, state feelings, record thoughts, describe memories, spiritual awareness, personal insights, ask questions aloud, etc...

## APPENDIX E: DATA ANALYSIS WORKSHEET

Column 1 Thematic statements	Column 2 Themes	Column 3 Essential Themes	Column 4 Essences

## APPENDIX F: INFORMATION LETTER AND CONSENT FORM

**The Intentionality of Community: A Seventh Moment  
Critical Phenomenological Study**

You are being invited to participate in a study entitled *The Intentionality of Community: A Seventh Moment Critical Phenomenological Study* that is being conducted by Gerard Bellefeuille. Mr. Bellefeuille is a Doctoral student in the school of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria and you may contact him if you have further questions at (250) 960-6437 or bellefeg@unbc.ca.

As a graduate student, Mr. Bellefeuille is required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a PhD in Child and Youth Care. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Frances Ricks. You may contact Dr. Ricks at (250) 721-8735 or fricks@cascara.uvic.ca.

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**PART 1: INFORMATION LETTER****Face-to-Face Interview**

The purpose of this research project is to explore the phenomenon of “community” from the “lived experience” of the participants and its meaning for those participants in relation to community based practice. Research of this type is important because governments are turning to the community as a resource in solving social problems. The benefits of the research include a) developing an understanding of the meaning people place on community in a globalized world, b) furthering the understanding of how child welfare practice grounded in community may take shape, c) contributing to meaningful criteria for community governance, and d) helping to inform critical human service education and practice.

You are being asked to participate in this study because of your personal knowledge about the phenomenon being explored “community” and willingness to discuss your experiences of community.

You have been identified as a potential participant for this study because of your involvement in a previous study conducted by this researcher in which you placed your name on a registry of people who expressed an interest in being notified of further research on the topic of community. Others were referred to me with permission by someone who believed that you would make a valuable contribution to the study.

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include:

### Face-to-Face Personal Interview

A 2 hour interview conducted face-to-face. This will be followed-up by a series of discussions over email and telephone. The open-ended interview will include five categories of interview questions as outlined below:

1. What is sense of community to you?
2. Do you experience sense of community in your life?
3. Do you participate in building sense of community for yourself?
4. Do you ever experience absence of sense of community?
5. What outside influences affect sense of community?

### Personal Journal

An optional journal to record your thoughts about community over a period of 4 weeks.

### Focus Group Interview

A 3 hour focus group interview by teleconference to discuss the themes which emerged from the researcher's analysis of the personal interviews and reflective journals in relation to community-based practice.

Your involvement in this study may pose some inconvenience to you. You are being asked to participate in a (2 hour) personal interviews, a (3 hour) focus group interview, and to keep a journal (optional) for 4 weeks. Every effort will be made by this researcher to schedule the face-to-face interview at a time and place that is convenient to you and the focus group interview will be coordinated to accommodate everyone to the best of my ability.

While there are some potential risks for provincial employees participating in this study should their opinions be made known to their employer, there will be no direct way to relate any of the data to participants. Every effort will be made to maintain anonymity of participants' identities and confidentiality of the data. For instance, no identifying information will be used (ie. participants will be issued code names and coding of data will be employed), interviews will be scheduled and managed in a confidential manner, and all information will be stored in a secure location and destroyed at the conclusion of the research process. It is acknowledged that anonymity and confidentiality cannot be controlled during the teleconference focus group interview (ie. potential voice recognition), although participants will be asked to respect the anonymity and confidentiality of others.

Participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you choose to withdraw from the study your data will not be included in the study without your written permission except for the group interview. Individual data cannot be extracted from the group interview.

Data collected for this study may also be used in a published article or professional conference to communicate the results of the research beyond a published dissertation report.

All data will be destroyed following 6 months of the researchers' defense of his dissertation.

An electronic copy of the study will be made available to each participant.

In addition to being able to contact the researcher [and, if applicable, the supervisor] at the above phone numbers, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Associate Vice-President, Research at the University of Victoria (250-472-4362).

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers.

<i>Name of Participant</i>	<i>Signature</i>	<i>Date</i>
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A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

#### PART 2: INFORMED CONSENT

1. I have read and received a copy of the attached information sheet

Yes                      No

2. I understand the benefits and risks involved in participation in this study

Yes                      No

3. I understand that by agreeing to participate I am agreeing to take part in a 2-hour interview, a 3 hour focus group, and maintain an optional reflective journal.

Yes                      No

4. I understand that my participation in this study is completely voluntary. If I agree to participate in the study, I understand that I can withdraw at any time.

Yes                      No

5. I understand that Gerard Bellefeuille may use the information from this study to publish an article in a professional journal or present at a professional conference.

Yes                      No

6. I understand that I will be given transcripts of my interviews to review and can give any clarifications as necessary.

Yes                      No

7. I have had confidentiality and anonymity explained to me and I understand that while every attempt will be made to protect my identity some particulars may be familiar to someone who knows me.

Yes                      No

I agree to participate in this study as explained above.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Participant

Date \_\_\_\_\_

I believe that the person signing this form understands what is involved in the study and voluntarily agrees to participate

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Researcher

Date \_\_\_\_\_

THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTRIBUTION TO THIS STUDY