

Well-Being and Ethnic Identity Promotion for Aboriginal Youth: A Community Based
Mixed Methods Study of Tribal Journeys

by

Tania Smethurst
B.A., Vancouver Island University, 2008

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

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There are significant mental health disparities in Aboriginal communities in Canada as a result of historical assimilation policies (Health Canada, 2012). One approach to mitigating these mental health concerns is through prevention programs that include a wilderness component. Wilderness based programs for Aboriginal youth are informed by cultural wisdom and empirical research that connects immersion in nature with psychological well-being. The goal of this study was to collaborate with two community partners (Nala Winds canoe family from the Heiltsuk First Nation, and Victoria Native Friendship Centre) to develop an evaluation tool that will satisfy mainstream funding standards as well as community, cultural standards. This tool-kit was designed to reflect the youth experience and mental health consequences of Tribal Journeys, an annual canoe journey program for Coastal First Nations peoples. The findings were shared with community partners and may be helpful in facilitating the creation, maintenance, and evaluation of other Aboriginal youth programs.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this research to my own ancestors who have come before me. The lived experiences of these individuals have contributed to who I am today as a woman. My female ancestors did not have the same opportunities as myself, and this work is for them. Although many of these woman were, and are scholars in their lives I am the first to attend university. From those that have come before me to the one that will come from me, I also dedicate this work to the child I have been carrying during the writing of this thesis. All my relations.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

There is a significant health gap between Aboriginal¹ people and the rest of the Canadian population. On almost every measure of health and well-being, Aboriginal people fare worse than non-Aboriginal Canadians (Provincial Health Officer's Report, 2009; Statistics Canada, 2003). The reasons for this health gap are complex, but stem in part from the colonization of Aboriginal peoples in Canada. As a result of efforts to force the assimilation of First Nations peoples in the early 1800's and the ensuing cultural genocide, there are continued impacts on health at personal, community, nation and intergenerational levels (Chrisjohn, Young, & Maraun, 1997; Health Canada, 2012; Kirmayer, Brass, & Tait, 2000).

Mental health is a particular area of concern for Aboriginal peoples, who have higher rates of suicide and depression. National rates of suicide for First Nations youth are at least five times the rate of non-First Nations Canadians (Advisory Group on Suicide Prevention, 2003). The mainstream media unfortunately paints an unrealistic view claiming that the "suicide epidemic" affects all Aboriginal communities. With their landmark study on "cultural continuity," Chandler & Lalonde (1998) illustrated this was not true in British Columbia. Their findings show that in communities with control over key civic services and a drive to preserve and promote First Nations culture there are lower rates of suicide (Chandler & Lalonde, 1998; Chandler, et al., 2003). This research suggested a promising approach in which a connection to one's culture leads to improved mental health. Given the higher rates of mental health illness in Aboriginal individuals,

¹ The term Aboriginal is used in this paper to refer to more than one of the distinct groups of first peoples in Canada: First Nations, Inuit, or Métis. Each of these groups have distinct heritages, languages, and cultures (Statistics Canada, 2008). When one specific group is being discussed, that name is used in place of the term Aboriginal.

mental health promotion, or interventions that foster improved mental health, are needed to mitigate this health gap.

Aboriginal youth are currently the fastest growing age cohort within the larger group of Aboriginal peoples in Canada (Blackstock, Clarke, Cullen, Hondt, & Formsma, 2004). This, combined with lower rates of mental wellness, indicates a growing need for programs that target the mental health and well-being of young Aboriginal people. Without such programming, the health and development of this population may have an unfavourable trajectory, which could result in consequences that are both considerable and compounding (Loppie Reading & Wein, 2009).

There are a variety of mental health promotion strategies approaches that could be employed. Given the importance of the natural world to the Aboriginal peoples of Canada (Assembly of First Nations, 2006), programs with a wilderness component may offer a culturally relevant manner of programming. Such programs typically focus on traditional land-based activities and often include cultural and spiritual content. Programs that recognize the interconnectedness of land, health and culture reflect the holistic view of health that is common to Indigenous worldviews (Duran & Duran 1995).

Parkes (2011) details several examples of programs that follow this approach to health within Indigenous communities. In an effort to improve the mental health of Aboriginal youth, many Aboriginal communities are mounting programs. In the Yukon Territory, for example, many First Nations have “on-the-land” programs for their youth (Stasyszyn, 2012). The content of these programs varies, including programs that concentrate on traditional food gathering and preparation, or traditional medicine, and those that focus on wilderness safety and survival skills.

Wilderness based programs with a psychosocial focus have been a growing area of mental health promotion for youth in recent years with non-Aboriginal groups. Private companies (primarily in the United States) have found a niche that has promising outcomes for youth who have behavioural and mental health concerns (Russell & Philips-Miller, 2002). Wilderness based programs are based on the theory that having a connection to the land, or being immersed in a natural setting promotes mental health.

Wilderness based programs for Aboriginal youth share a need for an evaluation tool that could be used across communities, but also address the unique features of individual programs. This tool would offer a way to communicate the youth experience of these programs in general and to document the specific benefits of particular programs within particular cultural communities.

Though communities work hard to mount such programs and are convinced of their value, few evaluation tools exist to help communities assess their programming and objectively measure and document their successes. The development of an efficacy measurement tool of the youth experience would help communities to identify successful youth programs and help them to advocate for ongoing program funding. In the academic context, this efficacy tool would also be beneficial in helping us understand how these programs can support strength building in Aboriginal youth. Such a tool may also have the potential to be applied to non-Aboriginal youth programs as well. The first area of inquiry for this research is to explore how well a pilot test of the evaluation tool-kit created in this study could be used as an effective means for communities to review the youth experience of their wilderness based mental health promotion initiatives.

This thesis developed and piloted an evaluation tool-kit. It was designed to reflect the

mental health impact of the youth experience of an annual canoe journey for Coastal First Nations communities known as Tribal Journeys. Using community based research methodologies (CBR), the Victoria Native Friendship Centre (VNFC) and the Nala Winds canoe family from the Heiltsuk First Nation will partner on this study. By looking at the outcomes of a canoe journey, I make the argument that having a connection to the land and sea are central to the mental health of First Nations youth. Furthermore, the ways that Tribal Journeys may contribute to mental health promotion are outlined. In particular, the benefit of the program for ethnic identity and well-being for First Nations youth are reviewed.

The next chapter begins with a discussion of an ecohealth perspective to mental health promotion, and details the mental health benefits associated with having a connection to the land. Trends in public health research and mental health promotion are also discussed. A model depicting the logic for a culturally appropriate evaluation tool is presented by reviewing the proposed outcomes (enhanced well-being, enhanced ethnic identity) and influences (psychological, cultural, and social).

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Cultural Aspects of Health

For the Coastal First Nations peoples of Canada, the land and sea have always held profound importance in terms of their sense of identity. Prior to European colonization, a connection to the natural world was understood to be a resource for the robust health of Indigenous peoples (Assembly of First Nations, 2006). In fact, this relationship for First Nations peoples has been characterized as more than merely feeling connected to that land, but rather that the land is an essential component of their identity (Wilson, 2003). Duran and Duran (1995) present the Native American worldview as a means of illustrating the interrelation between humans and the natural world: “the individual is a part of all creation, living life as one system and not in separate units that are objectively related with each other” (p.15). The physical land is intricately tied to the lives of First Nations peoples of Canada.

Discussing the physical land and sea in relation to identity exemplifies the complex understanding of health and well-being for Coastal First Nations peoples. In a report on sustainability written by Frank and Kathy Brown (the research partners of this study) the importance of the land is highlighted: “As Coastal First Nations we believe there is an eternal and inseparable relationship between our people and the land and forests and sea” (Brown & Brown, 2009, p.5). In terms of mental health promotion, programs involving a wilderness component may provide a promising approach. For Aboriginal youth, whose ancestors lived within the natural world for millennia, this is an obvious path for investigation.

In addition to this connection to the natural world, health must also reflect mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being (Committee on Indigenous Health, 2002). Within this constellation of health there is a focus on balance, meaning an individual must be well in all areas to be considered “healthy” (Loppie Reading & Wein, 2009). This balance of health also extends to the physical environment surrounding an individual (Wilson, 2003).

Several authors have used a medicine wheel model (see Figure 1, Graham & Leeseberg Stamler, 2010) to present the holistic concept of health within an Indigenous context (e.g., Brant Castellano, 2004; Graham, & Leeseberg Stamler, 2010; Wilson, 2003). Although it originated with Plains Cree nations, the medicine wheel is often used more broadly in discussions of Aboriginal health in Canada (e.g., Brant Castellano, 2004; Graham, & Leeseberg Stamler, 2010; Wilson, 2003). However, it should be noted that the medicine wheel model of holistic health might not be suitable or culturally appropriate for all Aboriginal peoples in Canada or Indigenous people globally (Blanchet-Cohen, 2011).

This approach to health as a holistic concept may be a contrast to some dominant western philosophies that have prevailed in program and health service delivery for Aboriginal communities (Graham, & Leeseberg Stamler, 2010), which have historically been disease focused. Although there are many western health practices that are currently including a holistic focus, the medicine wheel image presents the Aboriginal conception of health that is part of the long history of Aboriginal philosophies of life (Wesley-Esquimaux, & Smolewski, 2004).

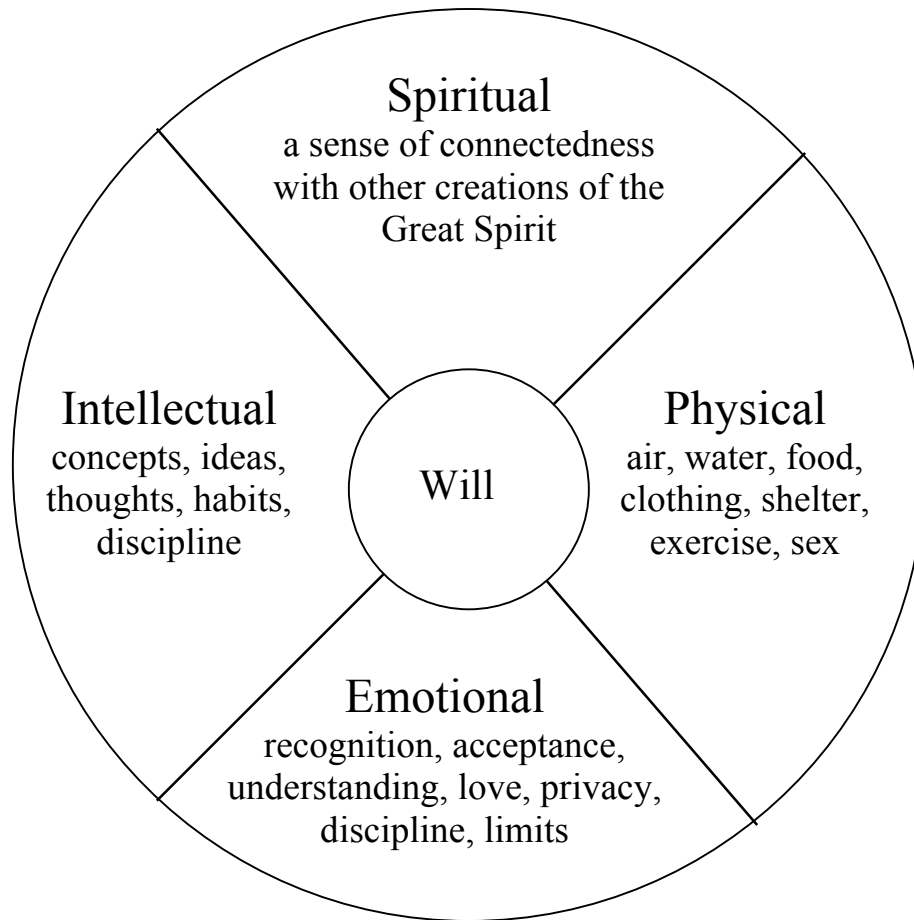


Figure 1 Medicine wheel

Population Health

Ecohealth.

It is clear that the natural environment is a source of life, culture, identity, and well-being for Aboriginal peoples (Greenwood & de Leeuw, 2007). The National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health articulates this sentiment in a recent “Emerging Priority” publication, which reviewed the common ground between ecohealth and holistic conceptualizations of Aboriginal health (Parkes, 2011). The concept of ecohealth is described by Parkes as a way of understanding human health by

acknowledging the interconnections between the social and ecological world, specifically how health and well-being are linked to the natural world. This may be understood broadly as *the health of the land reflects the health of its peoples*. However, for this paper the concept of ecohealth will be used in terms of *being connected to the natural world as a necessary pre-cursor for a human to be considered healthy*. The report from the National Collaborating Centre notes examples of health promotion programs that are employing an ecohealth perspective, and serves as a sign that the field of Aboriginal health promotion has an emerging interest in exploring this perspective.

Beyond views of the health benefits of the historical connection to the land for Aboriginal peoples of Canada, there is also a growing body of literature detailing the health benefits of having a connection to nature. From spending time in a natural environment, to living close to green space, there are well-documented examples of the positive outcomes of having a connection with nature. For example, Taylor and Kuo (2008) compared concentration ability of youth with an ADHD diagnosis (n =17, age range, 7-12) after a twenty-minute walk in a park, in a downtown setting, and in an urban neighbourhood. Using a backward digit-span test of concentration after the walk, concentration was found to be significantly improved for the youth in the park setting than after the downtown walk. These findings exemplify the mental health benefits of spending time in nature.

Also addressing the health benefits of exposure to nature on well-being, Leather et al. (1998) investigated the direct effects of windows in the workplace. One hundred office workers in Southern Europe were surveyed on job satisfaction, general well-being, and intention to quit. Findings revealed a direct effect for sunlight penetration and: job

satisfaction, intention to quit, and general well-being (operationalized as tense and uptight).

Nature exposure has also been investigated in relation to stress responses of university students. In a study of 120 undergraduate students, participants watched one 10-minute video depicting a stressful scenario, and were then instructed to try to relax while watching a second 10-minute video that depicted one of six different outdoor settings (urban or natural) (Ulrich, Simons, Losito, Fiorito, Miles, & Zelson, 1991). Responses were measured with physiological responses (e.g., heart rate (EKG), muscle tension (EMG)). Greater stress reduction was found for those exposed to the natural setting. These results highlight the benefit of being exposed to a natural environment after experiencing stress. This study provides further evidence of the positive effects nature can have on human health.

Public health.

The connection between human health and the natural environment is also evident in research in the field of public health. One of the cornerstone documents on health promotion in Canada, the 1986 Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion noted that the protection and conservation of natural environments is essential to any health promotion strategy (WHO, 1986). Furthermore, other public health papers also reference the connection between health and nature (McMichael, 2006; Hancock, 1993). As a tool for describing this connection, Hancock and Perkins (1985, p. 45) created the “Mandala of Health” (Figure 2).

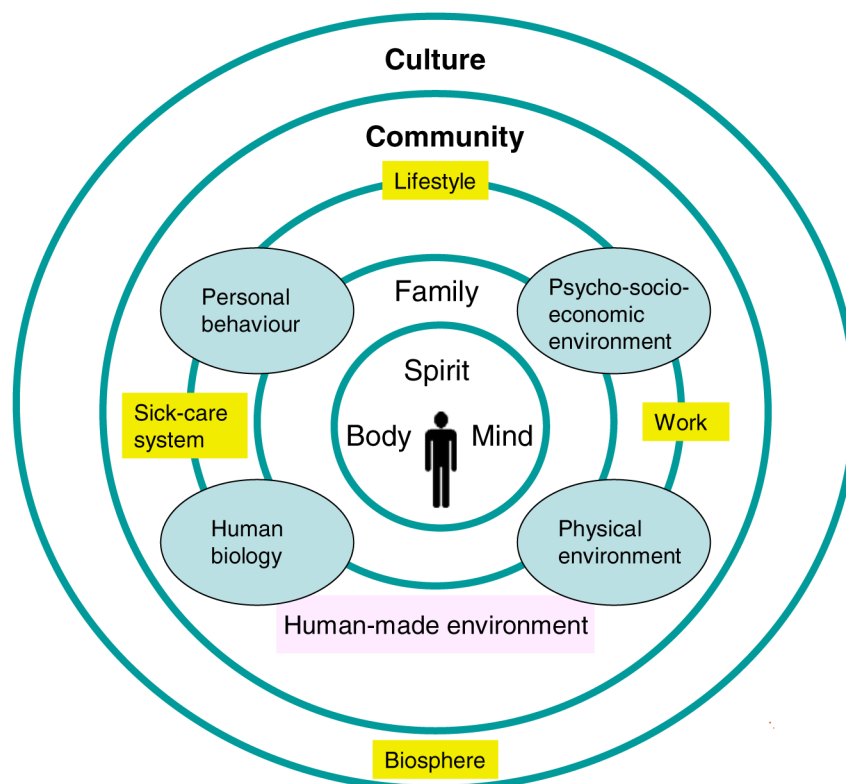


Figure 2 Mandala of health.

This model shows the natural environment as one component of the human ecosystem of health. Noted in the model as “Biosphere”, this circle surrounds the individual. In the middle of the figure the individual is centered amidst mental, physical and spiritual levels of health, are depicted to suggest that health is a multileveled, and multifaceted approach to find success.

Wilderness Programs for Youth

From a therapeutic perspective, western psychology and education has paired immersion in nature with psychosocial programming as an intervention for increasing psychological health and well-being. Interventions for youth that include a nature component take various forms (e.g., residential programs, boarding schools, day programs). One type of programming is wilderness therapy, a therapeutic intervention for

youth with psychosocial and mental health issues (Russell, 2001). The evolution of wilderness based programming dates back to the 1900's.

The literature describes the beginning of therapeutic wilderness programs as beginning at a New York psychiatric institute in the early 1900's. The hospital required certain patients to be separated from the others, and housed them in tents on the facility's lawn (Caplan, 1974). Initially this was a strategy of dealing with over crowding, however the staff observed remarkable results during this time. Patients who had been bed ridden started to show improvement both mentally and physically. This so impressed the institute's staff that this came to be a common practice for psychiatric facilities (Caplan, 1974).

Following this trend of personal growth in a natural environment, in the 1940's summer camps for youth were established to promote socialization in a recreational setting. This approach capitalized on the healing power of the natural world, and the social cohesion of the cabin groups to foster personal change (Berman & Davis-Berman, 1994).

During the same period of time, the school of Outward Bound was established in the United Kingdom by Kurt Hahn. Initially this school's goal was to take British sailors on 20 day wilderness expeditions to train them how to be self-reliant. However, the program also included an experiential education approach where the young participants learned through their experiences in the wilderness. Hahn also noted the improvement in the participants' self-esteem, self-efficacy, and sense of responsibility (Marsh, Richards, & Barnes, 1986). Eventually this school expanded its clientele to all youth, and in the early 1950's Outward Bound began delivering programs in the United States.

The experiential education approach of Outward Bound became the benchmark for other programs that began to reach out to youth in a variety of settings: psychiatric, penitentiary, group homes, etc. (Berman & Davis-Berman, 1994). The Outward Bound style of facilitating individual change became a common therapeutic approach to working with youth.

There are several key components of wilderness therapy programs that are believed to contribute to the therapeutic process. These include: immersion in wilderness, living in a group setting, educational and therapeutic curricula, individual and group therapy sessions, and specified learning objectives (Russell, 2001). Backcountry expeditions and living in a wilderness environment at a wilderness therapy program are two of the mechanisms that are believed to provoke the positive shift of behavioural issues (Russell, 2001). This context provides the opportunity for clients to develop personal and social responsibility as they are dependent on themselves and on their peer group for their physical survival. Youth are reciprocally responsible to the group for its physical survival and social harmony.

It is believed that the client's immersion in a setting in which they are in touch with their primal sense of personal and group survival also results in a growth of their emotional intelligence (Russell, 2004). Physical challenges, solo time, intense peer interactions and a context that fosters a therapeutic alliance all contribute to effect change in adolescents' lives. As these programs have become increasingly popular, the available literature on their effectiveness has also expanded.

Recent empirical reviews have found evidence supporting specific benefits of participating in a wilderness therapy program. Examples of these benefits include:

reduced recidivism for adjudicated youth (Castellano & Soderstrom, 1992), improved family functioning (Harper & Russell, 2008), and a decrease in oppositional and defiant behaviour among adolescents (Brand, 2001). Russell (2004) reviewed findings from 858 participants (both self and parent report) across eight different American wilderness therapy programs. This analysis reported a significant improvement in the areas of intrapersonal distress, somatic symptoms, interpersonal relations, social problems, and behavioural dysfunction.

Evidence supports the continued study of nature based programming as a means of mental health promotion for youth. For Aboriginal youth whose ancestors traditionally considered having a connection to the land as an integral aspect to their lives (Brown & Brown, 2009), these types of programs may be offer a culturally relevant style of a psychosocial or mental health intervention.

Promising Practices for Aboriginal Youth Programming

In terms of mental health promotion programs, there are very few examples of literature detailing best practices specifically for Aboriginal youth. However, Williams and Mumtaz (2007) present three key ideas from their review of research on mental health promotion with a broad population. This report was created for the National Aboriginal Youth Mental Health Promotion Strategy Symposium hosted by the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch in 2007. Of the 150,000 articles found regarding mental health promotion for youth in their preliminary search, eighty seven articles were identified as having a primary emphasis on interventions focused on Canadian Aboriginal youth.

This report notes the Public Health Agency of Canada's definition of mental health promotion as "the process of enhancing the capacity of individuals and communities to take control over their lives and improve their mental health" (2006, p. 1). A distinction is made in this report about what separates generally accepted approaches to population health promotion from the emerging Aboriginal approach. The former is based on a medical model and addresses a range of health determinants, of which culture is only one. The Aboriginal approach to mental health promotion incorporates identity, culture, and worldview as the starting point from which health and healthy actions follow (Williams & Mumtaz, 2007).

As a result of a systematic search in the English literature from 1995 – 2006 Williams and Mumtaz (2007) present the following ideas for best practices of mental health promotion for Aboriginal youth stem from their findings: 1) Healing and cultural continuity, 2) Multiple literacies, 3) Power-culture awareness.

Firstly, Williams and Mumtaz (2007) suggest that mental health promotion for Aboriginal youth be focused on both individual and community healing. Because of the legacy of residential schools and intergenerational trauma, it is especially important to focus on rebuilding the human foundations of healthy communities. One manner of achieving this rebuilding is by bringing traditional knowledge into the public sphere. Williams and Mumtaz (2007) emphasize that interventions must not be deficit focused, but rather strengths based with a focus on the cultural assets that Aboriginal youth can connect to and identify with.

Taking a multiple literacies approach to mental health promotion acknowledges that there are many ways to be literate. "Literacy may be regarded as a tool to the means by

which people negotiate their environments in order to achieve full health and human potential” (Williams & Mumtaz, 2007, p. 20). In that sense, the authors propose the promotion of literacy to be a component of mental health interventions for Aboriginal youth. The Aboriginal sense of literacy, however is broader and deeper than what we traditionally associate with literacy (Williams & Mumtaz, 2007). In addition to textual and technological literacy, best practices would involve promotion of cultural, linguistic, spiritual and environmental literacy. Developing interventions along these lines includes: a) program development created in collaboration with youth to outline the various ways of being literate in the world, and b) employing diverse types of literacies when building community and individual capacity.

The final theme noted by Williams and Mumtaz (2007) in their literature review involves promoting a sense of personal power (i.e., agency) through identification with cultural power. This power-culture dynamic considers the interaction between the lives of the individual, and his or her experiences within their personal cultural context. Meaning, different experiences of power (e.g., personal, group, institutional) interact with different socially constructed cultural systems (such as ethnicity, gender, class, and sexual orientation), which results in varying levels of ability to self-determine, or advocate for one’s self.

In their review of the literature, Williams and Mumtaz (2007) refer to research on groups at the economic and cultural margins. The results show that opportunities for self-determination as a group correlate with individual mental well-being. From this, they extrapolate that if Aboriginal communities feel in control of, for example, their culture, their institutions and their resources, this will translate into the individual members of

those communities experiencing a sense of well-being. They suggest that for Aboriginal youth a sense of self-determination may be developed through access to capacities such as land, language, traditional knowledge and economic resources. The promotion of opportunities for self-determination as an aspect of well-being is accomplished through addressing:

1. The dominant ethnic cultural-power relations along with other cultural-power dynamics (such as sexual identity, gender, etc.) to increase self and cultural awareness.
2. The subjective and material experiences of power-culture (e.g., explore subjective experiences of identity and well being and provide access to culturally-appropriate environmental supports).
3. The heterogeneity of aboriginal youth (i.e., do not treat aboriginal youth as a homogenous group, but take into account the interaction between different identity groupings and different risk environments).

Overall, this literature review on best practices for programming for Aboriginal youth suggests that programs should be created in collaboration with youth, and acknowledge the various ways of knowing and the diversity within Aboriginal individuals in Canada. These programs should facilitate the connections between community and individual health and take a strengths based approach. Incorporating a focus on constructs of power in relation to both self and culture may also be important because of its relevance to well being.

These best practices proposed by Williams and Mumtaz (2007) provide a foundation for programming strategies for Aboriginal youth. Developing programs specifically for and with Aboriginal youth needs to go beyond adapting mainstream programs for

Aboriginal youth, as these may lack relevant and meaningful cultural components (Moran & Reaman, 2002). The noted best practices in this section will be reviewed in the next section in relation to the youth program that is the focus of this study, named Tribal Journeys.

Chapter 3 – Current Study

Model Program: Tribal Journeys

Beginning in 1986, First Nations communities from the West Coast of Canada and the North West United States began the resurgence of paddling traditional canoes from their home communities to the traditional territory of a pre-determined host community. This canoe journey is known as “Tribal Journeys” is a demanding and rewarding experience, both physically and mentally (American Friends Service Committee, 2008). It requires up to 2 weeks of paddling a 30 to 40 foot long canoe often in open ocean water. Participants or team members, known as a “canoe family,” paddle together, camp together, and live together for the duration of the Journey. At one time, traveling in traditional canoes was a way of life for Aboriginal peoples on the West Coast of Canada (Brown & Brown, 2009). Traveling on the traditional canoe routes of their ancestors and learning about Aboriginal culture are the foundations of the Tribal Journeys experience (American Friends Service Committee, 2008). Practicing their Aboriginal ceremonies and traditions day after day such as dances and asking permissions to come ashore offers the participants a unique physical, mental, and cultural experience; one that is considered highly positive for those who are able to participate (Y.K. Brown, personal communication, July 15, 2011).

The culmination of Tribal Journeys, when all the canoe families have reached the final host community is known as “protocol week”(American Friends Service Committee, 2008). This is a week where each Nation or Tribe shares its own dances and songs. Up to 5,000 people are present for this week. As a result, there is a festival-like atmosphere that exists at the venue. When youth participate in Tribal Journeys, they connect with Aboriginal people from many different geographic and cultural regions. Canoe families

join the Journey from hundreds of kilometres surrounding the West Coast of Canada and the Pacific Northwest of the United States. The youth are exposed to many peers, adults, elders and mentors originating from a range of Aboriginal cultures, each with their own unique cultural traditions.

Communities that are familiar with Tribal Journeys are confident in the success of the initiative as a pro-social intervention (Y.K. Brown, personal communication, July 15, 2011). Although, in the research literature, there is little systematic evidence for the effectiveness of programs for Aboriginal youth with a wilderness component, there is abundant anecdotal evidence among Aboriginal people that they are helpful. By providing an important opportunity for Aboriginal youth to connect with their Indigenous culture and build positive healthy relationships with other First Nations people, Tribal Journeys is proposed as a promising example of a successful youth program.

Tribal Journeys is in line with the best practices noted in the previous section. In fact, the Journey is often discussed as a “healing journey” for its participants, an event that inherently fosters individuals confronting personal and community issues in need of healing (Y.K. Brown, personal communication, July 15, 2011). Although there is no guarantee that by participating in Tribal Journeys one’s personal challenges will be ameliorated, there is abundant positive anecdotal feedback from those who have participated in the Journey (Scooter, 2012). This healing is described as an opportunity to overcome obstacles in one’s life. Before community members embark on Tribal Journeys, experienced paddlers are known to share with rookie paddlers that “it will be a powerful time for them”. The healing aspect of Tribal Journeys is perhaps one of the reasons participants often return year after year.

Connecting with the land and travelling the canoe routes of their ancestors could be considered healing for some of the participants, and even for their communities at home. For the youth who had not been previously engaged in celebrating and practicing their culture, the Journey is a means of bringing them back to their cultural heritage. By participating in the daily events of Tribal Journeys such as singing traditional songs, being involved in the tradition activity of paddling the canoe, and spending time celebrating Aboriginal culture participants are building positive connections with their culture. To heal from the effects of colonization a meaningful starting point is to reconnect with one's culture, and this is precisely the objective of Tribal Journeys.

Taking a strengths based approach is another aspect of the Tribal Journeys program that connects to the best practices identified by Williams and Mumtaz (2007). The program is focused on strengths in a youth's life rather than deficits. In the Canadian First Nations context, a strengths-based approach to youth programming is of special importance. The assimilation and colonization forced upon the First Nations people of Canada has led to addiction, poverty, and violence in some communities. For many First Nations communities this is the direct result of the loss of culture and family, experienced during colonization (Crooks, Chiodo, Thomas, & Hughes, 2009; Kirmayer, Simpson, Cargo, 2003). A strengths-based approach, focuses on the resilience some First Nations have demonstrated after generations of suppression; rather than the deficits. Crooks et al. (2009), advocate for the inclusion of a cultural component within an asset based framework of programming for First Nations youth. This may be especially relevant for communities who have lost the connection to their cultural heritage over time.

Current Research Study

The current study created and tested an evaluation tool-kit to document the effects of the Aboriginal youth experience of the 2011 Tribal Journey to Swinomish, Washington, USA. The goal of the tool-kit was to assess the mental health benefits of the program and document community understandings of Tribal Journeys as a vehicle for mental health promotion for First Nations communities. This research is motivated by the notion that having a connection to the land and to one's culture (Chandler & Lalonde, 1998) may have a positive impact on the mental health of First Nations youth.

Although Tribal Journeys has been in existence since 1986, each year it is dependant on the availability of funding. Individual communities are responsible for applying for grants to enable them to join Tribal Journeys. Some communities are adept at seeking out funding and writing grant applications, while others have fewer skills. Additionally, some communities have resources available to them that result in funding being more accessible (e.g., an on reserve casino, the Potlatch Fund), than in others.

In an attempt to increase the capacity of Tribal Journeys as a means of mental health promotion, it would be helpful for communities to have an easy way to assess and communicate the benefits and outcomes of their programs. One application of this tool-kit could be to include it as an evaluation tool in funding applications for future Tribal Journeys. Having documentation that can assess and describe the positive impacts is a core strength of successful funding applications. In the past, funding has been a limiting factor for many communities who wish to participate in Tribal Journeys. Securing long-term funding could increase the capacity of this program and potentially make it accessible to more youth in the future.

Project Design Process

In the beginning stages of this project, open-ended interviews were conducted with four adult key informants who had previously participated in, or organized Tribal Journeys. These interviews helped inform myself about the goals, objectives and history of Tribal Journeys. From these interviews, after reviewing the comments I identified three key themes that represented the informants' goals of Tribal Journeys: 1.) Learning about self (personal, and cultural), 2.) Having a positive life experience (being sober, exposure to positive role models, and living a healthy lifestyle), and 3.) Actively participating in a traditional activity. The theoretical model, interview questions and surveys of this study were developed to address these three themes. Drafts of the assessments were shared with the community partners, and their feedback (largely focused on the qualitative questions) was integrated into the final version.

Theoretical Perspective

As a Psychology student, and a life long environmentalist, the theories of Ecopsychology are appropriate for my approach to this study. Ecopsychology is a field of Psychology that is based on the theory that humans have an innate instinct to connect emotionally with nature, and that mental health relies on this connection.

Theodore Roszak is one of the leading scholars in this field. His seminal book entitled *The Voice of the Earth* (1992), which sparked the beginning of Ecopsychology research, outlines the basic tenants of this area of thought: 1.) There is a deeply bonded and reciprocal relationship between humans and nature. 2.) Realizing the connections between humans and nature is healing for both. 3.) Ecological insights can be helpful in psychotherapy. In this same book, Roszak (1992) criticizes modern psychology for

neglecting the primal bond that exists between humans and nature. A goal of my research study is to explore the influence of having a connection to the natural world with mental health promotion. Ecopsychology theory offers a suitable theoretical framework upon which to base my analysis of the findings.

As a non-Indigenous researcher, I do not believe it is appropriate for me to use Indigenous methodologies. However, I would like to entertain the similarities between Ecopsychology and Coastal First Nations philosophies. From my understanding, as a person who is non-Indigenous, the Coastal First Nations peoples have always understood the natural world to be an inextricable part of their existence in the world, and therefore implicit in their physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health. In a report on sustainability by Frank and Kathy Brown (the research partners of this study), this connection to the land is clearly echoed: “Our relationship with our territory is fundamental and we regard it as an extension of ourselves” (Brown & Brown, 2009, p.23).

Native American Psychologist Leslie Gray has suggested that Indigenous cultures may find the term ‘Ecopsychology’ redundant because their ways of knowing have never separated the human psyche from the natural world (1995). Nevertheless, based on my understanding, a theoretical position, which acknowledges a deeply rooted, reciprocal relationship between humans and nature could represent a link between two culturally distinct worldviews. “As Coastal First Nations we believe there is an eternal and inseparable relationship between our people and the land and forests and sea” (Brown & Brown, 2009, p.5). This inseparable connection between Indigenous peoples and the natural world is also echoed by Duran and Duran (1995).

To illustrate where Ecopsychology fits within the context of wilderness therapy and Indigenous knowledges, Figure 3 (from Naropa University’s graduate program in Ecopsychology, as cited in Boyle, 2009, p.19) depicts this relationship. The upper level of this figure, “leaves and branches”, details modern western wilderness programs that may or may not have a significant emotional connection to the land. The “trunk” depicts human connection to the earth, explained by Ecopsychology. Finally, the ‘roots’ describe Indigenous knowledge as the foundation for the “trunk” and the “leaves and branches”. This is a helpful image, depicting part of the theoretical foundation of the current study.

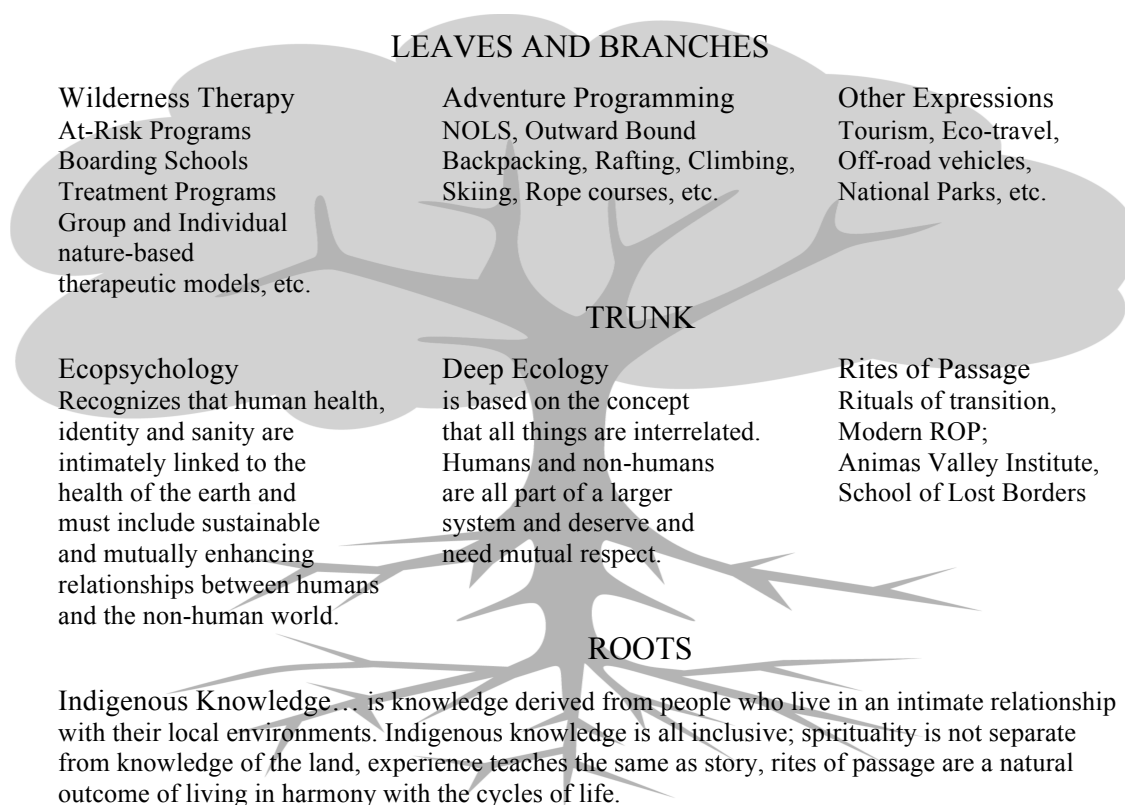


Figure 3 Interrelations of wilderness therapy, ecopsychology, and Indigenous knowledge.

Theoretical Model

Programs such as Tribal Journeys may not be seen as obvious health promotion programs *per se*, but rather as part of *a way of life*. However, it is through this natural part of life that health is promoted to the youth involved with Tribal Journeys. Through the daily cultural activities, physical challenges, and time to self-reflect the youth are learning about their culture, about themselves, and about their ancestors. This, in turn, may contribute to the development of their ethnic identity and enhanced psychological well-being. These components are the focus of the assessment tool created for the current study, and are detailed in Figure 4. The components include psychological (physical and emotional safety, perceived mattering, and being physically active); cultural (connection to cultural teachers, being connected to ancestral legacy); and social influences (exposure to positive role models, and being immersed in community of members of similar ethnicity). The thick black arrows connecting the “Influences” boxes to the “Measures” boxes in the model illustrate how each specific component will be assessed. Figure 4 presents the theoretical model that informs the assessment tool that is developed in consultation with our partners and piloted during Tribal Journeys 2011.

The psychological, cultural, and social influences and the outcomes of ethnic identity and well-being in Figure 4 are discussed and defined in terms of specific constructs. The interrelations between these influences and expected outcomes for health are also examined.

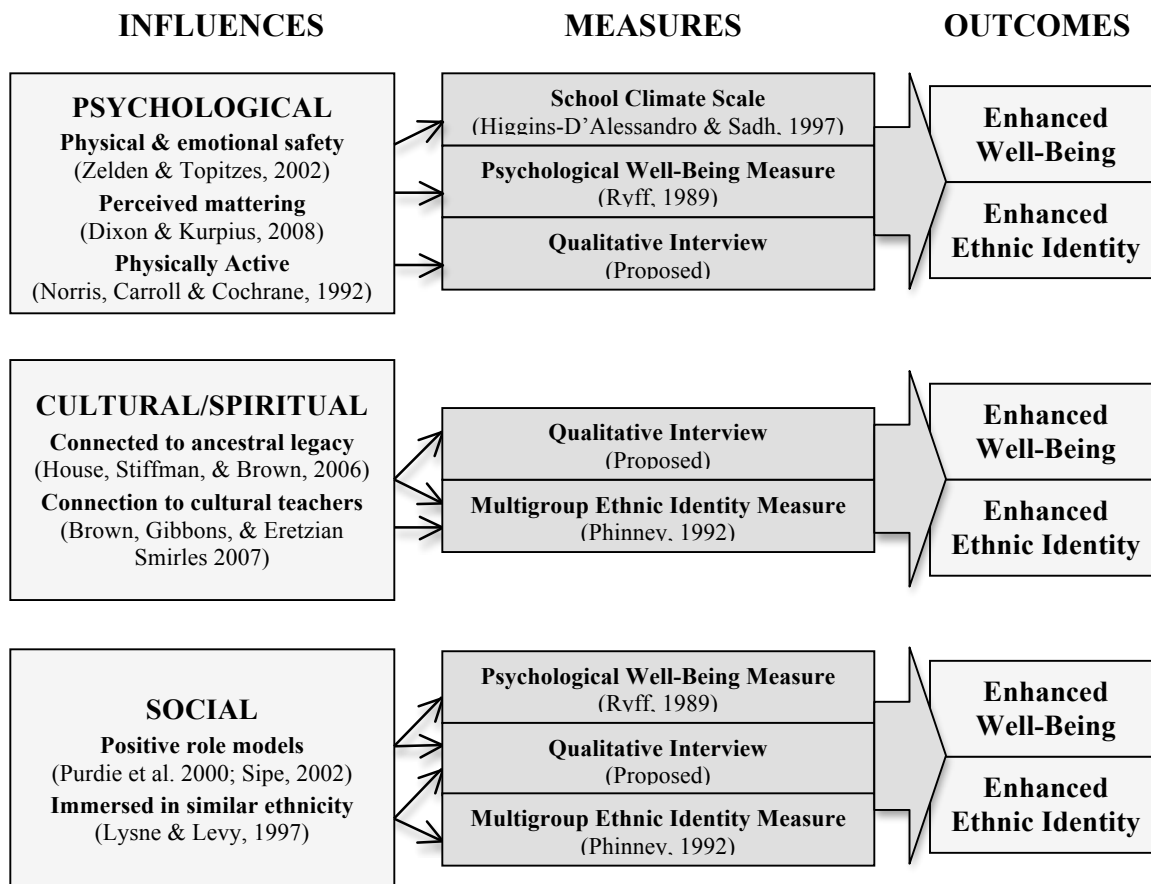


Figure 4 Theoretical model of the current study, detailing the connections between the influences, measures and outcomes that will be investigated.

Outcomes

Enhanced ethnic identity.

Ethnic Identity is the self-concept that comes from knowing one is a member of a specific ethnic or cultural group, and the value and emotional significance attached to this group membership (Tajfel, 1981). Identity development is central to the adolescence period of life (Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1980). The development of a strong ethnic identity is a component of identity development that ethnic minority adolescents experience

(Newman, 2005). During the process of this development, some environments are more suitable for fostering ethnic development than others.

The environment and context plays an important role in the clarification and understanding of adolescents' identities. These surroundings encompass everything that the individual encounters, and they all influence who that adolescent becomes as an adult (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). An environment that offers opportunities to participate in meaningful cultural activities contributes to one's ethnic identification. The reverse of the statement also holds true: if one is in an environment characterized by negative or demeaning cultural attitudes, there is little chance for building a strong ethnic identification (Oetting, 1993). A strong ethnic community will also have more individuals available to act as positive role models to younger generations.

Phinney (1989) describes an ethnic identity development in terms of working towards Ethnic Identity Achievement. This is defined as commitment to and affirmation of one's ethnic identity following a period of exploration. In line with Phinney's (1992) theory of ethnic identity, the proposed model relates an enhanced ethnic identity to 1) self-identification, 2) engagement in social and cultural activities, and 3) ethnic pride. The ethnic identification label one chooses to use is one's self-identification (e.g., First Nations, Métis, Caucasian, etc.). This may be the same as or different from ethnicity, which is based on a parent's ethnic heritage. Self-identifying as a member of one's ethnic group is foundational to an achieved ethnic identity. Participating in ethnic practices is the second component to ethnic identity. Phinney (1992) notes that social and cultural activities, typically take place with one's ethnic group members. House, Stiffman, and Brown (2006) echo this importance of practicing culture with other members of the same

ethnicity for Native American peoples. Having pride about one's ethnicity is the final indicator of ethnic identity. This refers to the individual being content with their ancestry, and feeling they belong to, and are connected to, their ethnic group (Phinney, 1989).

Enhanced well-being.

Emotional-Social well-being is an element of the holistic framework of Indigenous health (Kowal, Gunthorpe & Bailie, 2007), and is one of the interrelated factors that contribute to health in an Aboriginal context (Loppie Reading, Wein, 2009). From an Indigenous health perspective one's health must be considered with a holistic lens where emotional-social well-being is only one component within the constellation of health. Health in an Indigenous context reflects the well-being of an individual mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually. Within this constellation of health there is also a focus on balance, meaning an individual must be well in all areas to be considered "healthy" (Loppie Reading & Wein, 2009).

Psycho-social factors also contribute to the health of an individual (Kowal, Gunthorpe, & Bailie, 2007). Conversely, stress, depression, and hopelessness have been associated with adverse health conditions. For an example, in a systematic review of psychosocial factors linked to heart disease, Hemingway & Marmot (2011) concluded depressive symptoms, anxiety, and job strain have a negative influence on heart disease risk. On the other hand Psychosocial health, or well-being, is key to avoiding negative health outcomes. Furthermore, a strong sense of culture promotes well-being (Schweigman, Soto, Wright, Unger, 2011; Roberts et al., 1999). For Indigenous peoples, addressing health inequalities requires attention paid to psychological well-being (Turrell & Mathers, 2000).

In mainstream psychology literature, Ryff's multi-dimensional model of well-being is frequently used as a measure of well-being (1989). This measure focuses on the multi-dimensional elements of well-being. Ryff's (1989) description of psychological well-being (PWB) is evidenced within the six dimensions of her model: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relationship with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. Enhanced well-being is defined in the model of the current study as an increase in any of the six factors of PWB.

It is important to note that in the field of well-being, there is debate surrounding the relevance of each of Ryff's six dimensions of well-being (Burns & Machin, 2009). Of interest to the current study are questions surrounding the measure's validity for populations that do not uphold the dominant Western Euro-centric ideals such as independence and autonomy (Panelli & Tipa, 2007). Although these questions are relevant and pertinent to the current study, the selection of this measure was a calculated step made in response to interviews that were conducted with community members (key informants) regarding the Tribal Journeys program.

Influences

The influences of the outcomes in the current study are presented in three theme areas of health: psychological, cultural, and social.

Psychological influences.

Emotional and physical safety are important elements of the Tribal Journeys program. Youth and staff work and live closely together as they paddle their canoe to its destination. To reach the host community and complete the Journey, the canoe family

needs to feel emotionally and physically safe amongst each other. Ideally, the group will have a sense of physical safety and trust with their fellow paddlers. This physical and emotional safety within a group relates to a sense of community. In a recent study investigating community connection among urban adolescents, from Washington D.C., Zeldin and Topitzes (2002) found that physical and emotional safety significantly contributed to feelings of connectedness within a community, or what they term “sense of community”. Furthermore, having this sense of inclusion within the group has been reported to be positively associated with well-being and coping ability (Pretty, Andrews, & Collett, 1994). Given the expected benefits of having positive group dynamics (and the associated physical emotional and mental safety benefits) on Tribal Journeys, a measure of participants’ perception of the group culture is included in the current study (Higgins-D’Alessandro & Sath, 1997) . Group culture is defined as the sense of community amongst a group. This is noted as “physical and emotional safety” in the model (Figure 4) for the present study.

The concept of “sense of community” is related to a term from the Positive Psychology literature: “mattering”. Elliott, Kao, and Grant (2004) describe mattering as “the perception that we are a significant part of the world around us...that others think about us...seek our advice and ...care about what happens to us”. For the current study, perceived mattering (Marshall, 2001) is in reference to how individuals of the canoe families feel as a member of that group. In a study examining the interrelationships of depression, stress, self-esteem, and mattering among 455 undergraduate students, Dixon & Robinson Kurpius, (2008) report mattering and self-esteem are positively correlated ($r = .35, p = .001$), whereas mattering and depression are negatively correlated ($r = -0.35, p$

= .001). Mattering is noted in the current model as an influence of enhanced well-being (Ryff, 1989) and was evaluated with the “purpose in life” subscale of the well-being measure that is proposed in the methods section of this paper.

Being physically healthy is also a cornerstone of the Tribal Journeys program. During the Journey from the home community (or starting point) to the host community (final destination), participants spend long hours paddling their canoes daily. This is often in stark contrast to the lifestyle the youth have at home, and there are inevitable physical challenges for the paddlers. Research evidence supports the influence of exercise on the well-being of adolescents. In a study investigating the effects of physical activity, 147 adolescents (ages 13-17 years) were asked to report their exercise, well-being, and psychological stress levels (Norris, Carroll, & Cochrane, 1992). Greater physical activity was associated with lower levels of stress ($r = -0.23$) and depression ($r = -0.18$). The influence of being physically active on psychological well-being is evaluated using the qualitative interview questions.

Cultural influences.

Chandler and Lalonde's (1998) work on cultural continuity illustrated the significance of First Nations communities maintaining and rehabilitating their culture. They identified six indicators of cultural continuity that correlated with lower community-level suicide rates among youth : (a) land claims status ; (b) self-government (economic & political independence); (d) education (if youth attend band - administered school); (f) police & fire services; (g) health services; (h) cultural facilities (communal facilities designated for cultural activities). In communities where all six indicators of cultural continuity were present, there were no instances of suicide. This research suggests that connection to

one's culture has mental health implications for Aboriginal individuals. Further, it could be suggested that cultural continuity influences the strength of one's ethnic identity.

The first point under this theme is the concept of legacy. Not only are the youth becoming a part of the legacy of Tribal Journeys, but they are also learning more about the legacy of their ancestry as Indigenous people. Learning cultural traditions and passing them on to other generations is a foundation of the Tribal Journeys program. In a qualitative study of Native American youth, adults, and elders, (n=24, age 13-90) House, Stiffman, and Brown (2006) found that being part of the Native American legacy by passing on culture was an important part of developing one's ethnic identity. Participants also reported that being connected to the legacy of the American Indian people as a factor in what grounds them. This evidence highlights the importance ancestral heritage can play in the lives of Indigenous people.

Tribal Journeys creates an actual connection to the ancestry of the Coastal First Nations peoples. Traveling the Salish Sea by canoe was a way of life for these people historically. The youth are keenly aware that as they paddle on the Journey, they are re-tracing routes that their relations traveled at one time. Although participants of Tribal Journeys may already have a strong connection to their culture and its traditional activities, it is hypothesized that paddling the routes that their ancestors historically traveled will contribute to their ethnic identity. This connection between cultural legacy transmission and identity development is illustrated in the model (Figure 4) and was evaluated with the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure, and qualitative interviews.

A second component of the "cultural" influences of the model is "perceived connection to cultural teachers". As noted previously, Tribal Journeys is an immersion in a cultural

setting with members of the same Aboriginal heritage. This environment, in combination with the premise that one purpose of the gathering is for youth to experience a traditional cultural way of life, results in the adults being very dedicated to share their traditional knowledge. When an individual is connected to, and surrounded by, several engaged and active teachers this experience could contribute to enhanced ethnic identity (Brown, Gibbons, & Eretzian Smirles, 2007). The teachers encountered by youth on Tribal Journeys hold invaluable traditional knowledge that can only be learned from someone who knows it personally. As an example, these teachers may be well known Elders from various communities, other participants in one's canoe family, or members of the host nation. Learning oral history, language, songs, and participating in cultural activities is positively correlated with a positive ethnic identity (Brown et al., 2007).

The majority of youth involved with the Victoria Native Friendship Centre (VNFC) are urban Aboriginal youth who live away from their home communities (although there are also youth at VNFC who are living on their traditional territories). Being away from one's home community may mean that one is distanced from cultural teachers and opportunities to learn about ethnic identity. Being involved in programming at VNFC is an avenue for youth to build a connection with their Aboriginal ancestry. The majority of the youth from the Nala Winds canoe family lived in urban areas ($n = 5$), with the remainder being from their home community of the Heiltsuk First Nation (Bella Bella) ($n = 4$).

Connecting youth who are otherwise disconnected from their culture to an intensive cultural experience is a major strength of the Tribal Journeys program. The current study

addressed the extent to which youth believe they were surrounded by active, engaged cultural teachers with the qualitative interviews.

Social influences.

Tribal Journeys is a rare opportunity for youth to be surrounded by many Indigenous people. Lysne and Lysne (1997) have demonstrated this high concentration of people of Indigenous ancestry positively relates to youth enhancing their ethnic identity. In a study of 101 Native American adolescents from a large rural reservation using the Multigroup Ethnic Identity measure (Phinney, 1992), Lysne and Levy (1997) compared the ethnic identity (specifically the ethnic identity exploration and commitment) of those who attended a school with primarily Native American students to that of individuals who attended a school with a majority of non-Native American students. The students who attended the predominantly Native American school had significantly higher ethnic identity exploration and commitment scores than their counterparts attending the non-Native American school. This study illuminates the connection between one's environment and ethnic identity. Similar to this study, the current study investigated the relationship between "being immersed in a network of member of similar ethnicity", and "enhanced ethnic identity". This was evaluated in the study in the qualitative interviews and the Ethnic Identity measure.

Exposure to positive role models is another influence in the Tribal Journeys program. The adult leaders of a canoe family (typically 3-5 individuals) are seen as role models to the youth, and the youth themselves are also role models for one another throughout their time on the Journey. Sharing tips of paddling techniques, being respectful, and contributing as a group member are examples of role modeling that are present during the

Journey. Having exposure to the positive roles models on Tribal Journeys is another asset to the program that offers participants an encouraging experience.

Positive outcomes are often associated with constructive mentoring programs. In an evaluation of eight Big Brothers and Big Sisters programs, Sipe (2002) found participants (age 5-18 years) were less likely than non-participants to initiate drug and alcohol use. Participants also reported more positive relationships with peers and parents. For Indigenous youth, role modeling can enhance ethnic identity development. In a qualitative study done for the Australian Commonwealth Department of Education and Training and Youth Affairs, Purdie, Tripcony, Boulton-Lewis, Fanshawe, and Gunstone, (2000) found that a national sample of Indigenous community members referenced role models as one of the most influential factors in shaping the identities of Indigenous young people. In the current study, the influence of “exposure to role models” was evaluated with the qualitative interviews and the “positive relations with others” subscale of the Ryff measure of psychological well-being.

Chapter 5 – Methods and Methodology

Personal Location

I would like to acknowledge my own location as the lead academic researcher of this project, and be clear about my personal interest in this study. I am a fourth generation Canadian originally from Barrie, Ontario. My ancestry, that I am aware of, is Irish and Scottish. I moved west to Vancouver Island in 2001, and currently when I am not at school in Victoria I have a cabin in the Sayward valley (on Northern Vancouver Island) that I call home.

In outlining one's personal location, it is also relevant to outline what the research means to you, and how you are personally invested in the area of study (Absolon & Willet, 2005). Researching the health benefits of time in nature has long been an interest of mine both personally and professionally. As a young adult I worked at a number of outdoor education centers, most recently at a wilderness therapy program for youth-at-risk. In this month-long program, youth who were struggling at home, came to try to "straighten out" their lives. While I was working there, I was studying Psychology at Vancouver Island University, learning about mental health promotion and resilience, and I started to wonder about how the experience of being in the wilderness helps youth become more resilient. As an instructor, I witnessed substantial transformations in youth who had been struggling to trust others and regulate their behaviour when they started the program. I began researching the benefits of nature in terms of fostering resilience and well-being.

After my undergraduate work, I came to the University of Victoria to continue my education in Psychology. I also chose to extend my research on nature based

programming for youth to the context of Aboriginal health. I had been exposed to facets of Indigenous culture and philosophy from the Métis woman who created and ran the wilderness based program where I had been working. As I continued to work in wilderness therapy, I became intrigued about why so many of the wilderness programs incorporated Indigenous principles into curricula, and I became increasingly drawn to Indigenous cultures and spirituality. Consequently, I seized upon the opportunity to work and study with Aboriginal communities, especially with Aboriginal youth.

Ethical Approach

The current study takes a community based research (CBR) approach that includes the participation and influence of non-academic researchers. This research fosters non-academic research partners' influence and active participation throughout the research process (Israel, Schulz, Parker, & Becker, 1998). Unfortunately, there have been historical incidents where research was carried out in an unethical manner in Aboriginal communities, where research was done for the benefit of the researcher, and where the development, health and wellbeing of the community were disregarded (AFN, 1998). As a result, developing ethical approaches to research involving Aboriginal peoples have been a priority area of academic development in the field of Aboriginal related research. Two guiding documents in this field are: the Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS2) (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, 2010), and the OCAP Principles (First Nations Centre, 2007).

These documents aim to enhance the cultural respect and understanding among Aboriginal groups and researchers working with Aboriginal communities in Canada. The TCPS2 is the guiding document that must be followed by universities and research

institutions receiving funding from federal agencies. Chapter nine of the document outlines expectations for “Research Involving First Nations, Inuit, and Métis People of Canada.” The current study has followed these guidelines in the design of the project. As an example, article 9.2 references the importance of the researcher and the community *jointly* determining how to best engage the community (p.111). Accordingly, the current project was designed in a collaboration between myself and the community based partners from Victoria Native Friendship Centre (VNFC), and Nala Winds canoe family of the Heiltsuk First Nation.

The OCAP Principles were also created to “enable self-determination over all research concerning First Nations” (FNC, 2007, p.1). *Ownership* states that First Nations communities own their cultural knowledge/data/information collectively. *Control* refers to the rights of First Nations Peoples to control all aspects of research. *Access* affirms information and data of the research must be available to the community. *Possession* requires that the First Nations people are the stewards of their data. These principles have been considered and followed in the design of the current study (details below).

Following CBR approaches, research is done *with* participants and community partners rather than *on* Indigenous peoples and communities (Thomas, Donovan, & Sigo, 2009). In accordance with this collaborative process, the community must have a strong interest in the topic of the research, rather than only the researcher being motivated to learn about the topic (Burhansstipanov, Christopher, & Schumacher, 2005). To demonstrate this adherence to the above-mentioned ethical principles, the relationship between the researcher and the community partners is explained.

Community Partners

My involvement with the Victoria Native Friendship Centre (VNFC) began January 2010 when I did a research practicum with Debora Abood, the Social Services Program Manager. After this successful practicum I learned that the Friendship Centre was interested in conducting an evaluation of their youth programs. Debora Abood and the staff members of the Youth Team agreed to partner with me and work together on creating an evaluation tool to assess the youth experience of their Tribal Journeys' canoe family.

Two staff members from the VNFC acted as key informants in the early stages of this research project. These two staff members shared their experience of participating in Tribal Journeys, which helped shape the content and design of the tool-kit. In the time leading up to the departure for Tribal Journeys 2012, Meghan Clarkson (the Tribal Journeys co-ordinator at the VNFC) was the primary contact for this project at the Friendship Centre. Megan and I met several times and exchanged a number of emails to discuss the details of this project, such as: what should be included in the tool-kit, how to ask participants if they wanted to be involved, and when would be a good time to meet the youth. Through Megan, the VNFC was involved with the research process from the beginning of the design phase.

My relationship with the Nala Winds canoe family (of the Heiltsuk First Nation) emerged from my involvement with the LE,NONET Program (an Aboriginal undergraduate support program at the University of Victoria), in which I volunteered to supervise an undergraduate student in her LE,NONET Research Apprenticeship. The student, Jessica Brown, was keen to share her in-depth experience of Tribal Journeys.

When Jessica and I began working together she told her mother, Kathy Brown, about my research, which resulted in Kathy extending an invitation to include her canoe family (Nala Winds) in my research study in May 2011. Kathy Brown and her husband Frank Brown have been involved with Tribal Journeys since its inception in 1986, and are both considered leaders in the realm of Tribal Journeys. Kathy and Frank also invited me to travel with their canoe family during the Journey and act as a support crew member. I happily accepted this invitation to be involved with the Journey first hand, and spent three weeks in July 2011 travelling alongside the Nala Winds canoe family.

Participants

Twenty-five youth and adult participants were recruited from either the VNFC's or Nala Winds' canoe family for the 2011 Tribal Journey to Swinomish. Both the youth participants (age 15-23), and their parents or guardians were invited to participate in this study. Twenty-one youth participants completed the qualitative interviews, and 18 of these youth completed quantitative survey at time points one and two. Four parents or guardians completed a qualitative interview at either time point one, or time point two. Thus, the final sample used in analysis was 22 participants.

These 22 individuals came from one of the three following groups:

- *Group 1* – Adolescent or young adult participants of the VNFC's Tribal Journeys 2011 program (n= 9, 6 female, 3 male)
- *Group 2* – Adolescent or young adult participants of Tribal Journeys 2011 from Nala Winds canoe family (n=9, 6 female, 3 male)
- *Group 3* – Parents or guardians of the adolescent participants who were paddling in Nala Winds canoe in Tribal Journeys 2011(n=4, 3 female, 1 male)

(Parents or guardians of the adolescent participants who were paddling in the VNFC canoe in Tribal Journeys 2011 were intended to be included in this study, but due to time constraints, none were asked to participate.)

Twelve of the participants who completed a qualitative interview had also gone on previous Tribal Journeys. Of the participants who completed the quantitative survey, 10 self-identified as First Nations, four as Native, two as mixed ancestry, one as Métis, and one as “awesome”.

Research Objectives and Implications

The focus of inquiry for this study was to assess the mental health benefits of Tribal Journeys for the Aboriginal youth participants. The research objectives were to (1) design an evaluation tool-kit to review the youth experience of Tribal Journeys, (2) pilot test the tool-kit, (3) explore the potential of Tribal Journeys as a mental health promotion initiative, and (4) document Aboriginal views about the role that having a connection to the land has in mental health promotion. These objectives attempt to elaborate on the communities’ anecdotal understanding of Tribal Journeys as a positive intervention for its youth.

The theoretical model presented in Figure 4 frames the specific hypothesises of this study. The influences of Tribal Journeys on mental health were investigated using both qualitative and quantitative analysis to understand how particular factors contributed to the outcomes of enhanced wellbeing and enhanced ethnic identity. The dimensions under investigation included: psychological (physical and emotional safety, perceived mattering, and being physically active); cultural (connection to cultural teachers, being

connected to ancestral legacy); and social influences (exposure to positive role models, and being immersed in community of members of similar ethnicity).

The influences that were assessed quantitatively were: (a) physical and emotional safety, (b) perceived mattering, (c) connection to cultural teachers (d) connection to ancestral legacy, (e) exposure to positive role models, and (f) being immersed in a community of members of similar ethnicity. Qualitative interviews explored the remaining components of the model, as well as a few that were assessed both ways: (a) being physically active, (b) connection to cultural teachers, (c) exposure to positive role models, and (d) being immersed in a community of members of similar ethnicity

Measures

Demographic information was collected regarding participants' birthdates, gender, and self-identified ethnic group membership.

Ethnic identity.

Ethnic identity was assessed using The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (Phinney, 1992). This measure is a 12-item scale of ethnic identity with two sub-scales: Affirmation and Belonging (7-items, $\alpha = .86$), and Exploration (5-items, $\alpha = .73$, item 3 loads on both subscales), overall reliability has been reported as .86 within an Indigenous population of Pacific Islanders (Roberts et al., 1999). Sample questions are: "I think a lot about how my life will be affected by ethnic group membership", and "I am not very clear about the role of ethnicity in my life". Questions are assessed on a 4-point Likert-scale ($1 = strongly disagree$, $4 = strongly agree$) (Roberts et al., 1999). This measure has been used with a Native American population (Schweigman et al., 2011). It was assessed

for use in this study through consultations with both community partners where it was agreed it was a suitable measure.

Well-being.

Scales of Psychological Well-Being (Ryff, 1989) were used to assess well-being. This measure is a 54-item scale comprised of 6 sub-scales of eudaimonic well-being (Self-acceptance, Positive relations with others, Autonomy, Environmental mastery, Purpose in life, and Personal growth). Self-Acceptance is defined as a positive attitude about one's self, Positive Relations with others assesses the quality of relations with others (sample question "I know that I can trust my friends, and they know they can trust me"), Autonomy references self-determination and the ability to regulate behaviour (eg. "I tend to worry what other people think of me"). Environmental mastery is defined as the competence to manage surroundings, (eg. "I often feel overwhelmed by my responsibilities"). Purpose in life relates to having goals that give purpose to life (eg. "I don't have a good sense of what it is I'm trying to accomplish in life"). Personal Growth is indicated by a continued development as an individual, (sample question: "I have the sense that I have developed a lot as a person over time"). The internal consistency reliabilities for each of these subscales has been reported as ranging from .65 to .83 (van Dierendonck, 2004). All items are measured on a 4-point Likert-scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree", however for the purpose of this study the Likert scale was changed to match that of the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (Phinney, 1992), (1= strongly disagree, 4= strongly agree).

Group cohesion.

The School Culture Scale (Higgins-D'Alessandro & Sath, 1997) which assesses the socio-moral climate within a group was used to evaluate group cohesion. The School Culture Scale (SCS) is a 25-item measure assessed on a 5-point Likert-scale range from one (“*not true*”) to five (“*true*”). Example questions are “Participants trust each other” and “Participants have a chance to think about real issues.”

The SCS was designed for application in a school setting. Therefore, questions were altered to fit the Tribal Journeys group environment in place of school culture. Instead of focusing on the school environment, questions were phrased to apply to the canoe family (e.g., “Teachers generally treat students with respect and fairness” became “Staff/leaders generally treat participants with respect and fairness”). Two questions (12 and 17) were dropped from the original measure because they did not fit the Tribal Journeys context. The scale has been adapted to the youth sports team context in the past and found to have adequate psychometric properties (internal consistency $\alpha = .86$) (Rutten, Stams, Biesta, Schuengel, Dirks, & Hoeksma, 2006) .

Qualitative Interviews

A collective case study approach was the specific qualitative methodology used in this study, where several cases were examined to address a specific phenomena (Stake, 2000). The individual experiences of the youth and adults of this study were examined collectively to illuminate the Tribal Journeys experience.

The key informant interviews suggested that qualitative interviews be included in this study to give the youth an opportunity to share their experiences in their own words. Six questions focusing on the youth expectations of the Journey were drafted for the baseline

interview with youth participants, and nine for the follow up interview after the Journey was complete. The qualitative interview questions are listed in Appendix A.

Questions were also created for the parent or guardian of the youth because one of the key informants suggested that speaking with parents might be an effective way to solicit *outside* perspectives of the youth's experience of the Journey. All questions for youth and parent or guardians (Appendix A and E) were based on the three themes that were identified from the key informant interviews, namely: learning about the self on a personal and cultural level, having a positive life experience, and participating in a traditional activity.

Procedure

Participant recruitment: Recruitment followed a convenience sampling approach (Quinn Patton, 2012). The researcher recruited participants among the three target groups (listed above). The community research partners (Megan Clarkson and Kathy Brown) distributed an "Invitation to Participate" letter (Appendix B) to all youth who were involved with their canoe families for the 2011 Tribal Journey. This letter asked the youth to share the information sheet with their parent or guardian - both to inform the parent if the youth was interested in participating and to recruit parents or guardians as participants. Youth and parents or guardians were asked to contact me directly if they were interested in participating.

Informed consent: The informed consent letter (Appendices C & D) was introduced and reviewed for each participant. If the participant was in agreement, he or she, along with the researcher signed it. The original copy of this was retained by the researcher, and a copy was given to the participant. Both youth and adult participants were reminded that

they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without explanation or consequence. Each interview was recorded with a digital voice recorder and later transcribed verbatim.

Data collection: Standardized questionnaires were compiled into a single questionnaire survey and collected electronically using web-based iSurvey software on an iPad (see Appendix E for the complete survey) these included: The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (Phinney, 1992), Dimensions of Well Being (Ryff & Keyes, 1995), and an adapted School Culture Scale (Higgins-D'Alessandro & Sath, 1997). Participants were also invited to complete an individual interview (Appendix A). Parents and guardians were asked only the qualitative questions noted in Appendix A.

Interview and survey procedure: My research apprentice, Jessica Brown and I attended a preparation camp day with the youth of VNFC to get to know them, and become a familiar face. I also spent time with the Nala Winds canoe family prior to beginning the interviews. Pre-Journey interviews and surveys with youth participants and their parents or guardians took place the day before the Journey, or in the first few days of the Journey, as time allowed. Interviews and surveys were conducted in a private location. Post-Journey interviews and surveys with youth participants and their parents or guardians took place in Swinomish, Washington, USA, which was the final destination Tribal Journeys 2011. Participants were told the pre- and post- surveys would take 10 minutes for each session (20 minutes total). For the interview, participants were told to expect the sessions to take 30 to 60 minutes.

Scoring and Analysis of Questionnaire Data

The data from the three questionnaire measures were subjected to three separate statistical analyses. First, the correlation matrix for the scores on the three measures was examined for mean scores gathered at both Pre- and Post-test. Second, reliability coefficients (Chronbach's alpha) were calculated for the scales and subscales at both Pre- and Post-test. Finally, paired samples *t*-tests were conducted to compare the mean scores on the measures gathered at Pre- and Post-test. All statistical tests were performed using SPSS software.

The Ryff Scales of Psychological Well-being (1989) items were scored by calculating Pre- and Post-test total mean scores and mean scores for each of the six sub-scales. To begin, questions 41-94 on the iSurvey were extracted and re-ordered to match the original order of the Ryff measure. For example the Autonomy subscale, questions 36, 42, 48, 54, 60, 66, 72, 78, and 84 on the iSurvey were grouped together for analysis. Questions were re-coded so that all are positively ordered, and a total mean was recorded for each subscale as well as a final overall mean score. The School Culture Scale (Higgins-D'Alessandro & Sath, 1997) contains no subscales and thus a mean total for this scale from Pre- and Post-test was calculated. The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (Phinney, 1992) was scored to produce an overall mean score as well as scores for the two subscales.

Coding and Analysis of Interview Data

Qualitative interviews were analyzed using a content and thematic method (Gordon-Finlayson, 2010). All interviews were transcribed into the F4 transcription software program (Dresing & Pehl, 2005). The 21 pre-Journey interviews were grouped

separately from the 21 post-Journey interviews for analysis. The content analysis was organized with ATLAS.ti qualitative analysis software. Coding began with “open coding”, which initially targets large sections of text identify major themes (Gordon-Finlayson, 2010) (e.g. an entire participants’ transcription would be read through to identify major themes). The second phase of coding involved sorting the open codes into “axial codes,” which groups categories that are similar. These axial codes were then organized around the interview questions and assigned into one of three sections (expectations, reflections, or wisdom). Finally, each section’s themes were divided into the five dimensions of health (social, emotional, cultural, physical, or mental) where appropriate. Because of the emphasis placed on holistic meanings of health in Aboriginal cultures, presenting the findings according to these five dimensions was selected as a means of depicting this understanding. The end goal of the coding was to reveal the common threads among the participants and organize the quotations so they could be presented in a meaningful way.

Chapter 6 – Qualitative Findings

Qualitative Findings

Analysis of the 42 interviews resulted in themes that have been organized into three sections that represent the actual chronology of the Tribal Journey in the context of: expectations, reflections, and wisdom. This manner of organizing the themes into these three sections was chosen in order to illustrate how the participants experienced the journey. Within each of these three sections, the major themes have been grouped into five specific dimensions that represent a holistic conceptualization of health: cultural (which includes the spiritual dimension), social, physical, emotional, and mental. This framework reflects the multi-dimensionality and interconnectedness of Aboriginal philosophies described in the Introduction. There are overlaps between these dimensions of health, and in some cases quotations were not found for all dimensions in all three of the major sections. Participant quotes are included as illustrations; each quote is identified by a participant number and location within the transcript.

Expectations

In this section, I have summarized the youths' interview responses related to the expectations they had before beginning the Journey. As many of the participants had previously participated in Tribal Journeys, some of these past experiences are also referenced in their comments about their expectations for the current Journey. Comments associated with culture are presented first, followed by the social, physical, emotional, and mental dimensions.

Cultural

Within this dimension of health, the sub-dimensions related to youths' cultural expectations include Aboriginal or Indigenous: Cultural Sharing, Fostering a Deeper Connection to one's own Culture, Participating in a Positive Cultural Revitalization Experience, Experiencing a Sense of Belonging and Connectedness, as well as Spiritual Elements.

For some of these youth, Cultural Sharing was conceptualized as learning about and sharing culture during the events and activities of Tribal Journeys. Some youth reported that they were looking forward to teaching others about, as well as participating in, their cultural dances and songs: "you get to do your dances to a whole bunch of different tribes. It's just...awesome" (P8, 33:34)². Youth also noted looking forward to learning and watching the dances and songs of the other nations on the Journey: "I'm just really looking forward to meeting new people. Finding new friends and get to know other songs" (P13, 90:91).

At the end of each day of paddling, when the canoes were welcomed into the host community for the night, everyone participated in what is known as "protocol". These protocols reflect traditional practices undertaken when members of one nation wished to visit a community that also wished to welcome them (i.e. songs and dances from each nation would be presented as a means of honouring each other) (Y.K. Brown, personal communication, July 15, 2011). This continues to be the practice of all the canoe families and host nations on Tribal Journeys, and was a much- anticipated event among

² This notation system indicates which participant provided quote (Participant ID), and the line(s) in the transcription the quote is taken from. For example, P8, 33:34, is from Participant 8, lines 33 to 34 of that participant's transcript.

participants, as many youth simply referenced “protocol” as something to which they were looking forward to. One youth summed up her expectations as “dancing and the cultural sharing. I really like doing that stuff” (P 9, 9:10).

Fostering a Deeper Connection to one’s own Culture emerged as another expectation among the youth participants, who discussed how being so immersed in *culture* on Tribal Journeys would enhance the personal connection to their own First Nations ancestry. One young man who had participated in the Journey previously, recounted how he was impressed he was on the final landing day:

It was 90 canoes! First Nations canoes with thousands of people along the beach. First Nation people PROUD to be who they are, and proud to be where we are today...and to see these strong, beautiful First Nations people celebrating their culture thousands and thousands of years on this continent...it was just beautiful. (P2, 95:116)

The youth also expected to be inspired by paddling their traditional canoes, wearing regalia, singing and dancing their Nation’s songs, and practicing the protocol of their ancestors, all of which would help them to develop pride in their ethnicity: “[J]ust being there seeing everyone in their own traditional ways and getting to meet them when we are allowed on land,...it’s just amazing how we can all come together” (P6, 36:37).

Among the youth who had been on the Journey in the past, some reported expecting to learn more about themselves and what it means to be a First Nations person as a result of practicing their culture on a daily basis. “right now I don’t really know that much songs.

Like, I know songs, but it's kind of hard to memorize them at the moment 'cause I don't really spend all day, everyday practicing them" (P13, 91:94).

Participants reported looking forward to Participating in a Positive Cultural Revitalization experience. Tribal Journeys involves tracing the path that Coastal First Nation peoples have paddled since time immemorial. Being in the canoes, paddling these same routes, is seen as an act of cultural revitalization. Youth reported expecting that they would have a chance to learn more about themselves as a First Nations person during Tribal Journeys. One young woman simply stated she was looking forward to "finding something inside me that is hidden under a shell" (P7, 39:40). More specifically, a young man who had been on the Journey in the past also referenced his experience of seeing this occur:

[W]hat I look forward to is seeing that sense of pride, seeing my first cousin, take off his shirt—put up his paddle stand in front of the canoe, putting out his chest and saying 'We are Heiltsuk' and seeing that, and knowing his background, and knowing what he has gone through, and be immersed in this cultural revitalization that is happening, that's what makes you say 'WOAH'! (P2, 120:129)

As a result of being involved with this Cultural Revitalization some youth anticipated experiencing a Sense of Belonging and Connectedness. Each day, when the canoes landed paddlers would be met by the host community, as well as by others (both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) who were keen to see the events unfold. Participants reported expecting to feel overwhelmed by the size of the crowds that would be gathering

to celebrate their Journey and First Nations culture in a positive way: “I think it’s gonna be overwhelming and a bit you know, touching to see everybody ashore welcoming you and you know, dancing and singing and you know, a big celebration” (P7, 45-47).

The youths’ expectations related to culture also encompassed the Spiritual realm. Their discourse reflected a connection with something sacred that was connected to their time paddling on the water. They anticipated that being on the water would give them a sense of peace and calmness. One young woman envisioned this as a time to be alone with her thoughts, and also a time to sort out what was on her mind by connecting with the water: “You’re just kind of alone with your thoughts... like everyone says if you have a problem you can just paddle. Just paddle and paddle and the ocean will fix it and nature’s good energy and good medicine”(P9, 40:43). Another youth acknowledged that tracing the path that her ancestors once paddled would be an opportunity to connect with those ancestors:

Every time I’m out on that canoe I just, you know - every stroke, it reminds me of how our ancestors used to travel and we’re keeping this tradition going for so many years and in different communities they’re accepting us (P18, 45:48).

Social

The social aspects of Tribal Journeys are a major component of the journey. Youth are part of a canoe family for the Journey, as well as part of a community of other First Nations people who are travelling with them. Within this dimension of health, the sub-dimensions related to youths’ social expectations include: New Friends, Canoe Family Bonding, and Group Challenges.

Many of the youth interviewed reported looking forward to meeting New Friends during their time on the Journey. Over 100 canoes arrived at the final destination for this Tribal Journey, and each of these canoes held an average of 10 people. The magnitude of this event is overwhelming, with over 2000 participants (including support crews). This sizable event presents many opportunities for youth to make new friends from various age groups, nations, and tribes. The interviews revealed that the youth were also looking forward to learning about cultural traditions from their new acquaintances: “I’m looking forward to seeing the friends that I’ve made, you know the Elders that I see, and making new friends...you know? Networking, seeing and meeting different people and being exposed to different culture and different protocols” (P2, 135:141).

Another social expectation is the Bonding that was expected to occur between canoe family members. Youth reported looking forward to getting to know the other people in their canoe better, and planning to lean on their teammates when times were challenging on the ocean. One experienced participant expected the energy of the group to be motivating:

I looked forward to the great energy in the morning and it was like, so beautiful out and like everything is just so amazing and when it gets like, rough out the water – like, we all have each other and it just seems like it’s gonna be OK (P19, 41:47).

Although many of the youth were looking forward to the positive social aspects of the Journey, a few of them also remarked on the Challenges involved. Participants anticipated having to learn patience and trust to get along with their canoe family members during the Journey. As you can see from the following quote, working with

others who were not pulling their own weight or taking the Journey seriously was a lesson in patience, “Putting up with people that don’t really necessarily want to be on the canoe and that kind of just came for shits and giggles and... you know, just having to deal with that kind of stuff” (P 9,82:85).

In addition, paddling in the open ocean where safety must be constantly monitored requires trust amongst the group members. This was another challenge for the group that was referenced in the interviews: “For me personally, it’s like kind of getting along with other people ... ‘cause I do have like kind of have a little bit of trust issues” (P 14, 57:60).

Physical

Comments related to the physical aspects of Tribal Journeys were commonly referenced when the youth were asked about the upcoming paddle. Participants’ remarks touched on both the good and challenging parts of participating in an ocean canoe journey. Findings related to youths’ physical expectations include: Improving Physical Ability and On the Water Challenges.

Some youth expected to improve their own Physical Ability on the Journey. By spending day after day on the water, one young woman reported that she hoped to increase her muscles and get a tan: “Uh, just having fun, soaking up some sun...gaining some muscle... *(laughing)*” (P1, 23:24). However, the challenges of such a journey were much more frequently reported in the interviews. Participants noted physical challenges personally, within the group, and with the environment.

On a personal level, most youth expected to be physically pushed to the limit with sore muscles and long hours pulling the canoe through the water. This is depicted in the

following quote: “When we are like, halfway through the channel and you think you’re not close, but people say you’re not far, and you’re just sore, and it’s hot...and - yeah. And it’s very challenging” (P1, 47:49).

If one group member is new to paddling or is a weak paddler, this most definitely is felt by the group. In a 30 foot canoe, everyone needs to be in sync and pulling strong to make progress on the water. The youth commented that they were expecting to have to cover for the people in their group who could not contribute as much as others.

Just the long days and like with people who haven’t really pulled before like especially if ...like they don’t know how long the days are gonna be and they get really tired. It’s gonna be really hard on us ‘cause we’ll have to pull their weight sometimes (P10, 62:64).

The youths’ physical struggles were expected to lead to interpersonal difficulties amongst the canoe family when times were especially challenging: “I say pulling for hours on end, and dealing with everyone’s crabbiness once we hit that point... (*laughing*)” (P6, 51:52). However, one youth referenced her past experience of the canoe family being able to help each other through these challenging physical times:

The group is just really like, getting out there all together and just like maintaining that really good atmosphere and just being able to...work together and just, you know - push your hardest and paddle harder ‘til you reach the end of the journey (P14, 49:53).

The youths’ expectations related to the physical realm also included the physical environment. Rough weather, paddling against the current, and being in the rain were all

expected challenges. This youth highlights the current as a challenge of the Journey: “And then paddling, like, that’s the next hardest thing ‘cause sometimes we might not catch the current at the right time and we might be going against it, instead of with it” (P9, 107:109).

Emotional

The findings of this section of “Expectations” include those that touched on participants’ emotions and feelings. The sub-dimensions in this section relate to: Cultural Activities, Hesitations, and Positive Lifestyle Factors.

The youth expressed excitement about the upcoming cultural celebrations that are a part of Tribal Journeys. Specifically, the youth reported positive, almost elated, emotions about the upcoming arrival on the shores of Swinomish Indian Reservation on the final day of the Journey. The words they used to express this elation ranged from “pure joy,” and “a touching spectacle,” to “overwhelming” and “exhilarating.”

The final landing day of the canoes is also the beginning of a full week of cultural celebrations. This begins with each canoe asking to come ashore and then being welcomed by the host nation. The following quote summarizes the emotions that were reflected in the interviews regarding the expectations of the final arrival: “I think it’s gonna be overwhelming and a bit you know, touching to see everybody ashore welcoming you and you know, dancing and singing and you know, a big celebration” (P7, 45:48).

Although there was a strong response of excitement about the upcoming Journey and arrival at the end of the paddle, there were also some Hesitations about the experience

expressed by the youth. Missing one's family and being nervous about the physical challenge were two of these types of infrequent comments.

Positive Lifestyle Factors encompasses responses from the youth about experiencing positive emotions as a result of the activities of the Journey. When asked what they were most looking forward to about the Journey and being on the water, many youth responded "having fun." Furthermore, youth noted that they expected to feel positive emotions upon their arrival on the shores of Swinomish; this was most often expressed as thinking it would "feel pretty good". One youth commented that she/he expected to feel a sense of accomplishment when they finally arrived:

I think it will be really, like, achieving for myself personally, like knowing that I got out there and I did that and like, I pulled myself up to the challenge and I conquered it is really like, a really good feeling for me (P14, 30:34).

All of these responses from the youth participants point to indications of a positive lifestyle, or factors which indicate one is living a healthy lifestyle.

Note: No comments were identified under the Mental dimension in this Expectations section, although there may be comments in other dimensions that could cross over.

Reflections

This section includes the reflections of what the youth experienced on the Journey. The findings presented in this section were identified from the interviews conducted when all the youth had finished the paddling portion of Tribal Journeys 2011. The findings will

again be presented according to the five dimensions of health beginning with culturally related comments.

Cultural

The findings related to the youths' cultural reflections are organized under the following sub-dimensions: Lessons from Elders, Protocol, Practicing Culture, and Cultural Lifestyle.

Some youth expressed an appreciation for the opportunity to learn from Elders on the Journey. Canoe families often travel with an Elder, and there are many individuals who are considered Elders present during all Tribal Journeys activities. One youth recalls a memory where she was honoured to have heard a teaching from an Elder:

We were at our soft landing. There was about twelve canoes there and this elder stood up from, I'm not too sure where she was from but she stood up and, you know, she gave us advice. Um, not to think about the pain—every paddle, just let the pain go. Every stroke—it was just amazing to hear, you know, that type of advice. It was just amazing (P29, 162:167).

She continued to describe what this talk meant to her:

It helped a lot, you know it like, gave me strength to keep going instead of just giving up, 'cause at one point I felt like I was just going to give up and stop. But, I put those words back in my head and kept paddling, kept going (P29, 175:178).

Along with the comments about learning from Elders, youth also referenced the Protocol (cultural sharing) time as another major highlight from the Journey. The enjoyment of participating in cultural rituals was commonly referenced by the youth; as one participant detailed the highlight of her Journey: “just how everyone danced and all the guys sang. And like all the people that got into our dancing” (P38,12:13). Another example of a highlight from the Journey, being given a cultural gift during protocol, was also noted: “I would say receiving this- we got, we received a new song in protocol that the Swinomish tribe said we can use on the Tribal Journeys” (P28,4:6).

The theme of Practicing Culture was conceptualized by several of the youth as having the opportunity to speak their language and find their own voice. When the canoes come into the shores of another Nation or Tribe’s territory, they request permission to come ashore in their traditional language. Youth would take turns standing up in their canoes and speaking their language, as one participant recalls: “the other highlight had to have been, me asking permission to come onto Lopez Island (P29, 19:20). Singing their Nation’s songs on a daily basis helped the youth become more familiar with them, “Well, the first day I think I was just...whispering the songs along with the singers and give me a few more...times to actually try to sing with them I think now I can sing two full songs” (P41,46:48).

After their experience with Tribal Journeys, the youth revealed a desire to continue living their culture more often, as one participant summarizes, “It’s amazing. Um...makes me like, want to move back to Bella Bella just like, to learn my culture and share it with everybody. ‘Cause it’s a really amazing thing” (P26,73:75). Furthermore, one youth detailed her new understanding of what it means to live as an Indigenous person:

I learned that a lot of people have cried for where they come from. I learned that you shouldn't be embarrassed or put down by certain things that certain people have to say about Indigenous people and stuff like that like before I was... around a lot of people that criticized Indigenous people and...at most points like I'd be around some of my friends that didn't know that I was Indigenous and they'd be talking about how rowdy most of them are and stuff like that. Being here it's just like you see how strong people are and that their energy that they give off give you strength as well and it's just awesome to see all these people that show so much pride in where they come from (P25,96:104).

Social

The social aspect of Tribal Journeys was highly pertinent to the youth's experience, as evidenced through their interview responses. Reflections of the social nature include: Group Strength, Friendships, Communication Skills, and Leadership.

Within the canoe families the bonding that occurred amongst the youth was referenced as a highlight of the Journey. As one youth recounted, spending so much time together enhanced the group cohesion in their canoe: "in our canoe family everyone's like – we're all together so much and there's – we're always singing sometime or doing our cheer or we're always talking or telling stories when we're canoeing" (P30, 112:114). The youth reported that throughout the Journey, their canoe families learned that working together was key to paddling their traditional canoes. Specifically, "you can't really do it by yourself. You have to have the backbone and the support and just, everybody around you,

like, you can't pull a canoe of eight people just by yourself" (P37, 111:113). The canoe family was also a source of inspiration for the other youth in the group. One youth highlights how she got physical strength from the social influences of the canoe family:

Paddlin' at the beginning I didn't think I was gonna be able to pull through but I pushed myself and everybody in my canoe family pushed me as well. They didn't let you feel like you're like helpless or useless they literally pushed you and gave you motivation to keep pulling and keep pushing yourself (P25, 47:52).

New Friendships were commonly referenced in the interview at the end of the Journey. Youth reflected on their pleasure in being able to strengthen their existing friendships on the Journey. One youth spoke of her new relationship with a peer from home, "new friends from Bella Bella too that I didn't really know, but now know" (P26, 18:19). During the week of celebration in Swinomish, socializing is a daily activity. Making new friends was a highlight for many of these youth, as detailed in this response: "I think it would be the people, 'cause there's like so many new faces so you get to – you get to make a lot of new friends" (P27, 16:17). From these new friendships, two youth pointed out the cultural lessons that came from making new friends. As an example of a common occurrence, this youth describes meeting family he didn't know he had:

'cause I'm from Cowichan...I got to go dance with them. And I met some more cousins and everything and... like we all went up there and we did dance... and a guy named Dwayne? Apparently he's my cousin. I just met him and he showed me how to do some dances too, so I learned a lot actually (P30, 127:131)

Some youth also reflected on the Communication and Leadership skills they learned while working as a team on Tribal Journeys. In fact, Communication Skills were referenced as one of the lessons learned on the Journey: “as the Journey goes on, we all start to cope and talk to each other and learn how to, work with each other” (P35, 220:221). For a few participants, a growing awareness of individual Leadership Skills also emerged. During the challenging times with the group, this youth learned he could help others, “I really learned how much of a leader I am... a lot of my peers were telling me if I weren’t on this Journey they said – told me their selves – that they wouldn’t have been able to pull through” (P35, 256:263).

Physical

Findings related to the youth’s reflections on the physical aspects of participating in Tribal Journeys were in reference to the Physical Challenges they had endured. Many youth noted how tired they were from the long paddles, “There was long pulls that we had that you know after a while your body gets tired and you’re exhausted” (P32,46:50). Being challenged by the power of the ocean is an inevitable component of participating in the canoe journey. One youth summarizes his enjoyment of being in a challenging situation with the ocean current:

The highlight of my journey was when we were pulling through the narrows just before Victoria and when we were going through the narrows the tide and the wind just got so heavy and so strong it was just pushing our bow to the right... even though we were pulling as hard as we can, but the wind and the rapids were just too strong ... It was my first time experiencing something like that

...really being overpowered by mother nature is just...quite the experience (P35, 4-42).

Emotional

Emotions ran high for many youth during the Journey. The comments in this section illustrate what they have experienced emotionally throughout the Journey. The sub-dimensions related to the youths' emotional reflections included: Canoe Frustrations, Patience, Relaxing Feeling, and Personal Growth.

For some youth, the Frustrations they experienced while in their canoe was commonly detailed as an emotional challenge of the Journey.

There was long pulls that we had that you know after a while your body gets tired and you're exhausted and you're really vulnerable to a lot of things which...kinda ya there was times when we have all had you know kinda moody moments where we just needed to take a break and step back and kinda take a breath (P32, 46:50).

However, despite these emotional challenges, some youth also discussed the Patience they learned during their long days out on the ocean. By travelling at the pace of the canoe everyday, one youth explains how he learned to be patient as they paddled towards their destination: "It taught to me to be very careful on the water, and the pace is...patience. It teaches you patience on the water like I think that was one of the big keys being out on the water is the patience" (P25, 76:78). Patience was also apparent in comments about working with the group, "not everybody is the same (*laughing*), everybody requires something different" (P42, 103:104).

For these youth, the Relaxing Feeling of being near the ocean was another reflection they made after the Journey. One young man reflected on his upbringing near the water: “It’s really peaceful. I grew up in Bella Bella until I was sixteen, really close by the water and it just calms me down hearing the sounds of the waves and the ocean beach and it’s - there’s nothing like it” (P35, 84:87). Some youth reflected on the peacefulness they felt in their minds when they were on the water:

It’s amazing! I love it! That’s what I uh...I don’t know it’s - it just feels good. It’s slow, it’s - you can think. Everything’s moving so fast especially with me. My brain’s always just kinda going and I kinda have lots of energy sometimes and it’s hard for me to shut down at night. But when I’m out on the water it’s like...it’s serenity (P40, 34:37).

Along with many comments of positive emotions experience while on the Journey, such as: “happy” and “fun”; youth also discussed how paddling was a source of stress relief for them. One participant summarized:

I think a lot of it - it gives me a lot of stress relief. Uh it kinda helps me deal with stuff and cope with stuff that I had to deal with back in Victoria. It really did help me out a lot being on the water, being around people (P32, 33:35).

Through the emotional experiences of Tribal Journeys, Personal Growth in terms of emotional self-awareness was referenced in some of the interviews. One young woman highlights how her mood was improved from the Journey:

I'm a lot more happier now (*laughing*). I found that being around all this cultural stuff made the inner side of me come out and shine more brighter. And I feel more better about myself. I don't want this to end! (*laughing*) (P25, 14:17).

Mental

Findings related to youths' mental reflections of Tribal Journeys are those that involve a cognitive component, where the participant has reported thinking, learning, or reflecting. Under this dimension of health the following sub-dimensions were identified: Learning Culture, Cultural Pride, and Personal Development. This is one dimension where the comments overlap with some of the other four dimensions.

When reflecting about what participants had learned on the Journey, the majority of the youth noted lessons about culture. Tribal Journeys is an intensive cultural immersion experience. Some youth said they had learned more about Aboriginal culture in general, "I didn't know a lot... and um, but like I live in a city and stuff so I'm not really used to like, all this so. But yeah I do appreciate it a lot more" (P27, 98:100). However, youth also referenced learning they gained about their own First Nation's culture that was completely new to them, or an opportunity to improve their elementary understanding. "I learned some of the songs. Some of the dances that everybody's known since they were children" (P39, 167:168). One young woman recounted getting to know her Heiltsuk culture more on the Journey:

Well, being in my canoe family, people from Bella Bella would talk about our history and our leaders talk about it and they tell stories about our ancestors. I learned like the stories behind our

songs and how they got there and what the meaning of the song was so...like, there's not much gatherings in Bella Bella like this where you just have cultural sharing so just to have that time with people from Bella Bella that know a lot about it was just awesome 'cause like they knew, they know so much the people that travelled with us and...I learned a lot about my culture that I never knew before and it's awesome (P25, 84:91).

Ethnic Pride was evident in the reflections from the youth as well, and was conceptualized in various ways from being inspired to feel more proud of being First Nations to feeling more proud about one's ancestral legacy. By being surrounded by so many people who are strong in their culture on Tribal Journeys, one youth reflected how her own Cultural Pride was inspired, "Just seeing people like so like just really into it. And I - and I kinda felt I wanna be like - I wanna be like them. I wanna be like...in my culture and everything" (P27, 105:107).

There was also inspiration reported from seeing others continuing the legacy of First Nations culture: "hearing all these songs and just singing just randomly. You know, it's good to see that everybody is keeping this culture going and...not giving up is cool" (P29,138:140). One young woman reflected on seeing her culture being portrayed in a positive light: "It makes me feel really good 'cause...like not too many First Nations people are proud and strong about where they come from" (P38, 52:53).

From the immersion in culture and the development of ethnic pride and cultural awareness, some youth referenced the changes they felt personally in the interviews. One youth reflected on how his time on the Journey made him contemplate a shift towards a

more healthy lifestyle: “Well, in the two weeks being on the journeys with all these people, it really kind of encourages me to like, slow down on my drinking” (P36, 130:133). Finally, one young woman summarizes how her time on the water helped her with some self-discovery:

Being out on the water it’s like you can hear yourself think, you can feel your—it’s like you can literally feel your thoughts like everything just..is so peaceful and like you’re paddling and...you just learn so much out there even when you’re not tryin’ to learn anything like I learned so much stuff being on this journey (P25,44:47).

Wisdom

At the end of the Journey, as youth thought about their experiences on Tribal Journeys they also had advice or wisdom to share with other youth who might be considering participating in future Journeys. This section details the suggestions and feedback the youth had for other youth, and will be presented in relation to the five dimensions of health perspective.

Cultural

Participants agreed that this experience provided youth with an opportunity to learn about Aboriginal or Indigenous culture. One young woman summarized how she would tell people that the Journey helps get you in touch with your culture, “I’m just going to tell them it’s an amazing experience and you get to meet a lot of new people and get in touch with your culture side” (P26, 166:168).

Tribal Journeys hosts many nations, tribes and Indigenous groups from as far away as Hawaii and Alaska. Therefore, there are many opportunities to learn from other Indigenous groups about their culture, as is described in the following quote:

I would say it's really... a place where you learn a lot about well not only your own culture like in some form but other people's culture and it's really interesting to learn about different tribes and like what their beliefs are... (P32, 145:148)

Social

When asked if they would recommend Tribal Journeys to their friends or other youth, the participants referenced two social aspects of the Journey. Having the opportunity to meet many new friends and build a social network was a commonly referenced aspect of the Journey that youth said they would share with prospective youth. Simply stated, "It's a really, really great time – you like, make a lot of new friends. It's a great experience" (P34, 220:220). Beyond friendships that develop during the Journey, one youth reported the social network of Indigenous people as something she would share with youth who are interested in future Tribal Journeys. "You get so much out of it! Like, there's so much opportunities that are here... And it's just awesome to see all these like Indigenous people around you. It's just awesome" (P25, 128:133).

Physical

The physically related wisdom youth shared during the interviews included: training for the Journey, fuelling the body, preparing gear, and the physical benefits of being a participant on Tribal Journeys. Youth recommended that future participants train

physically and learn to wake up early before the Journey begins. Most of all they recommended practicing paddling, as one youth summarizes: “Practice is the main thing I have to say. Because our canoe family—we practiced for a month and a half, like – twice a week...and it helped a lot” (P29, 250-253).

Every youth that paddles on Tribal Journeys quickly becomes aware of the fuel required for the body to continue the physical pace required. As such, youth suggested that future participants stay well hydrated and well fed. One youth highlighted the importance of food: “You really need to eat breakfast and... I’d tell them when they’re out on the canoe – make sure to pack a couple of snacks, put them in your pocket...” (P35, 409: 415).

The youth also recommended being prepared for the weather; specifically for the elements on the ocean and for camping. In particular, packing appropriate clothing and gear that will protect you from the elements was highlighted: “Bring a lot of clothes – and shorts and um, sun block” (P34, 252:253).

The physical challenges of Tribal Journeys were referenced when the youth were asked if they would recommend the Journey. “It’s an amazing experience and ...hard work. Hard work!” (P31, 139:140). However the benefit of getting physically stronger was also referenced, “It’s hard at first, but then you get stronger physically...emotionally, mentally – just – you just get stronger as a person” (P37, 144-146).

Mental

Findings within this mental dimension included: having a good experience, personal growth, and accomplishment. A number of youth cited the fun of Tribal Journeys as what they would tell their friends about their experience, but also the overall good experience

was noted as another reason they would recommend the Journey, “I would tell them it is a great experience that comes only once a year... you just gotta be there. You can’t watch it on like a movie or something. You gotta feel the energy” (P41, 111:113).

A few youth also talked about the time they had to think while on the Journey, and referenced the changes they hoped to make personally as a result of participating. One youth describes how he would suggest Tribal Journeys as a chance to turn your life around:

I would ask them to go on Tribal Journeys... so that it would change their life around... to give a second look at what you can do in life and you don’t always have to do all like, crime and everything (P33, 175: 180)

Finally, accomplishment was reported as a further example of why youth would recommend Tribal Journeys to a friend. After paddling a canoe day after day – working towards a final destination, one youth explained how this is a reason other youth should participate in the Journey, “I’d tell them to come, that it’d be a really fun experience, that ...they’d really enjoy like being at the celebration and like just feeling so accomplished after such a long paddle” (P38, 97:99).

Parent Perspective

Parents of the youth from the Nala Winds canoe family, who were available, were interviewed before and after their sons and daughters participated in Tribal Journeys. These interviews were conducted in order to record the parent’s perception of how their child might benefit from the Journey, as well as their reflections after the Journey.

Interview responses associated with culture are presented first, followed by social, physical, emotional, and mental responses. Interview responses from time points one and two are presented together.

Cultural

Before the Journey began, parents hoped that their youth would have a chance to get more in touch with their culture. One father hoped his daughter would experience enhanced identity as a First Nations person: “It’s quite an opportunity for people to grow. That’s why I wanted her to experience something like this, it’s spiritual, it’s cultural [I hope she] can go there and figure out who she is” (P4, 9:15). As a part of this identity development, there were also comments regarding learning about Aboriginal culture. Another parent hoped that her daughter would broaden her cultural experience: “experiencing the whole Tribal Journeys, the fact that she’ll be in a canoe, and meeting other nations... just the whole experience of doing it, from start to finish” (P5, 171:174).

Social

Interviews with parents also revealed social expectations and aspirations. Parents were hoping their child would build friendships during the paddle. One parent hoped his daughter would “meet new people just to experience you know, getting out of her comfort zone; she’s somewhat shy” (P4, 121:125).

After the Journey was completed, parents reported on the positive relationships their son or daughter had gained. The social aspects of being in a canoe family are one of the major components of the youth’s experience of Tribal Journeys. One parent commented

that this was essential to: “building that camaraderie and essentially being part of another family I think is really what made that big difference” P23, 18:20).

Physical

The physical challenge of Tribal Journeys was something parents hoped their children would appreciate about the experience. Confronting the physical challenge of a long ocean canoe journey was highlighted by one parent as a hope he had for his daughter: “I think she will take a lot away from it, not only who she is as a Heiltsuk person, but who she is personally...just for me it’s obvious pride too because she’s taking the challenge on” (P4, 73:80).

Furthermore, the opportunity to be involved in a healthy activity was referenced as one reason parents were happy that their youth was participating in the Journey: “It’s a healthy experience right? I know she’s not out there testing, trying drugs...she could be doing something much worse, and more negative, but this is a healthy experience” (P4, 169:174). When the youth completed the Journey to Swinomish, parents reported the physical improvements in their youth, “she’s in better shape for sure” (P23, 10:11), as well as diet: “the other thing we noticed was about her diet, like she hasn’t eaten any junk food” (P23, 24:25).

Emotional

During the interviews, parents reported that their youth were opening up with their emotions, and being proud of their accomplishments after the Journey. Parents said their sons and daughters were happy, and more open emotionally after they arrived on the

beach of Swinomish. One parent recalls when she first saw her daughter: “she really was vulnerable and she was tired and she really let her emotions be shown” (P22, 85:87).

Additionally, parents perceived a sense of accomplishment in their youth. When one parent went to the final landing of the canoes she remembers “you could see it in her face, you know with her smile, the pride said it all” (P23, 69:77).

Mental

Parents reported on the personal growth and appreciation their children gained during the Journey; as well, the opportunity for a new experience was referenced. During the initial interviews, parents hoped their children would learn independence, “I think this will be good for her growth, her esteem, it will help her... with identifying that she can do it on her own” (P5, 9:10). Another parent hoped her children, and all the youth participating in the Journey, would gain confidence:

gain a new sense of self, get some grounding, but also gain some self confidence and also find their place in this world, so that they're not dependant on others to lead them to guide them – but to give them faith in themselves (P21, 3:6)

This same parent also hoped the youth would learn to appreciate the natural world they would be travelling through during their time paddling. Specifically, she hoped they would:

gain a sense of awareness of land and water, and become natural stewards. And understand that there is other ways of living other than being dependant on computers, TV, i Phones, it's important to

take time to remove yourselves from that from that busyness, and
to stay in touch with nature (P21, 47:51)

After the Journey was complete, parents highlighted the personal developments they saw in their youth, including trust: “She’s given herself up to those that are around her and put her trust in those people to look after her” (P22, 6:7), and confidence. As a final comment one parent remarked on the positive experience his daughter had just experienced, “ I guess as parents you always hope that your children will try something new and different and ...uh have a good experience and I think she has” (P23, 144:147).

Chapter 7 – Questionnaire Measure Results

Paired samples t-tests were conducted to compare the mean scores from the Scales of Psychological Well-Being (Ryff, 1989), Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure (Phinney, 1992), and The School Culture Scale (Higgins-D'Alessandro & Sadh, 1997) taken at the beginning and at the end of the Tribal Journey experience (time points one and two).

Results are reported in Table 1 including the subscales of the Psychological Well-Being and Multigroup Ethnic Identity measures. No significant Pre-Post differences were found (all $p > 0.05$), although one statistical trend was observed for the MEIM ($p = 0.071$).

Table 2 reports the range of possible scores for each of the measures.

Table 1

Comparison of time point one and two mean scores

Variable	Time point	Time point	<i>t</i> -score	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i> -value
	one	two			
	Mean (SD)	Mean (SD)			
Psychological Well-Being	3.08 (.27)	3.05 (.37)	0.50	17	0.621
Autonomy	3.02 (.43)	3.09 (.45)	-1.29	17	0.213
Environmental Mastery	3.02 (.26)	3.04 (.40)	-0.39	17	0.701
Personal Growth	3.16 (.34)	3.04 (.49)	1.05	17	0.308
Positive Relations	3.20 (.30)	3.15 (.48)	0.48	17	0.636
Purpose in Life	2.95 (.42)	2.88 (.41)	0.75	17	0.460
Self-Acceptance	3.10 (.41)	3.08 (.47)	0.36	17	0.725
Multigroup Ethnic Identity	3.46 (.38)	3.56 (.40)	-1.92	17	0.071
Affirmation & Belonging	3.57 (.17)	3.61 (.10)	-0.70	6	0.51
Exploration	3.33 (.21)	3.48 (.17)	-2.07	5	0.93
School Culture	4.40 (.29)	4.26 (.44)	1.38	17	0.186

Table 2*Maximum and minimum scores for questionnaire measures*

Variable	# of items	Minimum	Maximum
Psychological Well-Being	54	1	4
Autonomy	9	1	4
Environmental Mastery	9	1	4
Personal Growth	9	1	4
Positive Relations	9	1	4
Purpose in Life	9	1	4
Self-Acceptance	9	1	4
Multigroup Ethnic Identity	12	1	4
Affirmation & Belonging	7	1	4
Exploration	5	1	4
School Culture	25	1	5

The internal consistency was examined for each of the three measures included in this study. Coefficients of reliability for the Purpose in Life subscale of the Well-being measures were below .7 at both time points one and two (see Table 3, below). In fact, at time point one, only the Autonomy and Self-acceptance subscales had alpha coefficients in the acceptable range. At time point two, however, all subscales (with the exception of Purpose in Life) showed acceptable levels of internal reliability. Interestingly, the alpha levels for the Purpose in Life subscale appear to be adversely affected by one item. When the item “I used to set goals for myself, but that now seems like a waste of time” is deleted, the alpha levels rise to .68 and .72 at time points one and two respectively.

Both subscales of the MEIM (Affirmation & Belonging, Exploration) and the School Culture Scale showed “acceptable” (.7 - .8) or “good” (.8 - .9) levels of internal reliability at both time points

Table 3*Reliability Statistics*

Variable	Number of items	Chronbach's Alpha	
		Time point one	Time point two
Psychological Well-Being			
Autonomy	9	.730	.793
Environmental Mastery	9	.386	.738
Personal Growth	9	.534	.742
Positive Relations	9	.443	.749
Purpose in Life	9	.608	.652
Self-Acceptance	9	.769	.788
Multigroup Ethnic Identity			
Affirmation & Belonging	7	.865	.847
Exploration	6	.732	.725
School Culture Scale	23	.780	.888

At time point one, only the MEIM and the Well-being measures are significantly correlated (see Table 4).

Table 4*Correlations among Measures at Time point one*

Measure	1	2	3
1. Psychological Well-Being	-		
2. Multigroup Ethnic Identity	0.59*(.01)	-	
3. School Culture Scale	-0.14 (.96)	0.35 (.16)	-

*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

At time point two, only the MEIM and School Culture Scale scores are significantly correlated, however, the correlation between the MEIM and the Well-Being measure represents a statistical trend (.054) as does the correlation between the Well-Being and the School Culture Scale (.056). In general the measures appear more strongly correlated at time point two (see Table 5).

Table 5

Correlations among Measures at Time point two

Measure	1	2	3
1. Psychological Well-Being	-		
2. Multigroup Ethnic Identity	0.46 (0.54)	-	
3. School Culture Scale	0.46 (0.56)	0.63 (0.01)*	-

*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Chapter 8 – Discussion

The goal of the current study was to investigate the mental health benefits of Tribal Journeys for Aboriginal youth participants. Although findings from the questionnaire instruments were all non-significant and did not support the quantitative components of the theoretical model (Figure 4), the qualitative findings did provide support for the aspects of the experience that were evaluated qualitatively. The following discussion will review the findings of the study with regard to the hypothesized relationships detailed in the theoretical model (Figure 4). Further, outcomes related to the results of the following four research objectives will be examined: (1) design an evaluation tool-kit to review the youth experience of Tribal Journeys, (2) pilot test the tool-kit, (3) explore the potential of Tribal Journeys as a mental health promotion initiative, and (4) document Aboriginal views about the role a connection to the land has in mental health promotion.

Theoretical Model

Qualitative elements.

The theoretical model hypothesized potential mechanisms and specific pathways of youth development that occurs on Tribal Journeys. Seven influences were proposed to be related to two outcomes: enhanced well-being and enhanced ethnic identity. Of the seven, four were evaluated qualitatively: being physically active, having a connection to cultural teachings, being surrounded by positive role models, and being immersed in a network of members of similar ethnicity.

Being physically active.

Themes identified from the qualitative interviews suggested that being physically active positively influenced the well-being of participants in this study. This connection between activity level and well-being has been substantiated previously in work by other scholars (Norris, Carroll, & Cochrane, 1992). Ryff's (1989) definition of psychological well-being is the presence of the following six factors: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relationships with others, purpose in life, and self - acceptance. Following this definition, the qualitative findings include comments connecting physical activity to a development in personal growth, self-acceptance, and positive relations with others.

Personal growth is described by Ryff (1989) as an individual's continued development. Being physically tired from paddling but learning how to cope with these circumstances and realizing that one is becoming physically and emotionally stronger from paddling are both examples of personal growth that the youth reported. Also, the feedback about having "time to think" while paddling was reported to be a valued opportunity for self-reflection.

Some youth discussed *realizations* they had after completing the daily paddles. They reflected on an expanded sense of self, now that they had accomplished a perceived challenge. This supports Ryff's (1989) definition of self acceptance: a positive attitude about one's self. Positive relations with others is another dimension of well-being found in the interview transcriptions; this dimension references the quality of relations with others. Some youth reported feeling motivated to keep paddling by the positive encouragement they received from their canoe family members. Despite being tired,

participants reported being able to push through because they were able to communicate and work together with their group. These stories of physical achievement demonstrate a link between being physically active and increasing psychological well-being.

Connection to cultural teachers.

Learning from cultural teachers is one of the most salient aspects of Tribal Journeys. The theoretical model suggested that having a connection with these teachers would enhance the ethnic identity of the youth. The qualitative interviews included comments that are in support of this aspect of the model. Many of the responses from the interviews were about cultural lessons the youth learned. The teachers of these lessons were varied, including: elders, other youth, canoe family leaders, and other roles models. Youth reported pleasure from learning the songs, dances, stories, and traditions of their Nation, similar to the findings of House, Stiffman and Brown (2006). One youth noted that there is more time to learn cultural lessons on the Journey than during cultural events at home where time to teach may be limited.

When the youth reflected on the cultural aspects of the Journey, there were many examples of having a connection to a cultural teacher. In the “reflections – cultural” section participants noted the lessons they had learned from an elder on the Journey as one of their highlights. A prominent example of this connection is when the youth participated in protocol. By the end of the Journey, the youth reported feeling more confident in singing and dancing because they had been taught how to do so and practiced repeatedly. Phinney and Rosenthal (1992) echo this importance of the individual’s surrounding on their opportunity to learn cultural practices.

Learning culture and participating in protocol are significant examples of opportunities for enhancing ethnic identity. Participants provided ample evidence of enhanced ethnic identity as a result of having a connection to cultural teachers. These qualitative findings support the research of Brown, et al. (2007) who found a positive correlation between participating in cultural activities and enhanced ethnic identity for a group of Native American youth (n= 21, mean age = 15.57).

Positive role models.

Exposure to hundreds of people who are strongly connected to their Indigenous culture is an inspiring component of the Tribal Journeys experience. For young people to see so many people who are proud to be who they are, and for this to be the reason for the community wide celebration, is a strong example of positive role modeling. Youth participants made several references to seeing other Indigenous people in a positive light, which helped them re-frame their own Aboriginal identity.

Furthermore, specific comments about wanting to continue living their culture at home are examples of the youth being positively influenced by the people present in Tribal Journeys. The importance of this cultural role model interaction offers support for the connection in the theoretical model between positive role models and enhanced ethnic identity. This finding is consistent with the literature on role models in the lives of Aboriginal youth (Crooks et al. 2009; Klinck, Cardinal, Edwards, Gibson, Bisanz, & Da Costa, 2005). As well, Purdie et al. (2000) cites role models to be one of the most positive influences on the identity development of an Aboriginal young person.

Immersed with others of similar ethnicity.

The magnitude of Tribal Journeys and the number of Indigenous people present in one concentrated area for the week of protocol and celebration is extraordinary. Comments from the youth illustrate their positive impressions about being in this environment.

Youth who had been on Tribal Journeys previously described their arrival at the final host territory as an overwhelming experience. Almost all youth who had previously been on the Journey described the arrival as a “powerful” and “amazing” experience.

As a non-Indigenous person who has experienced Tribal Journeys, I would like to add that, having never been in such a large gathering of Indigenous peoples, I was inspired and in awe of the rich cultural sharing. The youth in this study described their arrival at the destination and protocol week as one of great significance. This immersion in a network of other Indigenous people appeared to enhance their own identity as an Indigenous person. These findings support the work of other scholars who found that being with other people of Indigenous ancestry contributes to an enhanced ethnic identity (eg. Brown et al., 2007; Crooks et al., 2009; Lysne & Levy, 1997).

Questionnaire Measures

The remaining three components of the theoretical model (physical and emotional safety, perceived mattering/group cohesion, and connection to ancestral legacy) were assessed using questionnaire instruments (i.e., School Climate Scale, Psychological Well-Being Measure, and Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure, respectively). It was expected that the Tribal Journeys experience would foster these influences and that scores on the measures would increase from time point one to time point two. As noted in the Results section, however, no statistically significant increases in mean scores were observed. A

single statistical trend was observed for scores on the Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure ($p=.071$).

There are many potential reasons that this hypothesis was not supported. Due to the convenience sampling technique the sample size was small ($n=18$) which limited statistical power. The short time period between the two sampling time points, was also problematic. The initial research plan was to do the first data collection during the weeks leading up to the first day of Tribal Journeys. However, this was not possible due to time restrictions imposed by the sponsors of the Journey. For both canoe families involved in this study, participants were making decisions to join the Journey up until the first few days of paddling. As a result, some participants did their first survey and interview in the first few days after Tribal Journeys had begun. Also, several youth participants had been on the Journey before, thus, their “before” and “after” experiences may not have been as different as for “first timers”.

Participants may have consciously or unconsciously been trying to please the researcher—the cooperative participant effect (Kirk, 2009). Because I was living and working closely with the participants during the study, they may have reported what they thought to be favourable results at both time points. If this was the case, it could account for the high mean scores observed at both time points.

A common concern when doing research with Aboriginal peoples involving standardized measures is whether the measures are appropriate and culturally sensitive. Assessment tools to evaluate the well-being of Indigenous peoples, for example, have often been considered culturally inappropriate (Thomas, Cairney, Funthorpe, Paradies, Sayers, 2010). Although considerable effort was put into ensuring that the research

partners approved the selected assessment tools, and some have been used with an Indigenous population in previous studies (e.g., Schweigman et al., 2011), it is still possible that the measures used were not appropriate for these participants within the context of Tribal Journeys.

The questionnaire measures (administered during breaks in the Journey) may have seemed odd or out of place to the participants. Alternately, the time required to fill out the 89-item survey may have seemed too long for some. Anecdotally, after completing the survey, some youth reported that they felt some of the questions were “weird” (meaning unexpected), and that completion took a long time. These potential problems are not cultural in nature, however, some survey content may not have been optimally appropriate for these participants.

It is important to note that the scores on the questionnaire measures were quite high at both time points. This was particularly true of scores on the MEIM. In other studies using the MEIM with an Indigenous population, the mean scores ranged from $M = 3.0$, $SD = .63$ to $M = 3.11$, $SD = .55$ (Roberts et al., 1999; Schweigman et al., 2011). Table 1 illustrates the MEIM scores for the present study: $M = 3.46$, $SD = .38$ pre-test, and $M = 3.56$, $SD = .40$ post-test. These scores are considerably higher than those reported in other studies. Furthermore, Schweigman et al. (2011) comment in their article that they were encouraged by the strong MEIM scores. The reason the MEIM scores are even higher in the current study may be related to the way participants were selected. Some youth who elect to participate in Tribal Journeys are already very strong in their connection with their culture, and several youth had participated in previous journeys. Scores were similarly high on the School Culture Scale (4.40 out of 5.0 at time point one, 4.26 at time

point two) and, again, this could be a cohort effect for previous participants. These higher mean scores and low standard deviations left little room for variability in youth responses from pre to post-test.

The correlations among the questionnaire measures at time points one and two reveal an interesting pattern. At time point one, a statistically significant positive correlation was observed between the measures of Well-Being and Ethnic Identity. This is perhaps not surprising, given previous studies with Indigenous youth that have reported that ethnic identity is correlated with high self-esteem, coping, and optimism (Roberts, et al., 1999; Schweigman et al., 2001). The lack of association between measures of ethnic identity (MEIM) and group cohesion (School Culture Scale) and well-being (Psychological Well-Being) is also to be expected at the start of the Tribal Journeys experience. That is, although participants in these canoe families were drawn from particular communities and so are likely familiar with one another, there is no reason to assume that individual-level measures of group cohesion, ethnic identity, and well-being should strongly be inter-correlated.

At time point two, however, a very different pattern emerged. The three measures were more highly inter-correlated. While the only statistically significant relationship was between the measures of well-being and group cohesion, the correlations among the other measures represent a statistical trend (see Table 5). This pattern suggests that well-being is potentially influenced by both the culture within a group, and ethnic identity. As noted in the time point one discussion, other studies have described the connection between well-being and ethnic identity. For the current study this is the one correlation that was consistent at both time points.

The trend towards significance between group cohesion and well-being may be explained by the importance the participants of the study place on their peer group and how this could influence individual well-being. The pattern the correlations observed at time point two provides tentative support for the conclusion that this evaluation tool kit is on the right track for investigating the phenomena that occurs for the youth participants of Tribal Journeys.

A similar pattern of mixed results was observed when the internal consistency of the measures and subscales were examined. At both time points, the School Culture measure and the two subscales of the Ethnic Identity measure showed alpha levels in the “acceptable” and “good” range. At time point one, however, only the Autonomy and Self-Acceptance subscales of the Well-Being measure displayed alpha levels in the “acceptable” range. At time point two, all subscales with the exception of Purpose in Life displayed “acceptable” alpha levels. As noted in the Results section, a single item in that subscale (“I used to set goals for myself, but that now seems like a waste of time”) appears to be responsible for the low coefficients of reliability. When this item is deleted, Chronbach’s alpha at Post-test rises to .721 (“acceptable”). It may be that this particular item is inappropriate for this age group, rather than this cultural group.

These results suggest that, while the Ethnic Identity and School Culture measures are internally consistent at both points of measurement, the Well-Being measure is reliable only at time point two. This finding is curious given that no significant changes in mean scores were observed. It is possible that the emphasis during Tribal Journeys on personal well-being and responsibility may have heightened the participant’s sensitivity to their

own sense of well-being and led them to consider their responses at time point two more carefully than they had at time point one.

In terms of an evaluation tool kit, one must ask if these three measures provide useful data. It is clear that the participants were “primed” because of the cultural immersion environment they were in at the time of testing. A baseline survey completed much earlier than time point one in this study would help remedy this concern but may not be possible within the context of a research project. A university-based researcher can only approach potential participants once they have signed up for Tribal Journeys. Because those selected for Tribal Journeys are nominated and vetted by communities and sponsoring canoe families, the final pool of participants may not necessarily be representative of the larger target population of First Nations youth. Communities and canoe families, however, would have the ability to administer the measures as a screening device—before participants know they have been chosen and thus before any ‘cultural priming’ effect could work to inflate scores on these measures. Such testing options are open to communities and sponsoring canoe families but closed to university-based researchers. However, the identification and development of measures that are deemed appropriate for this population and this type of intense experience would be beneficial.

Summary

The selected theoretical model was modestly successful in providing a framework from which to analyse the study’s findings. Although the quantitative components of the model were not supported in the present study, other measures may assist in discovering supportive evidence. A larger sample may also provide support for the model.

The qualitative interviews illuminated many components of the Tribal Journeys experience. The four components of the theoretical model that were to be investigated with the interviews all were supported. However, the model is only one aspect of the current study that was investigated.

Design and Pilot Test Evaluation Tool-kit

The creation of the evaluation tool-kit was the first goal of the present study. This tool-kit was created to learn more about mental health promotion and wilderness activities for Aboriginal youth, with particular emphasis on the mental health aspects of Tribal Journeys. The design process entailed a cyclical process, which began with a discussion with my research partners about what was important and what should be measured; followed by suggestions about how to go about particular lines of inquiry. This process continued until we agreed upon a final version of the tool-kit. The challenging aspect of doing community based research is that the project is the top priority at the time for the researcher, while community partners had many other priorities and therefore it was not always easy for us to meet and discuss the project.

With the pilot test of the tool-kit completed, there are now changes and improvements that I would like to make before it is used again. One change to consider would be to seek different measures that might be more appropriate for small groups with short test-retest time spans. Alternatively, perhaps the tool-kit could be used again with the intention of having a larger sample size and more time between testing occasions. For the qualitative interviews, a question that more specifically sought to elicit negative experiences of Tribal Journeys would enhance the evaluation aspect of the tool-kit.

Finally, the original intention of the tool-kit was for it to eventually be put in the hands of community members to enable them to carry out the evaluation on their own. In its present state, the tool-kit requires knowledge of basic statistics to analyze the quantitative data, and access to a qualitative analysis software package to manage the qualitative data. However, a user manual could be created to teach community members how to evaluate the data and the interviews could be coded without analysis software.

Tribal Journeys as a Mental Health Promotion Initiative

Seeking to contribute to the limited research available regarding mental health promotion for Aboriginal youth, the current study considered the suitability of Tribal Journeys as a mental health promotion initiative. Although this was not directly measured, either qualitatively or quantitatively, earlier in this paper the best practices detailed by Williams and Mumtaz (2007) were compared with the Tribal Journeys program. With respect to the several practices described by these author (eg. Focusing on the strengths within First Nation's culture, and learning personal agency) Tribal Journeys could be considered a promising mental health promotion program.

In the conclusions of the Williams and Mumtaz (2007) paper, their research found there is often perceived value in communities about mental health promotion programs, but also challenges in bringing enough capacity to the initiatives themselves. This is the case for Tribal Journeys, as many communities struggle to participate annually, often due to funding limitations. The interesting point here is that, as Williams and Mumtaz (2007) highlight, although community-based mental health promotion initiatives struggle financially, there is often no lack of community support. This was similarly experienced in the context of Tribal Journeys. If this study had posed a question to community

members such as: “do you think this program is beneficial for the mental health of the participants?” From my personal involvement, I would suggest that most individuals would not hesitate in stating their belief in the inherent value of the Journey.

Upon review of the qualitative findings, the youth themselves felt that their well-being, (a component of mental health) was positively impacted. Comments that were related to the “mental” dimension of health illustrated this development, such as engaging with culture, building pride in themselves and their Indigenous culture, and being on a path to self-discovery. These comments suggest Tribal Journeys may be a plausible path for mental health promotion, however they also offer support for an enhanced well-being.

Beyond demonstrating whether or not Tribal Journeys promotes mental health, this study is working toward the goal of bringing awareness to the immediate experience of well-being that participants encounter through the program. By aligning the evidence for Tribal Journeys as a mental health promotion initiative, this study illustrates the canoe journey as a promising program that is already in existence and is supporting the well-being of Aboriginal youth.

As the population of Aboriginal youth and young adults in Canada swells and current health inequities persist, there will be an immense need for mental health services, and mental health promotion programming (Statistics Canada, 2003). However, as Williams, and Mumtaz (2007) point out, mental health promotion is relevant to many areas beyond health. The health of a society (economically, socially, educationally) rests on the health of the individual. Given this wide span of mental health, there are potentially many cross-sectoral partnerships that could be built to bolster support for Tribal Journeys. A future area of inquiry could be to see what other community partners might be interested in

supporting youth development and participation in the annual Tribal Journeys. If community members can bring more capacity to Tribal Journeys, hopefully the outcome will be that more youth are able to participate and therefore more youth will be involved in a positive lifestyle activity. Presenting Tribal Journeys as a mental health promotion program is one approach that may contribute to enhancing its capacity.

Connection to the Land

The final line of inquiry for the current study was to consider the influence of having a connection with the land on mental health promotion. Given the historical connection Aboriginal peoples have with the land and sea (Assembly of First Nations, 2006), and the ongoing resurgence of cultural revitalization amongst Aboriginal peoples of Canada, their combination represents a unique opportunity for Aboriginal youth focused programming, as being in nature can be a captivating and therapeutic experience (Russell, 2004). Although it was not directly tested, the findings of this study offer some support for the view that living closely with nature presents youth with an opportunity for growth and personal reflection. Comments such as: “having time to think on the water”, and “feeling the mind slowing down during a paddle” illustrate the transformative power of the natural environment that was experienced in the current study.

For Aboriginal youth who have ancestral connections to the lands and seas of the Pacific North West, there is an added value that comes with spending time on the land of their ancestors. Some youth referenced this as being a “powerful” experience for them, as they traveled the routes that were used by their relatives so many generations ago. The importance of place impacting one’s sense of self is echoed by scholars such as Wilson (2003), and Kovach (2009). Furthermore, the positive influence of the land and sea on the

youth in this current study corresponds with the research of Greenwood & de Leeuw, (2007) who reference the land and environment as sources of life, culture, identity, and well-being for Aboriginal peoples.

Relation to Wilderness Therapy

Wilderness therapy programs were presented as programs that can succeed in combining the benefits of a wilderness experience with mental health promotion. The current study also considered the similarities between wilderness therapy programs and Tribal Journeys. As noted by Russell (2001), there are specific elements required for a program to be considered wilderness therapy. Some of these elements are present in the Tribal Journeys experience, such as an intense peer dynamic and experiencing a physical challenge. However, a context that fosters a therapeutic alliance is not a significant element of the Tribal Journeys experience.

In the western context, this alliance is critical to creating a medium of change for the individual. In the Aboriginal context, this may be more suitably phrased as “healing”. This raises the question: Is a healing experience in the Aboriginal context akin to a therapeutic one? Also, when we reflect on the mechanisms of change behind Tribal Journeys, we can ask: Is Tribal Journeys a healing program? Does it promote healing by fostering the connections between wellness and culture? What is clear from this study is that, while a wilderness therapy program focuses on the psychosocial development of its participants as they are immersed in a wilderness experience, Tribal Journeys is much more of a culturally immersive experience.

I began this research coming from my own lived experience in the field of wilderness therapy, thinking that the connection between nature and well-being would be the

primary area of focus. Instead, these initial conceptions were challenged, and after experiencing the intensive phenomena of Tribal Journeys I now see the cultural experience as the prominent pathway that leads to change and well-being for the youth participants.

Contribution to Broader Research Context

This study offers insight about a pathway that promotes positive mental health and well-being for Aboriginal youth. The cultural immersion experience of Tribal Journeys was revealed to be a major experience of the participants. The time spent participating in the cultural activities (i.e. dancing, ritual, and protocol) of the Journey, represent factors that were most prominent for the youth when they reflected on their experience. In fact, for these Aboriginal youth, it seems that the opportunity to be immersed in culture was the most salient part of the Journey. The youth were keen to learn more about their heritage, participate in their cultural traditions and share these new teachings with others. This is the element of Tribal Journeys appeared to most influence the youths' reported well-being. This is consistent with the research of Schweigman et al. (2001) and Roberts et al. (1999) in which a strong sense of one's culture has been shown to promote a sense of well-being.

This emphasis on the cultural connections would be valuable information for funders, policy makers and program developers. Although there is a lack of quantitative evidence for this being the pathway to change, this study suggests that having a cultural immersion experience can foster well-being. In addition, this paper contributes to an experiential understanding of this canoe journey.

In terms of community based methodology, the present study is an example of a collaborative community based approach (Israel et al., 1998). This may be valuable for other researchers who wish to review a study that integrates the research interests of a university researcher and the interests of two Aboriginal communities.

Limitations

As noted earlier in this section, there were several factors that limited the statistical power study. Although the sample size was sufficient for the qualitative analysis, it was one of the factors that contributed to the lack of statistical significance of the quantitative findings. Given that this was a community based research project, building relationships was an involved and intricate process. Within the time frame of the canoe journey, including a greater number of youth and parents in this study would have been very challenging. Some limitations were also noted with regard to the measures used.

The data collection time points are another limitation of this study's design. The initial plan was to carry out the first data collection sooner than it was gathered, however as indicated earlier in this section, there was not sufficient time to do so. Therefore, the time points resulted in being only two weeks apart, and sometimes less. If the youth had more time to reflect on their Journey, or were surveyed well before they began the Journey, the findings of this study may have been different.

Future Steps

The next step in this research is to create a community-based document to share the finding of this study with research partners. The qualitative findings and literature review

will hopefully be of interest to the community partners as they prepare to apply for funding for future Tribal Journeys.

I have developed a friendship and working relationship with Frank and Kathy Brown of the Nala Winds canoe family, and have received an invitation from them to continue developing this research project. If there is an opportunity to expand this study in future years, that time will be focused on refining and improving the tool-kit. The findings from the current study offer valuable insight that could be integrated into another version that would endeavour to be more appropriate.

Frank and Kathy have expressed an interest in developing their Tribal Journeys program to include a focus on long-term change for the youth. An extension of the current study could focus on this concept, and consider what would help the youth maintain the positive energy and spirit they gain on Tribal Journeys when they are back in their home communities.

Summary

This study was an example of a community based research project, carried out in partnership with two Aboriginal communities. The creation of the evaluation tool-kit and its pilot testing offer valuable insight into the experiences of the youth participants on Tribal Journeys.

Through my experience of being involved with Tribal Journeys 2011, and with the Nala Winds canoe family, I can say that being a participant in this three-week journey and celebration was one of the most profound experiences of my life. The immersion in Indigenous cultures was not something I had experienced before, and it gave me a unique perspective into this cultural event - about which I now feel extraordinarily privileged to

have been a part of. As an experienced youth worker, I would also say that Tribal Journeys reaches youth in a way that is challenging to do in most other contexts. Statistics aside, from my experience, this is an undeniably positive experience for Aboriginal youth.

One key finding that emerged from the research is that the youth are hungry for the kind of culturally immersive experience that is Tribal Journeys. The participants all reflected positively about the cultural aspects of the experience. Many also stated how this was an opportunity to get to know themselves better, explore their Aboriginal identity, and build friendships in a positive environment.

Mental health promotion for Aboriginal youth is a growing area of research and one that will become increasingly relevant as the population of Aboriginal youth increases in Canada. This study contributes important information to fostering mental health and well-being for Aboriginal youth in a culturally appropriate way, and contributes to the limited literature base that is available in this field.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Qualitative Interview Questions

Interview Questions

These are questions that will be used in one-on-one interviews with the youth participants of Tribal Journeys and their parents/guardians. These questions will act as a starting point for a conversation between the interviewer and the participant. The goal of these questions is to hear the story of what it's like to be involved in Tribal Journeys.

Questions For Youth:

BEFORE THE JOURNEY

- How did you get involved with Tribal Journeys?
- Are you looking forward to paddling every day and being on the water?
- What do you think it will be like to arrive on the beach in Swinomish?
- What are you most looking forward to on Tribal Journeys? Why?
- What do you think the most challenging part will be of the journey?
- What stands out for you from the time you spent training in the weeks leading up to Tribal Journeys? Were any of the activities especially important for you?

AFTER THE JOURNEY

- What is a highlight for you from Tribal Journeys?
 - What did it feel like to be so close to the water every day?
 - How was it moving only at the pace the canoe could be paddled?
 - Can you tell me a story about how you learned more about Aboriginal culture on Tribal Journeys?
 - Did you learn anything by being at Tribal Journeys with so many other Aboriginal people?
 - Do you have a good memory about learning traditional knowledge on Tribal Journeys that you could share?
 - Are there any lessons you learned from being part of a canoe family and achieving goals as a group?
 - Would you recommend Tribal Journeys to your friends or other youth? Why?
 - What would you tell someone to do to prepare to go on the journey?
-

Questions For Parents/Guardians:

BEFORE THE JOURNEY

- What do you hope your family member gets out of their time on Tribal Journeys?
- Why do you think it will be a good experience for your family member to go on Tribal Journeys?

AFTER THE JOURNEY

- How does your family member seem now that he/she has completed the journey?
- What was the first thing he/she said to you when he/she saw you?
- Is there a story he/she told you that stands out?

Appendix B: Invitation to Participate.



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Invitation to Participate

“Developing a Tool to Assess Aboriginal Youth Programs”

Hello,

My name is Tania Smethurst. I am a student at the University of Victoria and I am contacting you to inform you that I am doing a research study on Tribal Journeys. This Spring Jessica Brown began working with me on my research and introduced me to her Mother, Kathy Brown. Kathy suggested I include the canoes she is involved with in my study, and I was happy to expand the research to do so.

My research is about the youth experience of Tribal Journeys, with the end goal being to develop an assessment tool-kit that could be used by any program involving youth, or community participating in Tribal Journeys to evaluate their program. This assessment tool-kit will be useful to report to funders the difference Tribal Journeys makes in the lives of it's participants, and potentially help secure core funding for such programs for Aboriginal youth.

This summer I plan to pilot test this culturally relevant program efficacy measure with your Tribal Journeys canoe. I will be looking for youth from your canoe to participate in my study. I am also hoping to recruit some of the parents/guardians of youth who are participating in the study. Copies of the interview questions for youth and parents/guardians are attached. Participation in this study will include filling out a survey and completing a short interview before and after Tribal Journeys 2011.

If you are interested in volunteering to be involved with this study you can either contact me using the information below, or tell me in person when I join your practice paddles before the Journey. If you, or your parents/guardians have any questions or would like further information please don't hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Tania Smethurst, Graduate Student
Department of Psychology
University of Victoria
P: 250 - 686-8562
E: tanas@uvic.ca

Appendix C: Youth Informed Consent



University
of Victoria

Youth Participant Consent Form

Project Title:	Developing a Tool to Assess Aboriginal Youth Programs
Funded by:	Canadian Institutes of Health Research
Researcher:	Tania Smethurst, Graduate Student, Department of Psychology, University of Victoria, 250 -472-4631, tancias@uvic.ca
Supervisor:	Dr. Chris Lalonde, Department of Psychology, 250-721-7535, lalonde@uvic.ca
Co-investigators:	Megan Clarkson, Victoria Native Friendship Centre Kathy Brown, Heiltsuk First Nation
Research Assistant:	Jessica Brown, LE, NONET Student, University of Victoria

Purpose and Objectives of the Research:

This project will involve the development of a culturally relevant program efficacy measure that meets the needs of Aboriginal communities. By evaluating the youth experience of Tribal Journeys, I will investigate the notion that connection to the land has a positive impact on Aboriginal youth. In the end, I hope to build an assessment tool-kit that will be useful for evaluating any Aboriginal youth program. This evaluation tool-kit could be used to support the creation and maintenance of programs for Aboriginal youth.

This Research is Important because:

Though communities work hard to mount youth programs and are convinced of their value, few evaluation tools exist to help communities assess their programming and objectively measure success. The development of an efficacy measurement tool would help communities identify successful youth programs and advocate for ongoing program funding. In the academic context, this efficacy tool would be beneficial in understanding how research can support strength building with Aboriginal youth.

Participation:

- You have been selected to be included in this study because of your involvement with Tribal Journeys 2011.
- Participation in this project is entirely voluntary.
- Whether you choose to participate or not will have no effect on your involvement with Tribal Journeys, or how you will be treated in the program.
- Parents/guardians of youth who agree to participate will also be invited to take part in the study.

Procedures:

- This study will involve filling out a survey and doing an interview before and after Tribal Journeys. You can review the interview and questionnaire questions prior to giving your consent. Your survey interview responses and will be kept confidentially and never shared with your name attached to your results. Interviews will be recorded with a voice recorder and later typed up.
- Duration: The survey will take 10 minutes to fill out, and the interview will last about 30-60 minutes (total time commitment is 40-70 minutes on two occasions)
- Location: The interviews and surveys will be completed at a time that is convenient to you during breaks in the Tribal Journeys program.
- Photos: With your permission, we may ask to take photographs of you. We will use these photos (with your permission) in reports and presentations to illustrate how participants engage in typical Tribal Journeys activities. There is a separate section at the bottom of this form where you can indicate your preferences regarding such photographs. If you do consent to the use of photos we will also ask your permission before taking any photo.

Benefits:

- Participants of this study will be contributing to the future of Tribal Journeys, in helping to build an assessment tool that could help in securing long term funding and opening the opportunity of Tribal Journeys to more youth.

Risks:

- There is a very low risk that questions in the assessment package could trigger participants to feel stressed and or emotional or psychological discomfort. The questions are not designed to elicit thoughts about sensitive issues, however because they ask about the individual's well-being, certain questions may evoke unwelcomed feelings.
- Staff connected with the Tribal Journeys program are well prepared to deal with emotional and psychological discomfort and will be called upon to intervene if any of these unlikely events occur.

Researcher's Relationship with Participants:

- The co-investigators (Kathy Brown and Megan Clarkson) may have a relationship to you. Kathy is the sponsor of the Heiltsuk canoes and Megan is coordinator of Tribal Journeys.
- To help prevent this relationship from influencing your decision to participate, the following steps to prevent coercion have been taken:
 - Kathy and Megan will distribute information sheets about the project, but will not be involved in the consent process and will not have access to your data. They will see only group data with names removed.

Withdrawal of Participation:

- Your participation in this study is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent at any time without explanation or consequence.
- If you withdraw your consent, your data will not be used in the analysis and will be destroyed.

Continued or On-going Consent:

- Before the second interview and questionnaire session, I will remind you of the voluntary nature of your consent and of your right to withdraw from the study.

Anonymity and Confidentiality:

- Because participants in Tribal Journeys often form strong friendships, other members of your group may learn of your decision to participate (or decline to participate) in this project.
- We will remove all names from the information we retain and we may use the group data from this study to compare it with the results of future program evaluations. Transcripts of the interviews (stripped of identifying information) will be retained as will questionnaire data files. None of these files will contain information that could identify individual participants, nor information that could be used to re-identify individuals. Data will be stored in locked offices and on password protected computers at the University of Victoria.

Research Results will be Used/Disseminated in the Following Ways:

- Interview and questionnaire data will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the Tribal Journeys program and the evaluation instrument. Photos of participants may be used (with permission) in reports. The results will be used in a Masters thesis, in presentations to community partners and at academic meetings, and may be published in articles or books, in newspaper stories and on the internet. A summary of the results will also be provided to participants on request.

If you have Questions or Concerns:

- You can contact the researcher(s) using the information at the top of page 1;
- You can contact the Human Research Ethics Office, University of Victoria: 250 472-4545, ethics@uvic.ca

Consent: Photos:

- Photos may be taken of me for use in reports and presentations of the results of this study:
 Yes No _____ (Check one and provide your initials)

Note: Even if no names are used, you may be recognizable in photos

Use of my name in the results:

- I agree to be identified by name / credited in the results of the study. Yes No _____ (initials)
- I agree to have my responses attributed to me by name in the results. Yes No _____ (initials)

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. If you prefer to provide your verbal consent, this form will be read aloud to you and you will be asked to give your verbal consent to participate.

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

Appendix D: Parent/Guardian Informed Consent



University
of Victoria

Parent/Guardian Participant Consent Form

Project Title:	Developing a Tool to Assess Aboriginal Youth Programs
Funded by:	Canadian Institutes of Health Research
Researcher:	Tania Smethurst, Graduate Student, Department of Psychology, University of Victoria, 250 -472-4631, tancias@uvic.ca
Supervisor:	Dr. Chris Lalonde, Department of Psychology, 250-721-7535, lalonde@uvic.ca
Co-investigators:	Megan Clarkson, Victoria Native Friendship Centre Kathy Brown, Heiltsuk First Nation
Research Assistant:	Jessica Brown, LE,NONET Student, University of Victoria

Purpose and Objectives of the Research:

This project will involve the development of a culturally relevant program efficacy measure that meets the needs of Aboriginal communities. By evaluating the youth experience of Tribal Journeys, I will investigate the notion that connection to the land has a positive impact on Aboriginal youth. In the end, I hope to build an assessment tool-kit that will be useful for evaluating any Aboriginal youth program. This evaluation tool-kit could be used to support the creation and maintenance of programs for Aboriginal youth.

This Research is Important because:

Though communities work hard to mount youth programs and are convinced of their value, few evaluation tools exist to help communities assess their programming and objectively measure success. The development of an efficacy measurement tool would help communities identify successful youth programs and advocate for ongoing program funding. In the academic context, this efficacy tool would be beneficial in understanding how research can support strength building with Aboriginal youth.

Participation:

- You are being invited to be included in this study because your child agreed to participate, and we are interested in your thoughts regarding your child's experience in Tribal Journeys 2011.
- Participation in this project is entirely voluntary.
- Whether you choose to participate or not will have no effect on your involvement with Tribal Journeys, or how you or your child will be treated in the program.

Procedures:

- This study will involve doing an interview before and after Tribal Journeys. You can review the interview questions prior to giving your consent. Your survey interview responses and will be kept confidentially and never shared with your name attached to your results. Interviews will be recorded with a voice recorder and later typed up.
- Duration: The interview will last about 30-60 minutes (total time commitment is 30-60 minutes on two occasions)
- Location: The interviews will be completed at a time and place that is convenient to you.
- Photos: With your permission, we may ask to take photographs of you. We will use these photos (with your permission) in reports and presentations to illustrate how parents/guardians engage in typical Tribal Journeys activities. There is a separate section at the bottom of this form where you can indicate your preferences regarding such photographs. If you do consent to the use of photos we will also ask your permission before taking any photo.

Benefits:

- Participants of this study will be contributing to the future of Tribal Journeys, in helping to build an assessment tool that could help in securing long term funding and opening the opportunity of Tribal Journeys to more youth.

Risks: There are no known or anticipated risks associated with this research.

Researcher's Relationship with Participants:

- The co-investigators (Kathy Brown and Megan Clarkson) may have a relationship to you. Kathy is the sponsor of the Heiltsuk canoes and Megan is coordinator of Tribal Journeys.
- To help prevent this relationship from influencing your decision to participate, the following steps to prevent coercion have been taken:
 - Kathy and Megan will distribute information sheets about the project, but will not be involved in the consent process and will not have access to your data. They will see only group data with names removed.

Withdrawal of Participation:

- Your participation in this study is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent at any time without explanation or consequence.
- If you withdraw your consent, your data will not be used in the analysis and will be destroyed.

Continued or On-going Consent:

- Before the second interview, I will remind you of the voluntary nature of your consent and of your right to withdraw from the study.

Anonymity and Confidentiality:

- Because participants in Tribal Journeys often form strong friendships, other participants and family members may learn of your decision to participate (or decline to participate) in this project.
- We will remove all names from the information we retain and we may use the group data from this study to compare it with the results of future program evaluations. Transcripts of the interviews (stripped of identifying information) will be retained as will questionnaire data files. None of these files will contain information that could identify individual participants, nor information that could be used to re-identify individuals. Data will be stored in locked offices and on password protected computers at the University of Victoria.

Research Results will be Used/Disseminated in the Following Ways:

- Interview and questionnaire data will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the Tribal Journeys program and the evaluation instrument. Photos of participants may be used (with permission) in reports. The results will be used in a Masters thesis, in presentations to community partners and at academic meetings, and may be published in articles or books, in newspaper stories and on the internet. A summary of the results will also be provided to participants on request.

If you have Questions or Concerns:

- You can contact the researcher(s) using the information at the top of page 1;
- You can contact the Human Research Ethics Office, University of Victoria: 250 472-4545, ethics@uvic.ca

Consent -Photos:

- Photos may be taken of me for use in reports and presentations of the results of this study:
 Yes No _____ (Check one and provide your initials)

Note: Even if no names are used, you may be recognizable in photos

Use of my name in the results:

- I agree to be identified by name / credited in the results of the study. Yes No _____ (initials)
- I agree to have my responses attributed to me by name in the results. Yes No _____ (initials)

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. If you prefer to provide your verbal consent, this form will be read aloud to you and you will be asked to give your verbal consent to participate.

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

Appendix E: iPad survey

This is a survey to learn more about the youth experience of Tribal Journeys. All information will be recorded anonymously, and your opinions are greatly appreciated.

The following statements describe situations found in many groups. Rate how true these statements are in your Tribal Journey group. Use the following scale:

(5) True (4) Often True (3) Sometimes true, sometimes false (2) Often False (1) False

1. Participants generally treat each other with respect and fairness. _____
2. Participants help each other even if they are not friends. _____
3. Participants who belong to different groups are friendly. _____
4. Participants trust each other. _____
5. Participants and staff trust each other. _____
6. Staff/leaders generally treat participants with respect and fairness. _____
7. Staff/leaders are really interested in participants and want to help. _____
8. Participants and staff/leaders openly discuss problems. _____
9. Staff/leaders give participants a say in decisions about rules. _____
10. Some rules are made by votes by both participants and staff/leaders. _____
11. There is no fighting in this group. _____
12. There is no stealing in this group. _____
13. There is no vandalism done in this group. _____
14. There is no use of drugs or alcohol by participants in this group. _____
15. There is almost no verbal abuse or putting people down. _____
16. Participants get a good education and learn a lot. _____
17. Participants learn to become more responsible and care for other people. _____
18. Participants learn how to speak up and express opinions. _____
19. Participants have a chance to think about real issues. _____
20. Participants learn how to listen to other people's ideas better. _____
21. Participants learn how to take other people's points of view. _____
22. Participants learn to stop and think about things before speaking/acting. _____
23. Participants get a chance for a better future. _____

In this country, people come from many different countries and cultures, and there are many different words to describe the different backgrounds or ethnic groups that people come from. Some examples of the names of ethnic groups are Hispanic or Latino, Black or African American, Asian American, Chinese, Filipino, Aboriginal, Métis, First Nations, Native, Caucasian or White, Italian American, and many others. These questions are about your ethnicity or your ethnic group and how you feel about it or react to it.

Please fill in: In terms of ethnic group, I consider myself to be _____

Use the numbers below to indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement.

(4) Strongly agree (3) Agree (2) Disagree (1) Strongly disagree

24. I have spent time trying to find out more about my ethnic group, such as its history, traditions, and customs. _____
25. I am active in organizations or social groups that include mostly members of my own ethnic group. _____
26. I have a clear sense of my ethnic background and what it means for me. _____
27. I think a lot about how my life will be affected by my ethnic group membership.... _____
28. I am happy that I am a member of the group I belong to. _____

29. I have a strong sense of belonging to my own ethnic group.
30. I understand pretty well what my ethnic group membership means to me.
31. In order to learn more about my ethnic background, I have often talked to other people about my ethnic group.
32. I have a lot of pride in my ethnic group.
33. I participate in cultural practices of my own group, such as special food, music, or customs.
34. I feel a strong attachment towards my own ethnic group.
35. I feel good about my cultural or ethnic background.
36. I am not afraid to voice my opinions, even when they are in opposition to the opinions of most people.
37. In general, I feel I am in charge of the situation in which I live.
38. I am not interested in activities that will expand my horizons.
39. Most people see me as loving and affectionate.
40. I live life one day at a time and don't really think about the future.
41. When I look at the story of my life, I am pleased with how things have turned out.
42. My decisions are not usually influenced by what everyone else is doing.
43. The demands of everyday life often get me down.
44. I don't want to try new ways of doing things – my life is fine the way it is.
45. Maintaining close relationships has been difficult and frustrating for me.
46. I tend to focus on the present, because the future nearly always brings me problems.
47. In general, I feel confident and positive about myself.
48. I tend to worry about what other people think of me.
49. I do not fit very well with the people and the community around me.
50. I think it is important to have new experiences that challenge how you think about yourself and the world.
51. I often feel lonely because I have few close friends with whom to share my concerns.
52. My daily activities often seem trivial and unimportant to me.
53. I feel like many of the people I know have gotten more out of life than I have.
54. Being happy with myself is more important to me than having others approve of me.
55. I am quite good at managing the many responsibilities of my daily life.
56. When I think about it, I haven't really improved much as a person over the years.
57. I enjoy personal and mutual conversations with family members or friends.
58. I don't have a good sense of what it is I'm trying to accomplish in life.
59. I like most aspects of my personality.
60. I tend to be influenced by people with strong opinions.
61. I often feel overwhelmed by my responsibilities.
62. I have the sense that I have developed as a person over time.
63. I don't have many people who want to listen when I need to talk.
64. I used to set goals for myself, but that now seems like a waste of time.
65. I made some mistakes in the past, but I feel that all in all everything has worked out for the best.
66. I have confidence in my opinions, even if they are contrary to the general consensus.
67. I generally do a good job of taking care of my personal finances and affairs.
68. I do not enjoy being in new situations that require me to change my old familiar ways of doing things.
69. It seems to me that most other people have more friends than I do.

70. I enjoy making plans for the future and working to make them a reality. _____
71. In many ways, I feel disappointed about my achievements in life. _____
72. It's difficult for me to voice my own opinions on controversial matters. _____
73. I am good at juggling my time so that I can fit everything in that needs to
get done. _____
74. For me, life has been a continuous process of learning, changing, and growth. _____
75. People would describe me as a giving person, willing to share my time with
others. _____
76. I am an active person in carrying out the plans I set for myself. _____
77. My attitude about myself is probably not as positive as most people feel about
themselves. _____
78. I often change my mind about decisions if my friends or family disagree. _____
79. I have difficulty arranging my life in a way that is satisfying to me. _____
80. I gave up trying to make big improvements or changes in my life a long time ago. _____
81. I have not experienced many warm and trusting relationships with others. _____
82. Some people wander aimlessly through life, but I am not one of them. _____
83. The past had its ups and downs, but in general, I wouldn't want to change it. _____
84. I judge myself by what I think is important, not by the values of what others
think is important. _____
85. I have been able to build a home and a lifestyle for myself that is much to my
liking. _____
86. There is truth to the saying you can't teach an old dog new tricks. _____
87. I know that I can trust my friends, and they know they can trust me. _____
88. I sometimes feel as if I've done all there is to do in life. _____
89. When I compare myself to my friends and acquaintances, it makes me feel
good about who I am. _____