The Cross-Cultural Significance of the Sweat Lodge Experience

A Thesis Submitted to the College of Graduate Studies
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Master of Education in the
Department of Educational Foundation
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By

Grace K. Felix
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Department of Educational Foundations
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S7N 0X1
Fax:(306) 966-7549
DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my Mother, who always wanted one of her children to pursue a degree in Western Education. I also dedicate this to my Father, who instilled the pride of being an Indian deep within my soul. Also included in this dedication are my children: Lenora, Lonny, Anastacia, and Adam, as well as my grandchildren: Celina, Samantha, Andrea, Aiden; my unborn grandchildren; my husband Rick, and all my relations who supported me by giving me words of encouragement and sound advice.

Finally I also dedicate this thesis to all the First Nations scholars who will contribute to our collective advancement in academia so that we may engage in emancipatory research for the betterment of all First Nations.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I sincerely thank my committee members for their prolonged efforts, especially: my advisor, Dr. Marie Battiste, whose patience, support and encouragement helped me stay on track whenever I faltered and despaired. I also thank all my relations who sanctioned and advised me throughout the study. A special thank you is offered to the respected Elders who blessed my journey into the academic world. Thanks to Dr. Alan Guy for his learned assistance in editing the document and to Dr. Verna St. Denis, and Dr. Lenore Stiffarm who offered their respective academic and cultural knowledge in support of the study.

Thanks also to Dr. Cecil King for sitting as my external examiner.

Thank you to my non-Aboriginal friends who gracefully agreed to participate and share part of their stories with me.
Conflict has marred the relationship between peoples of Aboriginal and European decent since contact. This study proposes to deal with the emergence of a relatively new area of dispute, one which relates directly to the sanctity of religious practices and beliefs of First Nations people. The study explores the proliferation and encroachment of non-Aboriginal peoples into the realm of First Nations religious practices and beliefs. Specifically, I will examine the effects and perceptions of three non-Aboriginal people who have participated in traditional Native Sweat lodges, and the perceptions of four First Nations people who facilitated similar events. The research for this study was conducted using a qualitative research design employing a reflective narrative approach.

I was cognizant of the Cree First Nations’ cultural protocol that was required to undertake this study, and sought to do so in a traditional, respectful manner that was in keeping with the Plains Cree custom. All the First Nations people involved in this study speak Cree and English fluently, so translation was not an issue.

The research questions were as follows:

1. What are the perceptions and cross-cultural significance and value of Aboriginal people who conduct Sweat lodge ceremonies for non-Aboriginal people who request to participate in a ceremony of this type?
2. What is the cross-cultural significance of participating in a Sweat lodge ceremony for non-Aboriginal people?
3. What are the consequences for Aboriginal people in having non-Aboriginal people participate in their spiritual traditions?
4. What are the cross-cultural significance and value of having experienced a Sweat lodge ceremony among non-Aboriginal adults toward changing their perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs toward Aboriginal people?
5. What does the pertinent literature reveal about non-Aboriginal participation in traditional ceremonies and cultural knowledge?
The findings suggest that First Nations people want control of inclusion and exclusion of participation in their traditional religious practices and beliefs. They are fearful that the purity and sacredness may become corrupted through disrespect and ignorance. First Nations people are also concerned about the commodification of their spiritual knowledge. The study shows that Euro-Canadians who have participated in Sacred ceremonies have gained respect, understanding and appreciation of First Nations people. It would appear to suggest that participation in a traditional Sweat lodge can have a positive outcome for Euro-Canadians and First Nations people, if the individuals approach the Sweat with an open mind and have a spiritual experience that touches deep within the heart and soul. The literature review was predominately against the inclusion of non-Aboriginal people in traditional Indian cultural ceremonies and in gaining cultural knowledge.

Although First Nations people in general oppose inclusion of non-Aboriginal people in Sacred ceremonies, Elders are bound by cultural laws which provide very limited reasons for exclusion. An Elder may deny his/her services if they feel they cannot help the petitioner, in which case the Elder will not accept the traditional offering of tobacco. That is why it becomes vital for lobbyists to protect Indigenous knowledge, and to pursue legislation and global laws that are recognized throughout the world.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study was to determine the effects of sharing traditional Plains Cree knowledge, in the form of religious ceremonies, on non-Native people. To enable a comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon, the study addressed the perceptions of both non-Native and Native people. First, the study attempts to discover why three non-Aboriginal people have gained access to what would ordinarily be a restricted ceremony, the Sweat Lodge, and thus be considered confidential, sacred knowledge. Secondly, it attempts to discover the subsequent effects that this ceremony has had in their lives. Thirdly, the study also examines how First Nations people feel about non-Aboriginal people adopting traditional ceremonies and practices in their spiritual development. Using a literature review and the personal experiences of four First Nations people who have shared such a ceremony with non-Aboriginal people, I am hopeful that the study may offer insights into the effects of sharing traditional knowledge.

Significance of the Study

In conjunction with the primary purpose of the study, several larger constructs emerge. One of them is the growing movement of concerned First Nations scholars and activists who are petitioning law-makers (tribal and national) for the protection of First Nations' knowledge. This study focuses on the effects of sharing sacred knowledge with non-Aboriginal people and is not intended to reveal any knowledge considered sacred. Two additional constructs, which are interconnected but will not be the focus of this study, are the applicability of forms of cross-cultural education, such as anti-racist education and multi-cultural education. The study does overlap into cross-cultural education, simply because the study deals with two distinct cultures coming
together within the shared experience of a traditional Indian Sweat Lodge. Furthermore, the study itself should not be seen as anything more than an exploration of the effects that sharing traditional knowledge has had on three non-Aboriginal individuals, and what four First Nations people have to say about their experience with this phenomenon.

**Research Questions**

In attempting to gain the information for this study, I posed the following research questions to the participants. Their responses and analysis may be found in Chapter four and five.

1. What are the perceptions and cross cultural significance and value of Aboriginal people who conduct Sweat Lodge ceremonies for non-Aboriginal people who request or participate in a ceremony of this type?
2. What is the cross cultural significance of participating in a Sweat Lodge Ceremony for non-Aboriginal people?
3. What are the consequences for Aboriginal people in having non-Aboriginal people participate in their spiritual traditions?
4. What is the cross cultural significance and value of having experienced a Sweat Lodge ceremony among non-Aboriginal adults toward changing their perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs toward Aboriginal people?
5. What does the pertinent literature reveal about non-Aboriginal participation in traditional ceremonies and cultural knowledge?

Personal conversations and a literature review were used to provide clarification of the research problems.

**Assumptions**

The following assumptions were made for this study:

1. That the researcher would have access to and the cooperation of three non-Aboriginal individuals who would be prepared to share their experience of a Sweat Lodge ceremony.
2. That the researcher would have access to a Plains Cree Medicine Man and an Elder who would share their perceptions of conducting a Sweat Lodge Ceremony for non-Aboriginal participants.

3. That the Medicine man and the elder would act as gatekeepers against any cultural improprieties when discussing the Sweat Lodge Ceremony proper.

4. That the participants would be able to articulate their memories.

5. That the respondents' cultural backgrounds might be influenced by factors such as colonialism, urbanization, religion, education and racism.

**Delimitations**

1. The study was delimited by the number of non-Native participants selected on the basis of their participation in a traditional Native Sweat Lodge within the last three years and in keeping with the significance of the number four in Plains Cree culture.

2. The study was further delimited by the gender selection.

3. Another delimiting factor was the selection of a Plains Cree Medicine Man, Elder and First Nations woman and man who have organized or performed the Sweat Lodge Ceremony for non-Native individuals.

**Limitations**

As in all human research, there exist elements which may inadvertently influence the study. Time, situation, number of participants, and enculturation have the potential to influence the researcher, the participants, and the reader. This is an unfortunate consequence inherent to any type of human research.

1. The data were limited by the level of comfort and candidness with which the participants responded to the researcher's questions.

2. The data were further limited by the respondents' memory recall.

3. The moral and ethical guidelines and censorship surrounding examination of sacred knowledge added another limitation to the study.

4. The interpretation and analysis of the conversations were further limited by
the researcher's familiarity with the participants.

5. Generalizations of the findings were limited by the small number of non-Native participants.

6. The data was limited further by the cultural background specific to the Plains Cree First Nation.

Definition of Terms

The terminology used in reference to the different groups of people throughout this research paper may not necessarily be the current politically correct terms when speaking of First Nations people, Euro-Canadians, or Euro-Americans. The principal distinction among groups is based solely on how the individuals have self-identified, and several terms are used interchangeably. I intend no disrespect when I make use of euphemisms relating to the cultures or the people.

1. The terms White, Caucasian, Euro-Canadian, Euro-American, American, European, Western, non-Aboriginal, and non-Native are used to refer to groups of individuals who do not identify themselves as members of a traditional Native North American group.

2. The terms Indigenous, Native, Indian, First Nation, and Aboriginal are used to refer to people who consider themselves to be the descendants of the First Nations people on North American soil. Unless otherwise stated, the researcher will apply these terms when discussing the Plains Cree culture and people. Metis will be used to identify people of mixed ancestry (Indian and White).

3. The terms New Agers, alternative religions, cultists, neo-pagan, witchcraft, occult, and cult will be used to signify those individuals who are not Native, but who have attached or identified themselves with spiritual movements rooted in Native culture or otherwise identified with Nature religions. Nature religions, loosely defined, are self-explanatory: They are religions whose origins are connected to nature.
4. The term sacred knowledge will be used in reference to religious ceremonies, rites, rituals, beliefs, and practices pertaining to the Plains Cree tradition.

5. Tradition will be used as a term to depict the continuity of specific ways of life, or beliefs passed on through the cultural teachings of the Plains Cree people.

6. Enculturation refers to the values, morals, ethics, religious beliefs, knowledge, ways, and customs usually associated with a specific cultural upbringing, which is passed on from generation to generation. It is synonymous with lived experience.

**Introduction of Researcher**

No aspect of a culture is more vital to its integrity than its means of education. As I have been taught, nourished, and sustained by my culture, so it is my duty and privilege to transmit it. I value my Anglo-Saxon education and respect its necessity and power in this society, but my deepest values and my view of the world were formed within an Indian culture (Eber Hampton, 1995 p.7).

Hampton’s words in the above quote captured my sentiments so intensely that I felt his words of wisdom were written for someone just like me— to help introduce myself.

Attempting to isolate a research question has been a very painful process, which has taken me over two years to complete. When I decided to enter into graduate studies, I began thinking of topics that were of interest to me. During the following two years, I searched through hundreds of thesis topics, constantly hunting for topics that were grounded in Native content or issues. Reflecting back now, I have gained some understanding and appreciation of my struggle to pinpoint a research topic. One of the problems that I faced was that I had heard it said many times that North American First Nations people were, and continue to be, one of the most studied people in the world. I was, therefore, reluctant to
contribute even more to the abundance of studies already in existence. The only redeeming factor was that I would be providing a Native perspective on a topic that has not been over exploited.

I was born and raised until the age of eight on a Cree Indian Reservation in southern Saskatchewan. My father was a renowned traditional Medicine man who, unlike so many of our brothers and sisters, was untouched by the residential school experience because of his advanced age. My mother, who was much younger and the second traditional wife of my father, was not quite so fortunate. She spent most of her childhood in a Roman Catholic missionary school. She was a devout Catholic throughout her life.

Being raised in this family setting offered many advantages. My father spent many hours teaching me "Indian" ways, much to the chagrin of my mother, who dragged me kicking and screaming off to church every week as the Roman Catholic doctrine dictated. I have always been thankful that neither of my parents were disposed to drinking alcohol, and I have a deep sense of pride of being an Indian embedded in my heart and soul.

While my earliest childhood memories are based on the serenity of rural reserve life, from the age of eight, I was raised in the city where my aged father could easily access Western medical care. Being raised in an urban environment was not easy for me, and it did not take me long to feel the blunt, piercing pain of racism and discrimination. At the tender age of 12, I was devastated by the death of my father, and again at 17 when I lost my mother. My early childhood experiences drastically affected the path I would follow and have been a major contributor to the motivation behind the research for this paper. The loving foundation that my parents provided has given me the strength and courage to make my way through the good times and the bad times.

In my adult years, I have focused my career on helping others in the human services area. Prior to attaining my education degree I was employed by
the Government of Saskatchewan for over twelve years as a social worker, helping families in crisis.

I left social work in 1988, returned to university and earned a Bachelor of Education degree in 1993. I am currently in an administrative position within the provincial public school system. During my tenure my duties have changed; some would say quite significantly. I was initially engaged as a Native guidance counselor, which evolved into teaching science at a junior high school. I left guidance counseling and moved into administration. When the junior high school closed, I transferred to a community elementary school as a grade six teacher, maintaining administration status.

In this study I will draw from the skills that I learned as a social worker and as a guidance counselor to conduct the interviews and to insure the emotional well-being of the participants. With that said, I return to the problem that I encountered while deciding on a topic.

**Inherent Problems Choosing a Thesis Topic**

I was well into my third year of graduate work before I made a conscious commitment to my choice of topic. As I mentioned earlier in the introduction, I found choosing a topic exceedingly difficult. I have come to realize that the greatest difficulty and barrier was that my concept of education did not correspond with the curtailed Western tenet of education. The deficiency nagged at my peace of mind and would not let me rest. The anxiety that I felt was because I could not separate education into a neat little compartment within myself. My "Indianness", my world-view, my spirituality, my mind, and my body could not be disconnected from one another. Dr. Gregory Cajete, a Tewa Indian from New Mexico, captured the essence of my impasse when he said, "Indigenous education, at its innermost core, is education about the life and nature of the spirit that moves us. Spirituality evolves from exploring and coming to know and experience the nature of living energy moving in each of us, through
us, and around us" (Cajete, 1994, p. 42).

Until I read this, I was unaware of the inconsistency that I now believe plagued me throughout my educational experience. Plainly, the crux of the problem was that I could not separate my spirituality, my personality, and my ideology of education into distinct entities. Cajete's words had such an impact on the difficulty I had been having that I feverishly searched for others who supported his theory. It did not take long to find other Native scholars talking and writing about this paradox. In their book, Eduardo Duran, a Pueblo/Apache American psychologist, vocalized my problem further when he wrote the following:

In western experience it is common to separate the mind from the body and spirit and the spirit from the mind and body. Within the Native American worldview this is a foreign idea. Most Native American people experience their being in the world as a totality of personality and not as separate systems within the person. Thus Native American worldview is one in which the individual is part of all creation, living life as one system and not in separate units that are objectively relating with each other (E. Duran and B. Duran, 1995, p. 15).

Once I finally realized this, a whole myriad of ideas flooded through my mind. Both Cajete's and Duran's words served to open up the possibilities for research and greatly influenced my final decision on what topic to explore.

I recognized that to keep myself committed to the task at hand, it would be necessary to choose a topic that would hold my interest, be meaningful to me, and hopefully be of benefit to First Nations people. In my research, I kept coming across information dealing with the exploitation of First Nations spiritual ceremonies. The topic had certainly generated excitement in the Indian community, but it was also an area so deeply sacred and dangerous that I believed only fools would dare to tread there. Because I felt this way, I initially dismissed the idea and continued searching. In my introspection, I prayed for
assistance and guidance from the Creator, Grandfathers, and Grandmothers. At the risk of sounding superstitious in the eyes of the academic community, and because my approach might definitely be called unorthodox, I am hesitant to disclose that my research topic was blessed by the Grandfathers through a dream. However, if I am to be true to myself, it is necessary to share this information.

Mark St. Pierre and Tilda Long Soldier (1995) describe the use of dreams and their prophetic nature in traditional Native circles. These "extraordinary dreams" play an important role in traditional belief and may advise the dreamer to follow a particular course of action. Interpreting or decoding a dream is not always easy; it may take many months to reach an understanding, and the dream is often discussed with elders or other members of the Indian community who may advise the dreamer before executing any action.

Still uncertain and paralyzed by fear at the enormity of the task given to me by the Grandfathers, I asked for a further sign. Shortly thereafter, a female relative came for a weekend visit and animatedly recalled her recent experience organizing a Sweat Lodge for several of her co-workers who were not First Nations people. She herself is a Cree First Nations woman. I listened to her recollection with growing excitement and awe, wondering if this could be the sign I had been praying for. It certainly fit the essence of my dream. I had heard rumors and read that there were non-Aboriginal people who were passing themselves off as Indian healers and spiritual advisors. At this point I was still skeptical and had butterflies in my stomach. Until she was sitting across from me talking about her experience, I had only read about it. Never in my wildest dreams did I think I would find someone so close to me who would be able to share their experience. My curiosity was piqued. I had been raised to hold such ceremonies with the highest respect and understood them to be sacred. Fear and uncertainty continued to plague me. I waited to see if anything more would
unfold. Over the following month several non-Aboriginal acquaintances came forward, each sharing their experience in a Sweat Lodge. Hence came the certainty that I was meant to write their stories.

However, in conjunction with the research question, it did not take me long to see how complex my proposed study could become. The topic that I chose would certainly be a difficult one; combining both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal perspectives offered many challenges. Foremost in my thoughts was how to incorporate the subject matter in a respectful traditional manner while meeting the stringent criteria of academia. One of the most obvious twists was that I, a First Nations woman, would be exploring what white people thought and felt. I would be studying a sacred traditional ceremony, which alone is a subject area that few dared to explore, but I would also be describing it through the eyes of both cultures. To complicate matters further, I found myself and the proposed study alone in a vacuum. To my knowledge, and according to my research, no one had attempted to do what I was proposing. Would it be possible?

Another factor which needed recognition was that, while I was raised in the Cree culture during my formative years, I cannot honestly say to what extent living in a Western world has affected me. I have no doubt that Western culture has had an impact on my being, for better or for worse. However, I am very much aware of, and part of, traditional Spiritual beliefs that First Nations people share. This is not to imply that I am an "expert" on the proposed topic, but meant merely to validate that I am part of the cultural phenomenon in question. According to—and in adhering to—First Nations cultural norms, no one individual can be an expert, but can only offer the limited knowledge that each have gained. I respectfully adopt this position as a First Nations woman with the understanding that it may be in conflict with the academic community's perception of "expertise".
Chapter Overview

Chapter One describes the purpose and significance of the study, its assumptions, its limitations, its delimitations, background information on me, and the turmoil I underwent in order to get to this point. Chapter Two reviews the literature of religious phenomena that have been labeled as New Age. It further reveals what Westerners and First Nations people think about the resurgence of non-conventional religions. Chapter Three discusses the methodology that was used to conduct this study. In particular, it discusses the shortcomings of conducting academic research within the Native community while honouring traditional ways. Chapter Four presents the reflections of the First Nations people who conducted a Sweat Lodge for non-Aboriginal people, followed by a brief summary of their thoughts and feelings. Chapter Five presents the reflections of the non-Aboriginal participants. It offers an overview of the study, and draws conclusions from the findings of this research effort, with suggestions and recommendations for further investigations into this phenomenon.
CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Historical Beginnings to Present

According to Markham (1997), interest and belief in spirituality and religion predates modern man. He claims that, "Neanderthal humans living 150,000 years ago were intensely religious and, despite all the progress and numerous differences between then and now, they shared this characteristic with the majority of citizens in the United States today" (1997, p.1). Pavlos (1982) noted that "the deluge of cults that have flooded the American spiritual arena suggests that in addition to being removed from conventional religion, cults are by no means new phenomena in America" (1982, p.77). While Markham's and Pavlos' references are specific to the United States, other references document the same phenomena occurring on all continents. Lewis and Melton (1992) examined such occurrences in India, Italy, Nigeria, Japan, and South Africa, and moreover, Churchill (1996) scathingly reports on what he calls German "wanna-be" Indians.

The following chart (Table 1) is meant to give some idea of the numbers of people who have aligned themselves with non-conventional religions. The data were taken from Markham (1997) and represent only selected parts of the World Religions. I have intentionally omitted Christian religions and other established religions like Buddhism, Judaism, Hinduism, and Eastern religions, as well as those people who profess no religious beliefs. Immediately following the chart is a description of the various categories represented.
### Table 1 - Practitioners of Unconventional Religions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Shamanists</th>
<th>Tribal Religionist</th>
<th>New Religionists</th>
<th>Other Religionists</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>70,588,00</td>
<td>21,000</td>
<td>433,00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>10,233,000</td>
<td>24,948,000</td>
<td>141,382,000</td>
<td>12,292,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>50,000</td>
<td>1,469,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>936,000</td>
<td>530,000</td>
<td>3,570,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North America</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>41,000</td>
<td>1,421,000</td>
<td>485,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oceania</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>67,000</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>4,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eurasia</td>
<td>254,000</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1,000</td>
<td>4,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countries</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>10,493,000</td>
<td>96,581,000</td>
<td>143,415,000</td>
<td>18,586,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Markham 1997, (pp. 356,357).

Other Religionists: Including 50 minor world religions and a large number of spiritist religions, New Age religions, quasireligions, pseudoreligions, parareligions, religious or mystic systems, religious and semi-religious brotherhoods of numerous varieties (pp. 356-357).


The world population as cited in 1992 was 5,480,010,000, of which close to five percent was engaged in unconventional religious practices.

Historically speaking, what is currently referred to as the "New Age Movement" is very likely one of the world’s greatest misnomers, right up there with First Nations people being called "Indians". Its philosophy is rooted in ancient religions, and is thus far from being new. Contact with the spirit world has been attempted for more than two millennia. A mystical and abstract way of experiencing reality, philosophy, and religion was paved from the 5th to the 7th century B.C. by leaders such as Lao-tse and Kung-Fu-tse (Confucius) in China, Buddha, Mahavira in India, and Zarathustra in Persia (Pavlos, 1982). Robert Ellwood (1992), explains that "the New Age is a contemporary manifestation of a western alternative spiritual tradition going back at least to the Greco-Roman world" (p. 59).

Pavlos (1982) believes that "it was not until the recent surge of 'bizarre' and exotic religious movements took hold . . . (p. 77)" that they came to the public's attention. "This happened when a number of colorful hierophants such as
Father Divine, Marion Keech, Reverend Moon, and Reverend Jim Jones entered the cult scene" (p.77). M.D. Faber (1996), noted that during the last four decades that unusually high numbers of Westerners have very conspicuously resurrected ancient religions of magic such as channeling, witchcraft, psychic healing, crystals, and shamanism. Vine Deloria Jr. (1999) suggests that

Americans crave some form of religious experience, and they are unable to obtain it from any of the old mainline Christian denominations. This condition became obvious in the sixties, when people began to take drugs to help them deal with the pressures of modern society (p. 226).

Henceforth, the interest in Native religions blossomed. The response of serious Americans has been to look elsewhere. Asian religions, including various martial arts, old European religions, such as witchcraft; as well as devil worship, astrology, reincarnation, and a bewildering variety of self-help techniques that have offered a buffet of religious experience to a hungry American society. A sizeable number of people have come to American Indians, seeking to join tribal religious practices or take from the tribal traditions those things they find most attractive (p. 227).

Criticism Abounds Across the Spectrum (A brief overview)

There appears to be a profusion of literature whose objective is to discredit any non-conventional religions, including objections voiced by First Nations people. Critics including Martin Gardner (1988), are devoted to reporting and debunking fringe science. He takes aim at Scientology; television evangelical preachers like Jim and Tammy Baker, Oral Roberts, Jimmy Swaggart; and others, including Shirley MacLaine. He also rebukes numerous parapsychologists and numerologists. Similarly, Faber (1996) concentrates on debunking shamanism, channeling, witchcraft, psychic healing, and the New Age
version of the cosmos. In Faber's thesis statement, he ferociously attacks New Age thinking as a regressive, infantile, wishful thinking movement that may or may not be dangerous. He appears locked in the doctrine of psychological "science" which rejects any deviation from "scientific" thought. Presumably, conventional Western religions are exempt from this requisite, as he does not voice any opposition to them. Invariably, "science" and religious beliefs and practices are at opposing ends of the spectrum of belief. One can only guess why there is so much opposition to unconventional religious beliefs, notwithstanding the philosophical conflict which pits man against the environment and subsequent capitalist ideologies. While First Nations religious beliefs and religions are categorized as non-conventional and suffer under the same attack, in the literature I reviewed many First Nations people themselves object to non-Native practitioners of their faith. Janet McLeod and Russel Means (Churchill, 1996) believe that non-Aboriginal people are not only "unworthy, but unscrupulous thieves" (p.320).

Amongst the items that constitute the literature on Shamanism can be found books that offer step by step directions on how to perform numerous spiritual ceremonies. I will now provide a brief critique of several books as examples of the published literature pertaining specifically to Shamanism.

1. Earth Medicine: A Shamanic Way to Self Discovery (1991), Meadows claims that he has studied directly under Medicine Chief Silver Bear, Wallace Black Elk, Wolf-Eagle (all of whom have Indian sounding names) and other British and European shamans. He does not openly claim to be a Medicine man, nor does he indicate his heritage, but the implication that he is a Medicine man is very strong. While reading Meadows' work, I became quite skeptical of his self-professed status. Through personal experience, I know that traditional healers are very humble and would never openly profess themselves to be Medicine men. Within the Indian community there is no need to advertise one's ability to
heal or boast of one's spiritual prowess; word of mouth is very efficient in matters of this nature. Indeed if Meadows' studied under authentic First Nations Medicine men or spiritual leaders, he obviously missed the most important lesson of humility. First Nations Medicine men and spiritual leaders attribute their success to the Creator and do not claim any power for themselves. They also struggle daily to keep 'pure thoughts and actions', which involves thinking and speaking only the best of others. Medicine men and spiritual leaders can not profit from the gifts bestowed upon them by the Creator. Meadows book reads and looks like an exceedingly long horoscope. It is beyond fiction. What is perhaps the most disturbing aspect of his book is his dedication at the end, which concludes with thanks to his Indian teachers, Grandfathers, and Grandmothers; the last written word of his dedication is "Ho," which usually signifies the end to a prayer much like "Amen" in Christian circles!

2. The Ceremonial Circle: Shamanic Practice, Ritual & Renewal (1991) by Cahill and Halpern unfortunately are not any more accurate than Meadows at describing traditional First Nation religions. They provide a brief historical text on the origin of shamanism. In addition they also describe their notions of shamanic practices and how to conduct rituals and ceremonies. Native people like Janet McLeod (Churchill, 1996) and members of the American Indian Movement report being repulsed by such literature. Cahill and Halpern offer their understanding of authentic "how-to" instructions for ceremonies. However, setting the content aside, all is not lost when they describe the methodology they undertook in compiling their book. Whether it would meet the rigorous standards of an accredited practitioner of Anthropology remains to be seen. They conducted interviews with eight women who, in one form or another, claim to be practitioners of various ancient religions. The eight women interviewed do not identify themselves with any particular ethnic or racial community. I should clarify that while I do not doubt the women's sincerity and belief that they are
themselves practitioners of various ancient religions, such explicit written directions and sharing of spiritual knowledge strongly conflicts with traditional First Nations oral culture, values, beliefs and ways as stated by the traditional Elders that I spoke with.

3. *Spirit Healing: Native American Magic & Medicine*, by Atwood (1991), combines a fictional tale with step by step directions on how to make medicine bundles, do a vision quest, and commune with animal and nature spirits. To her credit, she conducted some research and gained some understanding of the historical impact resulting from contact between Europeans and Natives. Gary Bear Heals, who identifies himself as a Lakota Spiritual Leader from the Rosebud Indian Reserve, writes the foreward for her book, presumably to lend it credence. Atwood says she was taught traditional Indian ways (medicine) by many different teachers.

4. *The Eagle's Quest: A Physicist's Search for Truth in the Heart of the Shamanic World*, by Wolf (1991) presents an interesting journey through spiritualism. He has a doctorate degree in physics and was once a stage magician. Combining these two assets, he sets out on a quest to find truth in the Shamanic world. It was interesting that his experience as a professional magician assisted him in trying to uncover hoaxes. He uses a reflective narrative approach to describe his experiences with shamans from Peru, Brazil, Mexico, United States, Britain, and Switzerland. In his Chapter Four he reflects on an encounter that he had with a Rosebud Sioux Medicine Man. He offers a physical description of a Sweat Lodge, a Yuwipi (healing ceremony), an Olowonpi (thanksgiving ceremony), and his account of what transpired in them. People often say the world is a small place when they meet acquaintances from their past, or discover relatives in far off places, so I was pleasantly surprised to encounter the name of a young singer (whom I knew) whose father traveled the pow-wow circuit with an older brother. Wolf's reference to the young singer, and
the fact that he does not make any pretense to be a Medicine Man or draw any conclusions, made his book much more palatable. One is left with the impression he is simply a man with no answers on a spiritual quest. Wolf leaves the reader with plenty of food for thought.

5. Perhaps the book written by F. David Peat, *Lighting the Seventh Fire* (1994), was the most rewarding and refreshing book that I reviewed. Dr. F. David Peat is described as "a brilliant physicist".

The title *Lighting the Seventh Fire* prophesizes that when the seventh fire is lit, the Native American and the white man will become brothers. It bridges the world views of Blackfeet, Iroquois, Haida, Hopi, Ojibwaj, and Mayan peoples and our own [western] scientific account of reality. It reveals a world in which time moves in a circle, rocks speak, animals transform, and songs bring about healing. In the 1980s, he began a series of encounters with Native Americans that gave him a profoundly different perception of the world.... he explores what he terms "Indigenous science" (1994, cover page).

Peat takes the reader along with him on his sojourns across the country as he researches Indigenous spiritualism. He is completely aware of the criticism facing him by fellow scientists as he explores the multiple realities of Indigenous science. I was grateful to find a piece of work that was conducted with such earnest respect.

Many other sources that were researched ranged from profane to insidious, and were of little value for the purposes of this study. Some of the literature reviewed focused on the origin of Native religion. The arguments about origin basically formed and supported the same theories argued by social scientists, who have attempted over the years to pinpoint where the North
American Indian people came from. Albanese (1990) asserts that the similarity between the Quaker religion and Native American religion suggests that Indian religion was brought from Europe. Several other theories, which can be supported by empirical evidence such as archeological findings, trace Native American religion to Africa. However, some archeological artifacts such as the Atlatl (a tool used by First Nations hunters) are unique to the North American continent and cannot be found elsewhere.

Such contradictory evidence has created conflicting theories within the ranks of archaeologists and anthropologists, who question not only the emergence of "civilized" man on our continent but also whether the depth of digging has been sufficient to unearth artifacts that would substantiate human habitation on the North American continent prior to what has been generally accepted. With such uncertainty in archeological and anthropological circles, the origin of Native religion may never be known. Perhaps the most disturbing fact—and insult to the intelligence of Indian people—is the implied conclusion that we could not have developed our own religion over time and space. The Native American peoples have diverse origin myths and oral histories that not only recount planetary events such as the ice age, but propose creation myths very similar to Christian beliefs and Western science.

Peat (1994) finds Western science stories of creation lacking "values and meaning that help to bind a society together" (p. 87) and explores the holistic view of creation by Aboriginal peoples. Let it suffice to say that science and religion are at opposite ends of the spectrum of human creation myths. As indicated earlier by Markham (1997), an interest in the spirit world and religion dates back to Neanderthals. Origins of religious beliefs abound and constitute another argument, which I am not prepared to pursue at this time.

Regardless of what origin theory one believes, it has little bearing on this research because this research is grounded on the present interest non-Native
people have in First Nations religion. However, in conjunction with origin, ownership and authenticity of religion do play an important role in the objections of First Nations people. The ramifications of fraudulent healers is overwhelming, if not illegal and extremely dangerous. Fraudulent healers may indeed place their clients in more life threatening situations through their interventions. Trujillo, in the *Handbook of Psychotherapy and Religious Diversity* (2000), concludes that Westerners need to accept, respect and validate Native American religion as their own, for not to do so perpetuates the historical oppression of First Nations people and generates racist views in many Westerners. He concludes that what is more likely the case is that such theories are merely extensions of ethnocentric ideologies held by Westerners or, as McLeod and Means (1996) succinctly point out, "it is just another form of theft (p.320)". Both Western Religions and Aboriginal Religions are based on beliefs of a Higher Power or God, and in that sense should command mutual respect.

Janet McLeod (Churchill, 1996), a fishing activist from the Nisqually Nation in Washington State, condemns those who would claim First Nations religion. She, like many others, believes that the right to practice Native religion is a birthright meant only for Indigenous people. Russell Means (Churchill, 1996), an American Indian Movement (AIM) activist, voices the same argument much more strongly than Janet McLeod when he draws a comparison between land ownership and spirituality. Means says, "When they wanted our land they just announced that they had the right to it and therefore owned it. Now being spiritually bankrupt themselves, they want our spirituality as well" (p. 320). Noted writers, academics, activists and spiritual leaders like Oren Lyons, Joy Harjo, Wendy Rose, Vine Deloria, Leslie Silko, Geary Hobson, Gerald Vizenor, Pam Colorado, and Ward Churchill have added their voices in denouncing the appropriation of Indian Spiritualism and the subsequent marketing of spiritual knowledge, spiritual power, or spiritual objects that have become a new growth
industry for "Yuppies".

The commodification of Indian spiritualism has taken many forms, from selling ceremonies to trinkets that are all guaranteed to be authentic. One only need enter any gift shop to find genuine Indian craft made in Hong Kong. The old adage "buyer beware" holds a wealth of warning. That is to not to say that there are not authentic Indian arts and crafts for sale, but avoiding how-to books that offer directions on how to build a Sweat Lodge and perform a Sweat Lodge ceremony would be prudent. As Janet McLeod (Churchill, 1996) says, there is no quick fix: ceremonies and spiritual teachings take a lifetime to learn and are passed down from generation to generation. The authenticity of a cultural artifact is only as valid as the authenticity of the person who created or performed it.

In addition to the tangible objects being sold, another whole area including literary and scholarly works are being marketed. Whitt (1997), in the Canadian Journal of Native Education, draws attention to the consumer's belief that they are buying the "real thing" and are largely unaware of the moral theft taking place. She found that those who became aware felt that the objections were unwarranted and believed that they had as much right to Indian Spiritualism as Indians do. Gary Synder, a poet and New Age practitioner, believes that he and others like him not only have the right "but the obligation to pursue all forms of spiritual insight" (Whitt, 1997 p. 22).

An excellent example of the spiritual theft that has raised the ire of many Indigenous people was witnessed in a public forum at the Third International Native American Studies Conference at Lake Superior State University in October, 1991. A young White man boldly announced to the assembled audience that he intended to patent the Sweat Lodge ceremony; if that was not insulting enough to Indigenous people, he went on to justify his plans by saying Native people were no longer performing it correctly (Whitt, 1997). Aboriginal scholars such as Vine Deloria responded to Synder's allegations in Churchill's (1996)
saying,

The realities of Indian belief and existence have become so misunderstood and distorted that when a real Indian stands up and speaks the truth at any given moment, he or she is not only unlikely to be believed, but will probably be publicly contradicted and "corrected" by the citation of some non-Indian and totally inaccurate "expert." More young Indians in universities are now being trained to view themselves and their cultures in the terms prescribed by such experts rather than in traditional terms of the tribal elders. (p. 318).

Deloria (Churchill, 1996), points out that the young man referred to above would be viewed as a fake, and imposter; this abhorrence may even be present in the institutions of higher learning.

On the same note, McLeod further relates that "we have a lot of unscrupulous idiots running around saying they're medicine people. And they'll sell you a Sweat Lodge ceremony for fifty bucks. It's not only wrong, it's obscene. Indians don't sell their spiritualism to anyone for any price" (Churchill, 1996, p. 357). Atwood (1991) accurately points out that "powerful medicine people do not give their information away. Prophetic and healing talents are only given to those individuals who have proven that they have no interest in misusing them" (p. 15).

To my knowledge, there has been no social science investigation into the short term or long term effects with non-Aboriginal people who have participated in authentic Native ceremonies. However, as I discovered through the literature review, there is much outrage and criticism being voiced by Aboriginal people themselves. While criticism appears justified, the researcher has so far encountered only "white" men passing themselves off as legitimate "Shamans". As Churchill (1996) puts it: because they may have spent a weekend with an Indian, or, even more absurd, that they know an Indian, by some miraculous
metamorphosis they have been transformed into a "Medicine man or woman". 
More condemnation is directed at unscrupulous Indians who do not know, or 
perhaps do not care, about the dangers in such games. The late Mathew King, a 
Lakota spiritual leader, warned that 

many things are forbidden in our religion. The 
forbidden things are acts of disrespect, things 
which unbalance power. These things must be 
learned and the learning is very difficult. This is 
why there are very few real "medicine men" (or 
medicine women) among us; only a few are 
chosen. For someone who has not learned 
how our balance is maintained to pretend to be 
a medicine man is very, very dangerous. It is a 
big disrespect to the powers and can cause 
great harm to whoever is doing it, to those he 
claims to be teaching, to nature, to everything. 
It is very bad (Churchill, 1996, p. 359). 

So, knowing the dangers, why would any First Nations person attempt to 
carry out this research? More pointedly, how do I execute my dream? There are 
three factors that have made my decision to proceed more bearable and less 
frightening. First, and perhaps the most reassuring, is what Walter Lightning 
(1992) said in his dissertation, quoting Elder Louis Sunchild who says, "The 
ethos (medicine and teachings) protects itself. If someone says these things--
teaches another, attempts to define the truth, or in fact describes "the culture"--
without authority to do so, it has no meaning" (p. 241). Second, Stan Wilson 
(1995) a Cree from the Opaskwayak Nation, raises the question, "If we don't 
teach these things and if we don't acknowledge the work and the help of our 
ancestors in our writings and in our research, will we do any better than the white 
scholars who have forced us to hear only their side of the story for so long" (p. 
68)? Wilson believes that if we are to help ourselves, we must also help non-
Aboriginal people. Elder Louis Sunchild says that "one should not feel that these
are meant for any specific individual but rather that this is a concern that affects all humanity" (Lightning, 1992, p. 239). Clearly he is including people of other races in this statement. Some will argue that he is not. Sunchild goes on to say that "our people have taught these human truths and principles for the holistic survival of everyone" (p. 239). The truth of this is terrifying when we look at the state of the global community. "Holistic survival" not only includes spiritual survival, but also the physical survival of humankind on Mother Earth. In keeping silent are we not contributing to the destructive forces that threaten the survival of Mother Earth, and all its inhabitants? Duran and Duran(1995) say, "We cannot continue to reward knowledge that reifies the thought of western Europeans above all others" (p. 6). My mother once counseled me that what was in my heart was most important, I would always be an Indian, but it would be necessary and acceptable to take the teachings of the non-Aboriginal world and incorporate them into my world. The renowned Chief Sitting Bull said as much in 1888 when he said, "It is not necessary for Crows to become Eagles" (Churchill, 1996. p. 392). In other words, we do not need to forsake our heritage, or as Harold Cardinal (1969) humorously coined it, become "apples". Does that not apply to white people as well? Barbara Owl, a White Earth Anishanabe, goes on to explain, "It's not that we never make outsiders aware of our secrets, but we-not-they-decide what, how much, and to what purpose this knowledge is to be put" (Churchill, 1996, p. 320). Battiste (1996) says much the same when she says "Indigenous peoples should control their own knowledge, should do their own research, and if they should choose to enter a collaborative relationship with others that the research should empower and benefit their communities and cultures" (pp. 19-20). More and more Indigenous groups across the world are speaking out against the appropriation of Indigenous knowledge. A Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is presently being reviewed by the UN Commission on Human Rights. If the Declaration is passed, Aboriginal
peoples will be given "recognition of the full ownership, control and protection of their cultural and intellectual property . . ." (Battiste, 2000, p. 258), which would include

the right to special measures to control, develop and protect their sciences, technologies and cultural manifestations, including human and other genetic resources, seeds, medicines, knowledge of the properties of fauna and flora, oral traditions, literatures, designs and visual and performing arts.

These articles reflect general principles that have already been adopted in a number of recent conventions for the protections of the environment. The fundamental right of Indigenous peoples to the protection and enjoyment of their heritage has already been given international recognition in the existing human rights covenants, and in conventions on the environment that make express references to Indigenous communities (Battiste, 2000, pp. 257, 258, 259).

For a more comprehensive understanding of the protection concerns of Aboriginal people, Battiste, in Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision (2000), provides an appendix on pages 279-284 outlining the "Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of the Heritage of Indigenous Peoples", and in her award winning book Protecting Indigenous Knowledge and Heritage (2000), she also provides in depth coverage of this topic. The Australian and American governments have already recognized, adopted, and passed legislation affording their Indigenous people a measure of protection for their cultural knowledge and heritage. However, because of the complexity and the conflicting pedagogies of both the Indigenous and Western thoughts of ownership, determining the range of cultural protection has been frustratingly slow and controversial. Meanwhile, Battiste (1995) succinctly puts it,
In contrast with Canada’s achievements in international law and constitutional reform, the federal and provincial governments and administrative regimes have ignored Aboriginal and treaty rights. These regimes have engaged in creative avoidance of Indigenous knowledge and heritage, and they have not responded to Canadian constitutional reform in any significant way. Thus Canadian legislators have not passed any new legislation to protect, preserve, or enhance the rights of Indigenous peoples to their knowledge and heritage (p.216).

Ownership of traditional knowledge is seen as communal resources with an individual or a group of individuals who are responsible to maintain balance and provide all the due respect for these gifts. In my home community, this responsibility is shared by Elders and Medicine Men from the surrounding reserves. Because they afford each other a great deal of respect, the decision of one is honored by all. That is not to say they automatically agree with one another on all aspects or decisions, and they often confer with one another prior to decision making, but the respect they render to one another allows for some autonomy. Such responsibility is not taken lightly.

With that in mind, and considering the strong cultural opposition and taboos surrounding this subject, I feel I must clarify that I do not intend to breach any cultural ethics by describing or attempting to define the spiritual teachings or activities carried out in a Sweat Lodge. In her analysis of personal development and identity, Sleeter (1993) describes steps particular to people of colour that I could readily identify. She says that once individuals are at peace with their identity, they naturally become protective of their cultural ways. Walter Lightning (1992) also describes the process in which persons must first be accepting of themselves in order for love, spirit and feelings to grow. He says, "Then and only then does the ethos, quietly, in purity and divinity, move within our lives" (p.242). He goes on to say that when we achieve this state, we have a natural tendency
to protect it; we see the preciousness of it and hold it close to our heart. From personal experience I can certainly confirm the protective instinct engendered by this topic. I make no apology for wholeheartedly condemning the exploitation and subsequent commodification of Native spiritual ceremonies and teachings and, in so doing, I applaud those activists who seek to protect our ways, but I also need to know what positive effects, if any, exist out there in the hearts of those who are pure. I do not wish to insult my Native brothers and sisters who do not share my perceptions, and if in the process of conducting this study I accidently do so, I extend my apology. I intend to present the information in a manner that is as close as possible to what the subjects may say. It is my further hope that, as the study unfolds, the reader will form an unbiased opinion based on what is presented as I too struggle to do the same. As a precautionary measure, an Elder and a Medicine Man will assist the researcher to ensure that no breach of confidentiality occurs while discussing spiritual knowledge, spiritual powers, or spiritual ways of doing things in the Sweat Lodge. As noted earlier my main objective is to investigate whether there has been any significant difference in the perceptions of non-Native individuals since participating in legitimate traditional Sweat Lodges. Has participation created a spiritual kinship, a greater understanding of Aboriginal people? Will they take our teachings to heart? Will they be allies in the fight for "holistic survival"? Will they raise their voice against oppression? What was the first hand experience of the First Nations people who offered and conducted such an event? These and many other questions naturally emerge as a result of the study. Answers to these questions are discussed in the analysis and conclusion chapters.

**Warnings and Advertising through the World Wide Web**

With today's rapidly increasing ability to communicate with the global community, the Internet has become a vehicle not only for dispatching advertisements for spiritual get-aways, camps, and paraphernalia, but also for
condemnations and warnings. Simply entering related words such as new age spiritualism or shamanism will open up a myriad of choices for exploration. First Nations people and supporters of Western religions appear to share a commonality in their disapproval of non-conventional religions, but for very different reasons.

Understandably, there are many sources on the Internet that warn of hidden dangers associated with cults. Warnings are issued against joining cults whose followers are isolated from the general society, whose leaders demand total loyalty to the group and total obedience. Those who issue such warnings believe the practice of rituals to be psychologically unwholesome. Rightly or wrongly, First Nations religions are often regarded as synonymous with Nature religions. Because Native religions have such a strong focus on respecting nature, and because the term shaman is often applied to our Medicine Men and Women, Indigenous religion is subject to the same condemnations by perceived association as those of other Nature religions.

Conclusion

Through the literature review I have uncovered considerable hostility and fear from both the Indigenous and Western worlds. Unfortunately, most of the literature I encountered that was not directly attacking or attempting to debunk New Age religions was fraudulently advertising or selling sacred knowledge. Many other sources related expressly to different cults, while still others appeared to be soliciting conversion to an assortment of New Age Religions.

Authenticity, ownership, and control of Aboriginal spiritual knowledge are key factors in the continuity of our culture, and appear to be the cause of most of the hostility, mistrust and fear. The historical relationship between First Nations people and Europeans has not faded in the memory of Native people who still struggle for fair, equitable and respectful treatment. Likewise, incidents such as the massacre in Waco, Texas, and in Jonestown, South America, bring fear and
chill the souls of all. It is unfortunate that Indigenous traditional religion has been painted with the same brush. The connotations of being synonymous with other cults and nature religions, while unfair, may deter some curiosity seekers and inadvertently offer some protection from those who seek to rob First Nations people of our religion.

Two of the questions asked earlier were what motivated non-Aboriginal people to turn to Aboriginal spirituality, and who are these people? To answer these questions the researcher spoke directly to three non-Aboriginal individuals who have experienced a Sweat Lodge ceremony and have become involved in Native spirituality. While their stories form only a very brief glance at the phenomenon of non-Aboriginal involvement in Native spirituality, it is a beginning, and a topic that deserves more research in the future if we are to make informed decisions about the benefits or the dangers of sharing First Nations knowledge.

The benefits of gaining a few enlightened people, who do not engage in racist or prejudice behavior may be outweighed by the danger of fraudulent practitioners or those who would sell the limited knowledge they gain, thereby destroying the purity of our religion and medicines. One of the prime directives of First Nations healers is not to make financial gain by selling medicines that the Creator placed on earth for our use. Sharing such information with pharmaceutical companies who patent their products would ultimately mean that First Nations healers would have to pay to use them and could force First Nations healers underground to avoid prosecution from the law. The dangers are many; henceforth, there is an urgency for protective laws governing Indigenous knowledge.
CHAPTER THREE
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Design

In choosing a research design that would most appropriately fit the intent of this study and one that was in keeping with the oral tradition, I searched for a method that would transmit the cultural context of two diverse groups while meeting the rigorous academic standards set forth by the University of Saskatchewan and more particularly the formal criteria of a thesis. The reflective narrative approach appeared to be closest to the storytelling tradition of First Nations people and offered the most flexibility while being an accepted qualitative research method. Lincoln and Guba (1985) consider the qualitative research design to be "more sensitive to and adaptable to many shaping influences and value patterns that may be encountered" (p. 40). As well, a qualitative research approach allows the researcher to explore multiple realities constructed from social experiences (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). In this study it was of particular interest to present the experiences of the participants as reflections of their diverse social backgrounds and multiple realities. The latter of which included both traditional First Nations and non-Aboriginal cultural perspectives and perceptions.

To meet the criteria of reflective reporting, according to Wolcott (1990), four characteristics must be present. The researcher must (a) focus the story on a critical event; (b) tell the story from the participant's perceptions; (c) reconstruct the event according to the participant's memory; and (d) present events in a chronological order. In compliance with Wolcott's criteria, the critical event explored was the personal experience of each of the three non-Aboriginal people's participation in a traditional Indian Sweat Lodge, and the experiences of four First Nations people who organized and conducted such a ceremony. The conversations I had with the participants afforded an avenue for them to
reconstruct their experience and reflect on their memory of the ceremony. The reflective narrative approach allowed me to present the participant's experiences in chronological order. The most obvious place to begin was to speak to First Nations people who had organized a Sweat Lodge for non-Native people, because without their consent to participate in the study only one side of the story would be possible. Furthermore, without the spiritual leadership of a First Nations Medicine man in the Sweat Lodge itself, the authenticity of the ceremony would be jeopardized. Therefore, to begin the stories of how a Plains Cree Sweat Lodge ceremony was conducted for non-Native participants, I began by speaking to individuals who organized such an event and retrospectively reviewed their thoughts and feelings. Their perceptions precede the non-Aboriginal participants' thoughts and feelings, which completes the circle or story in a logical sequence. As I indicated earlier, I knew the three non-Aboriginal participants and the four First Nations people prior to the study.

**Method**

Following academic procedure I prepared a research proposal which briefly included the research design I had chosen, a short abstract, and the procedure and method I would follow. I also included the probes and questionnaires that I intended to use in the collection of data. After my advisor, and committee had reviewed and approved my proposal, it was submitted to the University Ethics Review Board for approval. A copy of the letter of approval from the Ethics committee may be found in the Appendix A. Once I was granted approval the work began.

**Honouring the Collection of Knowledge from First Nations Participants**

I consciously selected four representatives from the First Nations culture to share their experiences out of respect for First Nations ways and to maintain cultural norms. The number four is an
ancient symbol used by almost all Native people of North and South America. There are many different ways that this basic concept is expressed: the four grandfathers, the four winds, the four cardinal directions; and many other relationships that can be expressed in sets of four (Bopp, Bopp, Brown & Lane, 1984, p. 9).

Within the Plains Cree First Nations culture, the number four is significant in many other ways, such as the four seasons, the four kinds of creatures that inhabit Mother Earth, (the water dwellers, the flying creatures, the two legged, and the four legged), the four stages of human growth (birth, childhood, adulthood, and elder), and the four elements on earth (fire, water, air, and earth).

Cognizant of the cultural protocol, and adhering to customary practice, I spoke to an older male relative who agreed to be the intermediary between me and the Medicine man. Having a intermediary is not always necessary, but whenever possible this convention should be followed: it can sometimes be seen as a great disrespect for a female to speak to the Medicine man without the proper introduction and permission of a male relative, even when the Medicine man and female have known each other and spoken previously. A traditional offering of tobacco was presented to the Medicine man, along with a small cash honorarium. Although the honorarium is not required, it does signify appreciation. The Medicine man was advised of the purpose of our visit and, once he agreed to carry out the request, I explained the guidelines governing the study using the letter of introduction and release of information form (Appendix B and Appendix C attached at the end of the document).

The interviews were left unstructured because I was particularly concerned with the interview process when speaking with First Nations participants because of its limitations and intrusive overtures. In general, when seeking the wisdom of an Elder or Medicine man, cultural protocol demands conversations be led by the Elder or Medicine man and not by the individual
seeking their assistance. It is an accepted means of displaying respect. Katz and Nunez-Molina (1986) capture the finer art of collecting data in a First Nations culture when they say,

"The emphasis is on patient and careful listening to what is being said because that is all the speaker is prepared—or willing to share. To say any more would violate the truth and his own standards of responsible behavior. The hallmark of the dominant logical positivist research paradigm - a sense of questions formulated by the researcher to gather, even pry out information - becomes inappropriate. Its purpose seems more to express or even confirm the researchers own preconceptions, or hypotheses, rather than to find out what the other is actually saying (p. 3)."

In addition to this, I also had concerns about the limitations of the formal interview process to conform to the natural flow of a conversation. It is not unusual in First Nations communities for Elders and Medicine Men to respond to questions using stories to teach the uninformed. Mishler (1986) also highlights some of these concerns and limitations of the interview process that I feared when he says,

"Telling stories is far from unusual in everyday conversation and it is apparently no more unusual for interviewees to respond to questions with narratives if they are given room to speak. In general, researchers in the mainstream tradition either have not recognized the pervasiveness of stories because, as I have already remarked, the standard survey interview "suppresses" them . . . .

We are more likely to find stories reported in studies using relatively unstructured interviews where respondents are invited to speak in their own voices, allowed to control the introduction and flow of topics, and encouraged to extend their responses. Nonetheless respondents may also tell stories in response to direct, specific questions if they are not interrupted by interviewers trying to keep them to the
Traditional First Nations education relies on storytelling and experience. Because of the nature of this study, as well as the points that I referred to earlier about conversations, it was crucial to be unobtrusive in speaking with the Elder and the Medicine man.

The spoken word is also considered sacred because it contains the breath of life and spirit of the speaker (Cajete, 1994). "Various ceremonial practices, founded on experience and participation in" ceremonies form the base of "formal teaching and learning of this knowledge" (Cajete, 1994, p. 33, 34). "The use of experience as a legitimate basis of making meaning is well documented and supported" (St. Denis, Bouvier, & Battiste, 1998, p. 19). Brascoupe (1982) concludes that research that does not validate Indigenous knowledge and take into consideration the cultural context does not provide a sufficient understanding. The prominent anthropologist Franz Boaz (1943) has championed the legitimacy of experience, saying, "If it is our serious purpose to understand the thoughts of people, the whole analysis of experience must be based on their concepts, not ours" (p. 314).

Keeping in mind the cultural nuances of conversation with First Nations people and honoring our way, I developed a set of probe questions which were used as a mnemonic device to retrieve and recreate what was said in the conversations. Appendix D, the probe questions, are attached at the end of the document.

The use of audio taping equipment is not generally allowed when speaking to traditional First Nations people, particularly when they are fulfilling a traditional obligation or ceremony. By keeping the participants completely informed of the process, I was exceptionally fortunate that those I interviewed consented to the use of audio equipment. I also took extensive field notes immediately after the interview. In her thesis, Legare (1996) quotes Glesne and
Peshkin (1992) to explain that

The field notebook is the primary recording tool of the qualitative researcher. It becomes filled with descriptions of people, places, events, activities, and conversations; and it becomes a place for ideas, reflections, hunches, and notes about patterns that seem to be emerging (p. 45).

**Blending non-Native Perceptions with First Nations Perceptions**

When presenting the stories of the non-Aboriginal participants, I relied on an interview guide to form the parameter of information that I would use in analysis of our conversations. Once again, the questions were not meant to restrict the natural flow of conversation during the in-depth interviews, but to serve as a mnemonic device from which the reflections of their experience could be gently guided if need be, but more importantly be easily retrieved during analysis and transcription of the data later. For consistency in the presentation of the thesis, their stories were often transcribed verbatim in narrative form. Their stories may be "conceptualized as an example of the broader phenomenon . . . in term[s] of the light it sheds . . . " (Gall, Borg, and Gall, 1996, p. 546), on the "multidimensional, holistic, and rational reality" (Cajete, 1994) of their experience. It was the "affective elements-the subjective experience and observations, the communal relationships . . . the psychological and spiritual orientations . . . " (Cajete, 1994) that were most sought after in this study. "Like formal science research, descriptive narrative research involves detection, selection, and interpretation of the data, which in narrative is the text of the story and the common cultural presuppositions necessary for understanding it" (Polkinghorn, 1988, p. 169). In this study detection and selection are made easier by the use of the probe questions and the interview guide. Following the respondents' reflections, I made interpretations of our dialogue in an attempt to create a higher level of understanding of the two cultural viewpoints. Many Native people "walk in
both worlds", the First Nations world and the dominant cultural world. My interpretations and understandings are a reflection of this. Mishler (1986) explains

My own view is that the use of cultural understanding is unavoidable and that analysis of naturally occurring discourse, such as interview [conversation] narratives, require that the investigator "add to" or supplement the text through a step that Labor and Fanshel (1977, p. 49) refer to as "expansion".

In this process the analyst brings together all the information that we have that will help in understanding the production, interpretation, and sequencing of the utterance and question. To accomplish this expansion of meaning, the analyst uses her or his 'best understanding', makes explicit pronominal or elliptical references to other material as well as to presumably shared knowledge between the participants, and introduces factual material from other parts of the interview [conversation] or from general knowledge of the world. (p. 95)

When the interviews were completed, the notes I had transcribed were shared with the respondents. Any information that the participants were uncomfortable sharing was deleted from the text. The probe questions and interview guide assisted in filtering the information that was required for the study.

In the analysis stage of the study, I categorized the respondents' answers by using the probe questions and interview guide to keep the information manageable. A brief biographical description of each participant, excluding any identifying information, precedes each respondent's account of his or her experiences, thoughts and feelings. I felt that the biographical information would lend credence to the respondents' accounts. I was particularly concerned that the non-Aboriginal respondents not be seen as religious fanatics, illiterate, superstitious individuals, or romantics drawn to the mysticism of Indian religion.
These people were well educated, stable members of society who could be found in any community. In organizing the information this way, I was hopeful that the collective thoughts and feelings of the participants would offer insight into the value of sharing Aboriginal knowledge by providing both perspectives.

**Following Interview Protocols**

I conducted two distinct sets of interviews as outlined below. One set included four First Nations people and the second set involved three non-Native participants. I had originally intended having equal representation from both cultures, but this was not to be. As much as the number four is significant to First Nations, the number three in Christianity would be its counterpart. Having three non-Native participants more suitably reflected the significance of the number three in the Christian world. For example in Christianity there are three persons in one God, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Jesus fell three times while carrying the cross, and He rose from the dead after three days. Whether it was coincidence or not I do not know.

**A) Interviewing a First Nations female Elder and male Elder who organized a Sweat Lodge for non-Aboriginal participants**

As I indicated in my introduction, a lady that I knew organized a Sweat Lodge for her co-workers, which initiated my interest in this topic. In her interview she discusses how she became involved in organizing a Sweat Lodge and her evaluation of how things went. Her husband assisted her in preparation of the Sweat. He speaks candidly about his feelings after the Sweat had been conducted.

**B) Interviewing a Traditional Medicine Man**

When approaching the Medicine man, I drew from cultural teachings according to the Plains Cree tradition. To facilitate an interview with the Medicine man, I used an intermediary to arrange for a visit with one of the Medicine men who led a Sweat Lodge that was conducted for non-Native people. Following
cultural protocol, I made a traditional offering of tobacco and currency, although the latter was only a sign of gratuity and was not necessary. The interview was left unstructured.

**C) Interviewing an Elder**

When deciding which Elder to approach, I intentionally decided to cross geographical areas but within the same cultural group, hoping to discover if there would be any difference of opinion regarding the suitability of conducting such ceremonies with Euro-Canadians. The Elder that I chose was also more readily accessible to me in that I would not have to travel great distances to consult with him. As with the other interviews, this interview was unstructured. He in effect provided guidance after the interviews had been conducted with the non-Aboriginal participants, ensuring that there was no breach of confidentiality of sacred knowledge within the written text.

**D) Interviewing non-Aboriginal participants of a Sweat Lodge**

I conducted three in-depth personal interviews with non-Aboriginal individuals who had participated in at least one traditional Sweat Lodge. Since I first began the study I have encountered many other Euro-Canadians who have disclosed their interest and peripheral involvement in First Nations spirituality, particularly if they learn of my study.

**Data Collection**

The interview guide and the probe questions served a dual role in the collection of data. They were used both as a mnemonic device to guide our dialogue and as a method to categorize the data once the interviews were complete. As I indicated earlier, I was also extremely fortunate that all the participants agreed to the use of audio equipment.

The participants of the study were all people who were known to me prior to conducting the study. I believe knowing the participants was beneficial in a number of ways. First, the participants were more at ease with me during the
interview. This allowed me the latitude to paraphrase and ask for clarification. Second, because of their comfort level they were more candid and trusting. All of the non-Aboriginal participants were professional acquaintances whom I came to know for several years, two of whom I would now consider friends. I chose the three non-Aboriginal participants for three reasons: (a) They were professional people who possessed the necessary skills of gate-keeping their personal disclosures and emotions; bearing in mind the nature of our conversations and that the topic we discussed had the potential to be charged with emotion; (b) I believed they would be capable of expressing their experiences; (c) they had also previously told me of their experience in a Sweat Lodge during an informal social gathering, so I knew in advance they would be more receptive to sharing their experience again for the purpose of this study. In her thesis, Legare (1996) (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) explains how purposeful sampling increases the scope or range of data exposed (random or representative sampling is likely to suppress more deviant cases) as well as the likelihood that the full array of multiple realities will be uncovered, and because purposive sampling can be pursued in ways that maximize the investigator's ability to devise grounded theory that takes adequate account of local conditions, local mutual shapings, and local values (p. 50).

I have a much closer relationship with the Aboriginal participants. The Medicine Man is a member of the same Indian reserve as I, and I have sought assistance from him before. The fourth First Nations person is a person whom I have come to know and respect through his community involvement with young people. Based on the relationship I have with the participants, the interviews were left intentionally unstructured. My relationship with the participants also allowed for the exchange to be culturally supportive and meaningful based on our shared cultural awareness.
I provided the participants with a copy of the interview guide and probing questions, as the situation warranted, before the interview began so that they might set the scope of their experience, although I explained that it was not meant to restrict their account. The probe questions and interview guide provided the participants with a base to start their recollection and gave them a general idea of the information I was searching for. I also explained that the interview guide would be used as a way for me to categorize all the responses once I had completed the interview process. Prior to beginning the interview, I also advised them of their rights as a participant in the study. In particular,
1. That participation was voluntary, and participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time.
2. That I was interested in their thoughts and feelings regarding their experience in the Sweat Lodge as it pertained to them and to this study, and also, that I was not attempting to describe, teach, or disclose any Sacred knowledge of the Sweat Lodge proper.
3. I would treat all information confidentially.
4. I would release the raw data to each participant after transcription of the taped conversations had taken place.
5. That each participant would have the opportunity to review and make amendments or deletions to the transcript prior to the final draft being made public in the form of the study, at which time I would ask them to formally release the information to me for the purpose of this study.
6. I further advised the participants that the data may be used in a journal article at a later date and would be stored at the University of Saskatchewan as prescribed by the University Advisory Committee in Behavioural Science Research.

A copy of Appendix A (University of Saskatchewan letter of approval for human experimentation), Appendix B (Letter of Introduction), Appendix C
(Probes to be used with traditional Aboriginal people), Appendix D (Interview Guide), Appendix E (Release of Information), and Appendix F (Transcript Release), are attached at the back of this document.

Confidentiality

The researcher was committed to maintaining the confidentiality of the participants. Those who were selected to tell their stories were asked to choose a pseudonym, which was used when transcribing their stories. As indicated in the methodology section above, the individuals who were selected to share their stories were given an opportunity to participate in editing the final draft of their transcripts to ensure that they were comfortable with the contents, were reassured that any identifiable information was not present, and to ensure no misrepresentation of their experience was published. The raw data gathered through the interview process was returned to them after the University of Saskatchewan formally accepted the completed thesis.

Consent

The researcher followed the Guidelines For Informed Consent as set out by the Ethics On Human Experimentation at the University of Saskatchewan and followed cultural protocols of First Nations. The University of Saskatchewan approval letter to the researcher may be found as an appendix at the end of the study.

Debriefing and feedback

A final debriefing interview was scheduled once revisions were made to the transcripts, drawing closure through a final discussion with the subject signing off the transcripts.

The researcher has more than twenty years of professional experience in counseling and interview techniques, and felt confident that if any member of the study experienced emotional difficulty all necessary steps to eliminate the distress would be employed. The subjects were alerted to the possibility of
intense emotion and advised to be their own gate-keepers. In addition to this, the individuals who made up the study were selected in part for their personal skills, training, professional experience and ability to deal with highly emotional situations. This was ascertained prior to final selection.
CHAPTER FOUR
INTERVIEWS
First Nations Perspectives on the Phenomenon of Non-Aboriginal Participation in Traditional Ceremonies

This chapter provides a summary of this researcher's conversations (interviews) and interpretations of the interviews that were conducted with the four First Nations people. In some instances the writer will report verbatim what the participant says. All quotations, unless otherwise cited, are of the participants during their respective interviews. In other instances the writer will interpret and summarize the conversations that took place. In transcribing all the interviews verbatim I quickly realized that summarizing would be necessary as all the interviews exceeded ten pages of single spaced typewritten pages.

The researcher arranged for the interviews to be conducted in the private residences of the participants. I was particularly sensitive and cognizant of the location of the interviews. It was my express desire to place the participants in familiar settings to ease any discomfort, thus allowing the participants to be more open and forthright. In choosing the participants' home environments to conduct the interviews, I believed that the balance of power would be in the participants' hands. It was also tantamount for the writer to show respect and honour to the participants as culture dictated. While I have included some home descriptions, I have changed these to keep their identities confidential.

As indicated earlier, the writer has a closer relationship with the First Nations participants and I was directly motivated to conduct this study as a result of a conversation that took place between us. These were the people that I interviewed first. I began the reconstruction of interviews chronologically as Wolcott (1990) prescribed in reflective reporting. In addition to the paraphrasing or verbatim transcription, I will on occasion clarify certain text that may not be general knowledge to those who are not of Aboriginal descent. These
clarification points are italicized for the reader's convenience and to eliminate any confusion between the writer's explanation and the actual interview.

A summary of each interview that highlights the main points of each respondent, will immediately follow each interview. Analysis of all the interviews comprise the last chapter before final conclusions are drawn.

**Interview One (First Nations Female Elder)**

To enable an easier discourse and to protect the identity of the participants, each participant was given the opportunity to choose a pseudonym. The first was a First Nations woman who chose the pseudonym Rita.

Rita is a middle aged female with an olive complexion and dark brown hair and eyes. She has worked for the past twenty five years with the Provincial government. She was raised adjacent to a Indian Reservation because her father was one of the unfortunate members of the band who was disenfranchised by the Federally appointed Farmer-Instructor of the day for some misdemeanor. She was, however, taught and raised in the traditional Cree/Assiniboine way. She later married back into her father's band and became a treaty status member. Her father and her extended family members regained their status after Bill C31 was enacted in 1985. Her mother was born and raised on an Assiniboine reserve in South East Saskatchewan that has guarded the purity of their traditional culture fiercely. Rita was raised in and exposed to a rich traditional Cree/Assiniboine culture. She continues to live and participate in all aspects of the culture in which she was raised. She also speaks fluent English and agreed to being audio-taped in that language.

Before the interview began the researcher reviewed the purpose of the study, the rights of the participant and the obligations of the latter. Rita was completely at ease and indicated she understood her rights as a participant, my obligations and the purpose of the study.

The interview took place in her daughter's home. The room was neat and
tidy with the wafting aroma of fresh perked coffee. Rita’s daughter disappeared into a room down the hall, allowing Rita and me the privacy needed to conduct the interview. Rita traveled most of the day to come and spend the weekend with her daughter and to meet with me. Before the interview began, we laughed and visited in our usual way as we sat drinking coffee, easing the tension that had crept into the room, whether because of the tape recorder or because we both knew this would be an unusual format of our usual banter during such visits, I could not clearly discern. I explained to Rita that although she had told me about her experience arranging a Sweat Lodge for non-Aboriginal people before, this time I would be audio taping it for use in my study. She acknowledged her understanding by nodding her head affirmatively.

I began the interview by asking Rita how she had become involved arranging a Sweat Lodge for Non-Aboriginal people. Rita explained that she belonged to an employment equity group at her place of work. She went on to recount that several Non-Aboriginal co-workers were very interested in learning about First Nations culture in the hope of creating an understanding between both groups and fostering a better working relationship. Rita explained that, because of her long term work placement, her co-workers were comfortable asking her if she could facilitate a Sweat Lodge ceremony for them to attend, which she agreed to try. Rita elaborated further, stating that it was not just her department interested in the Sweat, but that other departments had also expressed their desire to be part of such a cross cultural experience. She explained that they were all professional people from different government departments, including justice and education.

I followed this exchange by asking her what she had to do to set up a Sweat Lodge. Rita answered by saying that she knew who to contact for a Sweat and made the initial inquiries. She enlisted the help of her husband as an intermediary to approach a Medicine Man whom they both knew. Upon being
asked, the Medicine Man indicated a willingness to conduct the Sweat. Apparently he had conducted Sweat Lodges for other government officials such as the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, who have a cross cultural awareness program as part of their training. Once the Medicine Man agreed, it became a matter of preparing the people who wanted to attend. To achieve this end she recruited her uncle to teach them the intricacies, procedures, and behaviors expected of them in a traditional Sweat Lodge. Rita explained that a meeting was called for those who had expressed an interest in attending the Sweat Lodge. Her uncle prepared the participants of the Sweat Lodge, telling them what they were to bring, what they were to wear, how to behave in order not to offend the Elders and Medicine Men, how to enter a Lodge, and what to expect in the Lodge. They were also advised that because of the very spiritual nature of the Sweat Lodge ceremony, they would not be allowed to take cameras, video recorders, or audio recorders into the Lodge.

Leading with the next question, I asked Rita— why she had chosen her uncle to teach them. She explained that her uncle was a Pipe-Carrier, and according to traditional Indian ways, he was allowed to teach others cultural protocols and to share cultural knowledge. She elaborated further, explaining the difference between a Pipe-Holder and an Elder. She said that there are two kinds of Elders. An Elder may be someone from the community who has earned the respect of the people in his community, usually based on age and wisdom gained through life experience. The other kind of Elder earns his/her distinction through much more rigorous training with a Medicine Man in the spiritual realm and in healing. In order for an individual to be a Pipe-Carrier, they must participate in a ceremony to receive the pipe, as well as participate in four Sun dances. They endure many sacrifices and provide many offerings. She further stated that being a Pipe-Carrier is passed down from generation to generation. Rita said that her "uncle got his from his mother, who was a Medicine Woman, and that she had
got hers from her father; so, it keeps going down from generation to generation."

I asked, rather naively, if anyone could become a Pipe-Carrier. Rita replied negatively, stating, "It's a gift; lots of people would probably like to be a Pipe-Carrier, and they may go through a ceremony, but it's a gift that you're born with, it just comes to you. It's handed down, but it's like there could be a Medicine Man with maybe five boys, but none of them would qualify, because they're not ready; they don't act respectfully, or they don't know how to use it, so then it dies."

Others, she says, are identified with this gift at birth by their parents. She went on to explain that her "uncle was different from other people; he had a special gift of seeing things, visions and dreams, and he was able to hear things that other people couldn't." She said that her uncle received songs from the spirit world which he was entrusted to teach to other specific individuals. Songs play a significant role in First Nations spiritual practices. Songs are considered to bear exceptional powers as prayers given to an individual so that his/her prayers may be more readily heard by the Great Spirit. It is also customary to share these songs with others as singers may not sing a song unless it is likewise given to them by the Spirits or by another person like her uncle. Rita explained that she asked her uncle to teach the non-Aboriginal people about the Sweat Lodge for her because of his special gifts and his status as an Elder/Medicine Man.

I asked Rita what happened next. She answered that after her co-workers were taught about the Sweat, she and her uncle started making arrangements. Rita says that they went to a nearby reserve where they knew the Medicine Man and finalized the plans. She explained that her husband collected the rocks and the firewood necessary to heat the rocks. Rita went on to explain that it was customary to have a feast after a Sweat, so all the participants were asked to contribute funds which would be used to purchase the necessary food supplies.

Rita continued on, saying that there were twenty-six non-Aboriginal people in attendance, along with four Pipe-Carriers that conducted the rounds in the
Sweat Lodge, and two other men who were helpers. One looked after the water and the other man brought in the rocks and served as the doorman. In total there were thirty-two participants. At this point I interrupted, asking if the Pipe-Carriers were the same as Medicine Men. Rita replied, "Yeah, sometimes they're called Medicine Men, sometimes they're called Elders." She went on to explain that the four Pipe-Carriers had their own lodges, their own pipes, and that they took part in Sun dances regularly. The four Elders in attendance were there to help the Medicine Man whose lodge in which the Sweat was carried out in. She also explained that one of the Pipe-Carriers had the gift of healing and everyone had an opportunity to see him separately. She said he also conducted the third round, which was the healing round.

At this point I asked Rita if the participants indicated what they thought of the Sweat. She said that overall everyone really liked it; that some were so overcome with the spiritual experience that they were in tears. She said, "A lot of them said they had always wanted to go to one but never had the opportunity to go, and this was something they always wanted to do and they said they never really expected it to be that good; they just never expected what they got, it was just such a great thing, they were really pleased with everything. Lots of them wanted to go back." Rita continued, "They said they had never felt so close to God, some said that you could go to church and worship, but with people all around you it wasn't the same as sitting in the Sweat Lodge praying, like one to one with God." Rita explained that when the Sweat was over, everyone seemed to share a togetherness feeling that was not there before. Most of the participants of the Sweat did not know each other before this encounter. Rita said she thought if more non-Aboriginal people participated in events like the Sweat that they might understand First Nations people better. She said there was a feeling after the Sweat that the barrier between both cultures had been broken. Rita was having difficulty explaining the feeling of closeness between
them, a feeling of acceptance, "a feeling you could sense, it's a feeling that should be there all the time. I think if more participated they might change their attitude, it would open their eyes a little better and maybe they wouldn't be so racist."

I asked Rita if the Medicine Men indicated what they thought of the Sweat. In response she said three of them were open and receptive to the idea, and welcomed the participants. She went on to say that those three thought it was good, but that there was one Medicine Man, the oldest of the four, who had told the participants that he did not like performing Sweats with women, and that years ago it would not have been allowed. Rita said that he went on to say that he really did not like the idea, but he had come to accept it because times had changed and he acknowledged that he had to change with the times as well. According to Rita, the old man explained his reluctance but welcomed everyone. Rita said, "He wasn't mad or anything; he just stated what he felt."

I asked Rita whether she thought there were any ceremonies that she felt White people should not be allowed to attend and participate in. She said, "Oh yeah," identifying some that were sacred and too spiritual like the Sundance. She went on to say that she would have to trust the person explicitly before she would even consider bringing them to a Sundance. She went on, saying that there were "some phony Medicine Men, both White and Indian, that played around with medicine." She said that "it's very dangerous to fool around with such things, and White men have no business trying to be a Medicine man." She likened it to her becoming an ordained priest in the Roman Catholic Church. As she broke into laughter, I asked her if she wanted to say anything else, because she had answered all the questions that I had wanted to ask. Rita replied negatively. We both breathed a sigh of relief as I shut off the recorder and our real visit could begin.
**Summary of Interview One**

Although Rita facilitated the Sweat for her non-Aboriginal co-workers and believes that sharing some of our First Nations spiritualism effected a positive change in the Euro-Canadian participants, she also clearly has some misgivings about sharing ceremonial aspects of her spirituality with non-Aboriginal people. She expressed strong opposition to Euro-Canadians pretending to be Medicine Men. She believes that only a select few can be authentic Indian spiritual leaders who have been given special gifts from the Creator, and that such gifts have been passed down from generation to generation. Her opposition concurs with the mistrust and fear of exploitation expressed by other First Nations people in the literature review.

**Interview Two (First Nations Male Elder)**

The following participant has chosen a pseudonym to protect his identity and to make transcription easier. He has chosen the fictitious name of Johnny. The satire of this respondent's choice of pseudonym was not lost on the writer, as he tends to be quite the comedian and enjoys humorous interludes with whomever he encounters. In his home community, his laughter is recognized wherever he may be. The proverbial Johnny jokes and misadventures aptly suit the respondent's choice of name.

Johnny is a short middle aged man with salt and pepper hair. His eyes are dark and lively. He speaks fluent English, which he was taught in residential school. He is from the Cree Nation.

The interview was conducted in his daughter's home. Before we began our conversation, we sat and had a smoke. He does not ordinarily smoke cigarettes, but does when he is engaged in a traditional activity. I provided the customary cigarette. By accepting the smoke, Johnny acknowledged his willingness to speak to me for the purpose of this study. He had prior knowledge of the purpose of this visit, but until he accepted the cigarette and smoked with
me, he had not formally agreed to speak to me in a traditional manner. *The smoking thus showed his willingness to talk to me without a verbal exchange taking place.* I explained my responsibility to him, outlining the protective measures that were in place for him to review the data and make changes if he felt them necessary. I also reviewed the purpose of the study and his rights as a participant. I also requested his permission to use a tape recorder, to which he agreed.

I began the interview by briefly outlining what I wanted to ask him about, and explained that if there were any questions he was uncomfortable answering, he need only indicate so and I would honour his refusal. As I took out the tape recorder, a sudden tension stole into the atmosphere. To dispel the tension we talked for awhile about nondescript things, and, when his calmness returned, I began the interview by asking him how he became involved in the Sweat that was conducted for Rita's co-workers. He indicated that Rita had been asked about a Sweat by her co-workers, and in return, she talked to him about it. He said that once she asked him what he thought of it he agreed to see if he could find someone who would do this. He indicated that he had heard there was a Medicine Man he knew who sometimes did that sort of thing for White people, so he "went and visited the guy and brought him tobacco and cigarettes." Johnny went on to explain that he was just helping Rita, and that he took the responsibility of collecting and gathering the rocks and firewood that would be needed for the Sweat once a date was agreed upon. Johnny said that the Medicine Man agreed to hold a Sweat for this group of people and that he (the Medicine Man) would arrange to have the singers, helpers, and Elders present.

What is significant in this agreement is that usually a Sweat is conducted without such formalities as asking the Elders and singers to participate. Generally, Sweats are conducted in a much more relaxed fashion. The Medicine Man will casually mention his intent to have a Sweat on a certain day and time
and whoever wishes to attend shows up. Invitations are not necessary. Similarly, when a community member asks the Medicine Man to hold a Sweat, those who want to attend simply show up. Generally, the word spreads throughout the community very effectively. The feast after the Sweat would be provided by whoever happened to be in attendance and generally takes on the characteristics of a pot luck supper. However, in this case, it became more formal and organized in the sense that the singers, helpers, and Elders were asked to make a commitment to attend at a special date and time, which is no easy feat to carry out. Sweats are most often conducted with only one Medicine Man in attendance, in which case he becomes the primary singer, Pipe-Carrier, and Elder. The Medicine Man chooses someone in attendance to serve as the doorman, or helper.

I asked Johnny if he knew what preparations the White participants of the Sweat Lodge had to undergo. In response, he said he knew that Rita had arranged for an Elder/Medicine Man to meet with the people and "that they had a faint idea of what to expect, and what to do." He chuckled and went on to say that they made sure to tell the women that they could not wear bathing suits and that they were to wear loose fitting dresses or skirts. Johnny went on to say that "the women who attended did dress appropriately." Johnny continued, saying that the White people "were pretty anxious to experience a sweat."

During the interview, I became a little concerned about the interchanging reference used to describe an Elder and Medicine Man. To clear up any misunderstanding, I asked Johnny what the difference was between the two. He explained to me that an Elder need not be a Medicine Man, per se, but that he could be in training as well. He explained further that the Elders were older men who knew more, but most often an Elder was a Medicine Man or Pipe-Carrier as well. In the case of this Sweat they had four Elders, who were the singers, and Medicine Men. He went on to say that they "had a healer who was there and he
helped the people get better." Johnny continued by saying that "there was a woman present who suffered from terrible, terrible head-aches and she got healed," and that "there was another man who had bad asthma, but he wasn't bothered by it at all, even the smoke didn't bother him."

I asked Johnny where all the Elders came from, to which he responded that the Elders came from the adjacent reserves. I asked if he remembered how many white people were there, and Johnny answered that he thought there were about thirty-six. He went on saying "the lodge was just packed." I asked if he went in the sweat too. Johnny answered affirmatively, indicating that he went in all four rounds, but not the cowboy round. He explained that the cowboy round was a fifth round, done principally to use up the water. Once materials are gathered and identified for use in the Sweat, they cannot be used for any other purpose. This is also true for any foodstuffs that are targeted to be used in the Feast after the Sweat. Therefore, if there is an overabundance of water or any other material, it needs to be used up. If there is food left after a Feast, the people in attendance must take it home to eat later; it cannot be thrown out as garbage and, as I heard once from an Elder, it cannot be fed to the dogs, as it has been blessed by the Elders/Medicine Men. In traditional Feasts, one is not allowed to refuse any food that is being served and most people bring extra containers to carry home any leftovers. A Feast is a ceremony where the community gets together for the sharing of a meal that has been blessed by Elder(s).

There are also different observances governing when the food must be eaten: some bands believe the leftovers must be eaten before nightfall, while others believe the food must be eaten within four days. During a Feast, it is believed that the participants are sharing a meal with their departed family members and with the spirits. A plate is prepared for the spirits containing everything that is to be used. When the Feast is over, cloth, tobacco, and the
food are taken to "clean" ground and tied in the trees. Any food that cannot be eaten within the given time frame is either buried or likewise tied to a tree on clean ground. Clean ground is considered to be ground devoid of domestic animals, to which few people have ready access.

Johnny went on to say that some of the White people stayed in the Sweat Lodge during the whole process, not exiting the Lodge during breaks between rounds. When the sweat was over, Johnny said, "everyone was pretty quiet, there were some that were really moved; they cried a lot during the sweat." That in itself is not particularly unusual considering the intensity of the prayers and communion with the Great Spirit.

I asked Johnny if the Elders/Medicine Men said anything during or after the Sweat. Johnny responded by saying that the Elders/Medicine Men welcomed the White people at the beginning but did not say anything more. Johnny indicated that the Elders/Medicine Men could not say anything bad because it would not be in keeping with traditional ways, and that it would be considered wrong of them.

I asked Johnny what he thought of non-Aboriginal people going to Sweat Lodges; Johnny burst into laughter saying "Oh oh, here comes Archie Bunker." After the laughter died down, he responded in a much more serious tone, saying, "For myself, I think that a White man is a White man, even though he wants to come to my religious things, he has his own religion; he just comes because he's curious, he hears from a friend he should come and do this. White men don't get nothing out of it. They only come to find out about it so they can use it against us somehow. It's like how the Catholics tried to beat the Indian out of me in school. I think White men should go to Church and Indians can go to Sweats." After paraphrasing his comment, I asked if he felt there was any kind of ceremony that the White community could attend. He responded that he saw no harm in them going to pow-wows, "since it's much more of a spectator sport now, and it's so
commercial, what with the dancers competing for money and all. But for religion, I think ours is ours and theirs is theirs."

Finally, I drew the interview to a close by asking if he wanted to say anything else, to which he responded negatively. I shut the tape recorder off and we got back to our informal visiting.

**Summary of Interview Two**

Even though Johnny helped facilitate a Sweat Lodge for non-Aboriginal people, he firmly believes the two cultures cannot mix in religious practices. He does not identify any advantages to either cultural group sharing First Nations traditional ceremonies. Johnny adamantly expressed his displeasure and opposition to sharing our religious practices and knowledge with non-Aboriginal people. His distrust stems from his personal experience at a residential school and the abusive relationship that took place between Indian students and the Catholic missionaries during the residential school era. Hard feelings are still rampant in Native communities by those who experienced such abuse.

**Interview Three (First Nations Medicine Man/Elder/Healer)**

The following interview took place on an Indian reservation in Southeastern Saskatchewan. I traveled most of the day to reach this destination. The interview was prearranged by an older male relative who was familiar with the Elder/Medicine Man. He accompanied me to the Medicine Man's home. When we entered into the Medicine Man's family kitchen, his wife greeted us with a smile, saying it was nice to see us again; she offered us a place to sit at the table and gave each of us a cup of tea. As my eyes traveled over the kitchen, I noticed a beautiful eagle fan displayed on the wall over the table. Other less noticeable cultural objects, such as the display of colors hanging over the doorway, were observable if one knew what to look for and were aware of their significance. The solid wood table and chairs would be worth a small fortune to an antique collector, but somehow fitted into the humble environment where we
sat. Humility, in the First Nations world view, is considered greatly desirable and honorable. The room itself seemed to emanate a sense of welcome and I felt an inexplicable sense of peace and well being. The Medicine Man/Elder greeted us with a handshake and motioned for us to sit in the chairs that his wife had indicated.

Our conversation began with inconsequential subjects and a quick rundown of our family genealogy, concluding that we were all related somewhere down the line. He signaled to his wife with a nod, and she got up and silently disappeared down the hall; taking the cue of the wife’s departure, my intermediary also left, smiling and saying he would see us later. I placed the tobacco, cigarettes and small sum of money on the table between us. He picked up the cigarettes and nonchalantly lit one. This action indicated to me that he was ready to begin. I asked if it would be possible to use a tape recorder for our conversation, and he readily agreed. I began the process of outlining what it was that I hoped to learn from him, my responsibilities for protecting his anonymity, and his rights as a participant. He shook his head in acknowledgment. As with the other participants, I asked him if he would like to use a fictitious name, to which he responded negatively, thereby giving me permission to use his birth name, which is Owen. Feeling it better to err on the side of caution to protect his anonymity, I will not disclose his surname. Owen was the healer mentioned in both previous interviews, and one of the Medicine Men that conducted the Sweat Lodge for the non-Aboriginal people discussed earlier. I turned on the recorder and asked him if he was a traditional Cree Medicine Man, to which he replied that he was, that some people would call him that, and that he had studied, and learned from his grandfather the spiritual and healing ceremonies needed to be a Medicine Man. He explained that he watched what his grandfather did for many years, saying that it (the sacred knowledge) had been passed down to him through the generations. He said he learned by watching, listening and helping
his grandfather. He explained that nothing was written down, that he had to listen very carefully and that he had to memorize everything. He said everything is taught orally because "you got to use your head, some things you have to keep to yourself, other things you're allowed to pass on. You're taught these things orally because if you wrote them down, someone can use them in different ways that are bad, in ways that they were not meant to." He further explained that this was where the term "bad medicine" came from. Like most Christian faiths, there is a good and an evil side to traditional Cree spiritualism. Most First Nations people have heard one story or another about the effects of bad medicine. It is generally believed that bad medicine is like a curse sent to harm another, or to bring bad luck, illness or even death. It is also believed to be harmful to pretend you are an Elder/Medicine Man or, as discussed earlier in the Literature Review, it may also be hurtful to an individual to teach others sacred knowledge. This reference was alluded to in the Literature Review in conjunction with the opposition expressed by Native people about sharing sacred knowledge with non-Aboriginals.

Continuing the interview, I asked Owen how long he had been in training. He responded that he has been involved in Cree Spiritualism constantly for the past fifteen years and that through the years he was taught different things by his grandparents, aunts and uncles. He explained that they were the ones who had done it before him, and they passed their knowledge on to him.

I asked Owen how he became involved in doing Sweats for non-Aboriginal people. He replied that he really did not know how it came to be, but that in the beginning he was reluctant to help people from other cultures. He went on, explaining that he thought "their way of thinking was different from ours, that they seemed to always need a logical, scientific explanation for what happens in a Sweat which in reality contradicts their faith in their own religious beliefs." He continued by saying he was vigilant and careful to teach them only very basic
things, like what to do in a Sweat. He does not teach anyone details. Owen further explained that a lot of non-Aboriginal people like going to Sweats and that he has noticed a change in the ones who have taken part in Sweats. He says, "They have a different outlook on our ways, our culture." Some people have told him that before they participated in a Sweat, they thought that "we were strange people, they thought they were better than us, they thought we pray[ed] to different things, paganism, but they soon found out that we all pray to the same Creator." He continued, saying that he does try to teach them certain aspects of our culture, particularly about respect. He "explains to them we don't make fun of anybody, any other religion, each one has to be respected, we respect their beliefs as well as their churches, they're no different than us, they go to their churches and we go into the sweat . . . they go to church and sing their hymns, we go to sweats and sing our songs. If you look in the book, in the Bible, a lot of our things, our teachings, are in the Bible."

After a brief pause, I asked him how non-Aboriginal people know how to find him. He said, "It's always passed on by word . . . some come out of curiosity, others because it's the last ditch effort because nothing else has worked, so they come to us. They're looking to get healed, some of spirituality, some are looking for meaning in life." I continued by asking how many Sweat Lodges he would have had where White people were involved. He replied that there were too many to remember, that he has never counted, but that there seemed to be more coming. He said that "When they come out [of the sweat] they say they feel different, they don't feel so lost, they don't feel so empty."

I drew his memory back to the Sweat that he was part of when Rita and Johnny brought her co-workers down for a Sweat, and I asked him if it was usual for there to be more than one Elder/Medicine Man present. He responded by shaking his head negatively, saying they will often have three or four men, "working at one time together, working on one problem." Then I asked Owen if
any of the other Medicine Men at that Sweat said anything to him about how they felt the Sweat went. "They said it went pretty good, they were happy with what happened. We all sat around and talked, some of the people in there were sick and we helped them." Extending the topic, I asked Owen if any of the non-Aboriginal people indicated how they felt about the Sweat. He said, "They all left feeling better and saying they liked it very much; they were grateful, saying they wanted to come back again. Some come back at different times, sometimes two or three together." He continued by saying that some never return, that "they get busy with work and some go back to the way they were."

I followed up with the next question asking Owen if he thought there were ceremonies which non-Aboriginal people should not be allowed to be part of. He sat in silence, pondering the question, and then replied, "Yeah, like some of our sun dances, rain dances, and our thirst dances." He recalled two occasions where there were non-Aboriginal people present at these ceremonies and they were asked to leave. One, he recalls, was trying to take pictures, and another one was doing a thesis on Sun dances. He explains that all of the sacred ceremonies were conducted in our language and that they would not understand the language or religious beliefs in which they were conducted. He continued that Elders would sometimes translate into English, but that it was not always possible to translate effectively, even for our own people who do not speak or understand the language.

Out of curiosity I asked Owen if he had attended a residential school, and if he did how it affected him. He answered that he was "in residential school from Grade Two to around the time I would have been in Grade Six." He explained that he "did not like it, because we were taught their teachings; they were supposed to have compassion which they never did; we were taught that we were the lower class, never to be, to accomplish anything. We were put down all the time, it wasn't very nice." Considering Owen's experience in a residential
school, it is to his credit that he sequestered his Native teachings and has become one of our spiritual leaders and healers.

Since I felt I had gained the information I was seeking, I asked Owen one final question, asking him what he thought of non-Aboriginal people who claimed to be Native Medicine Men. He laughed and discounted this possibility, saying "They would only be phony," and that "Indians would know this."

I thanked Owen for his time and wisdom and told him that, when I was done transcribing the interview I would return so that he could read it over and change things if he wanted. Several months later, on my return, Owen read the transcript over and signed the release form.

**Summary of Interview Three**

The tone of this interview was much more relaxed, assured, and definite in comparison to the others, in the sense that Owen innately exuded the confidence and power gained from his many years of experience as a spiritual leader. While in his presence his charismatic personality was very much evident. His soft-spoken voice instilled a sense of compassion, caring and trust.

Owen clearly believes that sharing some of our cultural beliefs and practices have helped some non-Aboriginal people to become more tolerant, accepting, and understanding towards First Nations people. His compassion reaches out to all of humanity regardless of race, and his willingness to extend help to those who suffer emotionally and physically is highly admirable. However, he still reserves the right to exclude certain individuals from sacred ceremonies. His reservations appear to be based on the possible threat of those wishing to exploit sacred knowledge and practices, as he indicated when mentioned the two incidents where non-Aboriginals were expelled from the Sundance ritual.

I was also particularly impressed with his tenacity, nurturing his traditional teachings even through his dreadful experiences while in residential school.
Interview Four (First Nations Male Elder/Medicine Man/Healer)

The following interview was with an older Native man who refers to himself as an Elder. His services are in high demand throughout the surrounding Native communities where I live, and he is often called to the United States for his ability to conduct various ceremonies. He speaks English fluently with a heavy Cree accent. However, he does occasionally asks for help with English translation of specific words that express his thoughts more accurately. For example, he would ask "How do you say . . . " and then request help saying a word similar to the one he wished to use. However, his English language skills were sufficient to express his thoughts succinctly. He has been commissioned as a Native Elder with the School Division with which I am currently employed. He emanates kindness, gentleness, and age-old wisdom. He is slightly overweight and dresses in comfortably worn blue jeans. His hair has mostly turned grey and his dark eyes sparkle with love and wisdom. I had offered Old Eagle a cigarette when I first approached him to ask if he would speak to me and assist me with my thesis. I was very careful to explain that I did not want to breach any cultural lines while exploring the topic of this study, and requested his help in ensuring that I did not do so accidently or through my ignorance. He was very supportive and agreed to assist me. Old Eagle is his Indian name, which he instructed me to use in reference to him. He does have a Christian name, but prefers to be called by his Indian name. Our interview transpired in the community room of the school where I teach. Several months after I had first approached him, he simply showed up one day, shortly before school would be dismissed for the day, and said he would wait for me in the Community room where we could talk in private. The location was, therefore, not planned but happened spontaneously. I had raised a few eyebrows storing a pouch of tobacco in my desk for several months, but I was heartily grateful that I had, had the foresight to have one available that day, and tentatively tucked the tobacco into my sweater pocket.
At the end of the day, with all the children dismissed for the day, I approached the community room, wondering what Old Eagle wanted to talk about. Old Eagle sat in a comfortable chair, holding a cup of steaming coffee with two hands as if he was enjoying the warmth of the cup. The community school room is furnished to encourage family and community involvement. It is meant to present a relaxed, homely atmosphere. As I entered the room, he extended his hand and shook mine in greeting. I thanked him for coming to see me and placed the tobacco pouch on the table as I sat next to him in a chair. He explained he had not forgotten my original request and thought he would check in with me, and if it was a good time he was prepared to talk to me about my study. I explained that he caught me not quite prepared and that I had another gift for him but that I would give it to him after we talked, as I would need to go and withdraw some cash from a money machine. He smiled and said that was not a problem. He picked up the pouch of tobacco and asked what it was I wanted to know. I asked if I could use a tape recorder to tape our conversation, explaining I did not want to get anything he said wrong. He merely nodded his head affirmatively as I took out the tape recorder.

I began the interview by asking him how he became involved with Sweat Lodges. He replied that he had been tutored by other Elders for many years and that he had to work for them at lodges, "something like training on the job. A young person has to do that to get information; to do the right things, you have to watch and listen to what the old men tell you to do. You can't just go ahead and run one, you have to be older because it takes many years to learn everything you need to and I'm still learning, I learn everyday."

He went on to explain that according to "our Indian way," only older people can become Elders after they have trained for many years and are grandfathers themselves. Much like Piaget's Stages of Cognitive Development and Erik Erikson's Stages of Psycho social Development that we learn about in
Psychology 110 or first year psychology classes, so too do First Nations have stages of critical development. In accordance to traditional First Nations culture, we have critical stages of life that mark the rite of passage from one stage to another, becoming a grandparent is of particular significance where an individual's role changes from parental responsibility to community responsibility, which includes teaching younger members of the community by passing down cultural norms and cultural practices.

Old Eagle and Johnny have both referred to this practice, which may be said to be true in all cultures, but of particular interest in this study is the transmission of such practices related to religion. This in effect assures continuity of culture. I have heard from other Elders of these stages, which concur with Old Eagle's rigorous viewpoint that only grandfathers may be considered as true Elders. Old Eagle explained that he had "heard of young men, maybe thirty or forty years old, who call themselves Elders," but if you follow traditional ways you cannot be an Elder until you are a grandparent.

Old Eagle continued on, saying that language was a very integral part of being a practicing Elder. He explained that young people must first learn to speak their language, "cause the Creator, He doesn't understand you when you are speaking English. A long time ago there was only us here and our Creator knows our language. That's why those ceremonies are not working like they should be. Some of them do it for money; you're not supposed to do that, they are overdoing it."

I shook my head to indicate I understood his viewpoint and moved on to the next question, asking him what he thought about White people going into Sweat Lodges. He responded, "Well, you know us First Nations people, we can't turn anybody down. If somebody gives us tobacco to pray for him, we can't say no." He continued to explain that the Elders could pray for the White people, but that the Elder must be able to use a pipe and pray in our Native tongue for it to
be effective. Old Eagle asserts that a White person may be allowed into the Sweat if he/she follows cultural protocol. "And they can't come in there and try to tell you what to do. Same with other Elders. If I'm going to have a Sweat, it's up to me, they're in there to help praying, nothing more."

Continuing on the same subject, I extended the question further, asking what he thought of White people that run their own Sweats. He shook his head negatively with a saddened expression on his face and said that he had heard of such practices and that he did not think that it was right. He elaborated further, saying, "They can do it, but there is nothing; it is not going to the Creator. Same thing if I doctor somebody White, the Spirits and Creator can't help White people." Old Eagle continued to draw comparisons to where he believes traditional spiritualism is being misused. He said, "A lot those guys say though they can cure anything. Me, if somebody comes to me for doctoring and then gets well, it's not me, it's the Creator. He's doing it through me; it's a gift."

Such humility is very much a characteristic of authentic traditional Elders/Medicine men.

He goes on to recall a time when he was ill and went to see a Medicine Man/Elder and how the Elder could not tell him that he was cured. "He couldn't, he's not supposed to; somehow you will know from the Creator that you are cured, that you have been given the gift to be well, not sick anymore. That's the same with cancer, some people say they can cure cancer, but that comes from the White people and that can't be cured even with the Spirits." Making reference to other Medicine Men who profess to have the ability to cure cancer, Old Eagle says quite disdainfully that he does not like that, "that they lead them on and only want their money, then they lie to them lots saying oh, you'll get better."

Old Eagle goes on to say that he learned this from four Elders long ago who told him not to do those things. Uninterrupted, Old Eagle continued, saying that a long time ago when people approached a Medicine Man because they
were sick, they would give the Medicine Man a gift, which the Medicine Man would hold onto as a gift; that the gift would be returned to the giver if what the giver sought was not granted by the Creator. He emphatically asserted "that if he can't do the thing that you want, if he can't cure you, he gives them back. That's how it worked a long time ago. That's how the Creator was really helping them, so were the spirits."

Old Eagle continued, explaining that pipes and rattles are not supposed to go into the Sweat Lodges and that people who take these sacred objects into the Sweat Lodges are abusing the Sweat. He explained that the Sweat was being far over-used. He indicated that there are separate Sweats for men and women, but that many today combine the two genders in one Sweat, which he sees as a breach of tradition. He explained there are special Sweats that are conducted to help clean the body and spirit of men who are going to participate in Sundances. He explained, "For that special Sweat they use twenty-four rocks and twenty-four willows. That's the only time you can use twenty-four rocks. Then you can doctor in Sweats too."

I asked if there was a difference between Elders that doctor and Elders that don't. He answered that only certain Elders are given the gift of healing. "It's a gift, gifted already before we even come out of the womb. Elders know when a child has been gifted with special healing powers." He continued that there are a lot of people who claim they can doctor, and heal people, but that if the patient does not get well, they (Medicine Men) are invariably not following cultural teachings in its truest form.

Old Eagle continued talking about the Sweat Lodge, explaining that there are many old laws which are perpetually neglected or broken by those who have not been groomed and taught the "proper" ways of old. He states that too many people are using the Sweat Lodge for purposes other than what they were intended for. He explained that the Sweat was a way of cleansing the body,
mind, and soul in preparation for other ceremonies. That the Sweat was to be used as a prayer forum. He explained that they have corrupted the Sweat Lodge by likening it to other lodges, lodges such as the Sundance. He says, "A lot of those guys say you have to have a feast after a Sweat; it's not right." Such variances between different First Nations groups can be witnessed within the same cultural group. For example, Old Eagle does not believe a feast should be part of a Sweat Lodge, yet the other Elders/Medicine Men interviewed, who are also Cree, have feasts in conjunction with the Sweats.

According to Old Eagle, other customary laws that govern a Sweat Lodge are incessantly broken. He went on to explain the protocols of a Sundance in comparison to a Sweat Lodge. Old Eagle said that if an individual planned on dancing in a Sundance he/she had to make many sacrifices. He said, "You got to have everything of your own, you can't borrow. You have to make new drums, your own hide drums, four of them, and you have to make your own pipes. Now today they're doing it the easy way, they're borrowing or whatever. That's not going to work."

Old Eagle went on to explain that other laws, not just laws pertaining to a Sweat Lodge, are being broken, including the use of the pipe. He said, "Same thing when you smoke a pipe, if you drink alcohol or do drugs the day before, you can't smoke the pipe, you have to wait four days to be clean; you must have a clean mind to smoke the pipe." Other laws that regulate the use of the pipe are being disregarded. He asserted that the pipe must be treated with extreme respect and that any self-respecting Elder would know that pipes are not to be transported anywhere on earth that is not clean. He maintained that he only uses his pipe for ceremonies that are to be held on his home reserve, and that he refuses to take it elsewhere.

He explained that a long time ago there were only two spirits that the Elders could speak to. "The Creator never speaks to us, only the Grandfather
Rock and the Old Lady Spirit, and them are the only ones, there used to be a third one, but I don't hear about him anymore, nobody knows, they've forgotten him, even me I don't know, me too, I'm still learning." He went on to say that he does not believe those individuals who contend they have the ability to speak directly to the Creator, or those who profess to speak to more than the two Ancient Spirits. For example, Old Eagle explained that he got his Indian name from Grandfather Rock, that the "eagle didn't talk to me, but the Grandfather Rock said that he was communicating with the eagles, and so Grandfather Rock told him to give me that name."

Our conversation continued on for quite some time with Old Eagle patiently telling me stories about other religious ceremonies and traditions. While I could go on listening and learning endlessly from this wise old man, the remaining conversation did not specifically address the topic of the Sweat Lodge.

When our conversation drew to a natural close, he again shook my hand and said he would be interested in seeing the finished product and would wait for me to let him know.

**Summary of Interview Four**

Old Eagle's convictions are indisputably anchored in timeless traditions. His knowledge base was gained through many years of training with Elders from an age ostensibly untouched by Western influence or corruption. He steadfastly adheres to his convictions that most of today's Elders/Medicine Men have been tainted by Westernization. He asserts that many Elders/Medicine Men who are currently practicing have misled and misrepresented the intent of the Sweat Lodge. He does not believe people of European descent derive any benefits from participating in Sweat Lodges or in healing ceremonies. He contends that they may attempt to duplicate the Sweat Lodge or seek traditional healing from an authentic Elder/Medicine Man, but any such activity would be superfluous. In keeping with traditional ways, Old Eagle cannot refuse his services to anyone
who requests them, including non-Aboriginal people.

Interviews Five and Six (non-Aboriginal Married Couple)

The following two interviews were conducted simultaneously, since the two individuals were husband and wife and requested they be interviewed together. The interviews were pre-scheduled at their convenience and took place in their family home. The home was appealingly decorated in a typically country decor that suited the personalities of the couple and the farm where they live. Both persons had been given the choice of using a pseudonym or their real name; both opted for a pseudonym. The wife is a lady with hazel eyes who will be called Janice for the purpose of this study. Her husband is a six foot tall man with dark eyes and dark hair who will be referred to as Andrew. They have two boys aged eleven and two. Janice is expecting their third child.

Janice has worked for the provincial government for many years and has a Master's degree in Social Work. Andrew has been employed part-time by the Province to supplement his farm income, he has studied in a Seminary, from which he withdrew before becoming ordained. Janice and Andrew are also long time family friends.

Janice offered me a seat at the kitchen table and a cup of tea as she laid out a plate of cookies. Andrew was already seated at the table. After joining them at the table, I offered Andrew a pouch of tobacco as a symbol of respect and gratitude. This was the second time that I had interviewed them. The audio tape that was used for the first interview was accidentally destroyed, which necessitated a second interview. When I requested the second interview with them Andrew suggested that a traditional offering of tobacco might serve to protect the interview, to which I agreed, and offered the tobacco.

I began the interview, by asking Janice to explain how she first became interested in Native spirituality. She responded that she had grown up in a Northern community where the majority of people were of First Nations origin, so
most of her "friends and their families were very spiritual even if they were not outwardly religious." She did have an encounter with a Sweat Lodge when she was approximately fourteen or fifteen, which she remembers as being very scary. She attributed the fear of that first experience to the individual who had conducted the Sweat, remembering that she did not trust him, primarily because he tended to be a heavy drinker. Janice explained that when she became an adult, she started to search for a spiritual connection, and said that Native spirituality "was always something that [she] believed in but never actively sought more knowledge or experience about, and so as an adult exploring spirituality it really became another option." It was not until she met and married Andrew that she once more became involved with Sweat Lodges. Janice has since attended other ceremonies as well. She recalled with humor being at an All Nations Sundance ceremony with people from as far away as Australia and New Zealand. She said she was sitting there in the sun when a Medicine Man noticed her and called out to her, "Hey, you better put a cap on." Her naturally fair complexion had burnt nearly the same color of her red hair before she put on a hat. She laughed about it, remembering she had not wanted to wear a hat for fear of showing disrespect.

Turning to Andrew, I asked how he first became interested in traditional Native Spirituality. He responded that he had just left the seminary and was working at a retreat in Manitoba that often conducted mini-retreats and healing services with First Nations people in the United States. He explained that as a child he developed quite a racist attitude toward First Nations people and found that his work with the Retreat was "rather incongruent with [his] racist feelings and [his] 'Christianity'." Had he been given the option, he would have chosen not to become involved with Native people. Andrew said it was at one such prayer meeting that he met an eighty-seven year old Native Elder. Andrew explained that he was inexplicably drawn to the old man as the old man prayed over the
people. He recalls when he approached the old man, he was asked what it was he wanted, to which Andrew had no answer, but simply burst into tears, crying that he had "some Native ancestry" but that he had "always rejected it." Andrew said that the old man "made a motion with his hand and I was out, out on the floor, and they said I was out on the floor for forty-five minutes." He said that when he recovered consciousness he felt that he had been "instantly healed, because just as I woke up, I innately knew that all the prejudice was gone." Andrew continued, saying that he stayed with the missionary group for quite some time and was asked one day if he wanted to go to a Sweat; he reluctantly agreed to go, even though he was feeling suspicious and mistrustful. "Unfortunately," he said, "I realized too late that I should have listened to my intuition because I had a very bad experience, becoming physically ill." Andrew later discovered from a different Elder/Medicine Man that his first experience was not typical, but that the Elder who had conducted that first Sweat had done something to Andrew which was not appropriate and was in conflict with traditional ways. Andrew explained in detail the inappropriate action which took place in the Sweat; I feel I cannot share it as I believe it would break my ethical guidelines in relation to what happens in a Sweat Lodge.

Several months later the Deacon who was in charge of the missionary group told Andrew that he wanted him to meet another Elder/Medicine Man named James. James is a pseudonym used to protect the identity of the Lakota Elder/Medicine Man. Andrew recalls "being completely overcome by the sheer power, the intense attraction, the overwhelming spiritual aura that exuded from [James, the Medicine Man]. He was a very powerful man, a spiritual man. I didn't need to be told who he was, I just knew. You could pick him out of the crowd." It was during the first prayer service that Andrew says he experienced an elocution: a voice that told him, "'Behold my anointed one, my chosen one,' which meant James [the Medicine Man/Elder], 'listen to him and remember
everything that he tells you; he will come to your farm and he will teach you the sacred ways, and six months from the day he leaves your farm he will die'.

Andrew was so overcome by the message he had been given that he burst into tears. In reliving this event, Andrew's voice quivered and tears ran down his face. After a brief moment he pulled himself together, said he was okay, and continued talking. He went on to say that when he was formally introduced to James by the Deacon, James "took his hand" and told him they were "having a Sweat the next night" and that Andrew should be there. Once again, Andrew very reluctantly went to the Sweat with James and found it to be "very peaceful, very Christian."

He went on to say that he "could hear the spirits talking to James, but I could not understand what was being said." During that Sweat, Andrew stated, he had a vision of himself doing a piercing like those that are carried out in a Sundance. He approached James after the Sweat to share his vision but James merely advised him that he needed to go to his (James') home the following summer. Andrew recalls being full of questions and asking James for clarification, but James would only reiterate what he had told Andrew before, that he "needed to go to James". Andrew attempted to ask James' wife the same questions, but was told "not to bug" James and that he would "answer all his questions when he (Andrew) went to their house" the next summer. Not knowing what was required of him, Andrew did ask what he needed when he visited James. James advised Andrew that he would need a pipe to go on a Vision Quest. Andrew did not own a pipe, and began searching to purchase one but soon found that the expense would be considerably more than he could afford. He spoke to the Deacon about his need for a pipe, to which the Deacon replied that he could borrow one of his pipes. After that, Andrew attended several more Sweats with James, and "whenever James would have a [Lawampi] spirit calling ceremony he'd always get me to be his helper, he would make me set up the altar, he'd say put this here, and put this there, and this is how you do it, so I learned how to tie the flag
and what color, but he still wouldn't tell me about the significance of anything whenever I asked, he'd just say, 'I told you already, you need to come to my house'."

So the following summer Andrew went to James' house with his borrowed pipe, and James brought him up the hill for a Vision Quest. Andrew recalled it as one of the most spiritual and mystical experiences he has ever had. Andrew remembered coming down from the hill and talking to James about his Vision Quest. Filled with more curiosity and questions, Andrew spoke to James, who always seemed to know the answer before Andrew could actually ask the question. "Of course he knew it all, he had experienced it with me, and he started talking to me about my pipe; he told me the pipe was mine now, and I told him no, I had just borrowed it, I can't just go and tell him that, and [James] said the Deacon already knew about it." James explained to Andrew that there were three ways in which one could get a pipe. "One, it's given to you; two, you go out and make one or buy one; and three, the spirits give you one." When Andrew tried to return the pipe to the Deacon, the Deacon refused to take it back, telling Andrew that the pipe was his to keep, that he (the Deacon) had been told to keep it for a young man who would come from the North and that he was the young man. He was also told that the pipe had originally been made from rock which had come from the North, and, by giving it to him, it would return to its origin.

While Andrew was on his Vision Quest, he saw a Sweat Lodge situated on his farm; Andrew told James about his vision. James instructed Andrew to build one on his farm, which indeed he did. Visions are very much like dreams, in the sense that while on a vision quest one may be instructed to carry out certain actions or be given certain gifts like a song or spirit helper.

Andrew said that he and James formed a very close bond while James continued teaching him. James obviously reciprocated this closeness and adopted Andrew as his son, in traditional fashion according to the Lakota way.
They would meet at various locations over the next two years with Andrew attending as many ceremonies as possible, assisting James. When they were not meeting they would speak to each other by telephone. Then one day James phoned Andrew and told him to pick him up at the American border. Andrew remembers crying, excited and happy, wanting to see James, but also remembering the prophesy of James' death.

James visited Andrew on his farm. "He stayed a week, and that's all we'd do, we'd go out to the Sweat Lodge and he'd teach me, every morning . . . that's all we did and then he started explaining everything to me about the ceremony, how you do this, why you do that, and what to expect." James explained to Andrew that the path he had chosen would not be an easy one, that there would be people who would be angry with him, and that he would be frowned upon. "Six months to the day that he left our farm, he passed away," and with James went any future chance Andrew had of learning more. James had told Andrew that the spirits would teach him in the future. Andrew knew this would be a difficult feat to accomplish without James and wondered how this could happen considering he did not know the language. James responded that his wife Leona would teach him the language, but shortly after James' death Andrew's relationship with the family ended.

Andrew continues to Sweat in the lodge he had built at James's instruction. During Andrew's training period with James, James consented to be audio taped during a Sweat, which is what Andrew draws from when he conducts a Sweat. It is highly unorthodox and extraordinary that James would have allowed Andrew to audio tape him during a Sweat. Andrew contended that his spiritual communication while in the Sweat has not deteriorated. He feels that the spirits continue to guide and teach him as James indicated that they would. He relies heavily on intuition, as the communication between himself and the spirit world is without a common language.
I asked Andrew if he held any particular status or title that would elevate his membership into either the traditional Native spirituality group or his Missionary group. He replied that while he was with the Missionary group, a secondary group formed calling themselves the All Nations Christian Warriors. Andrew described it as a group of people who came together and met to "share their common beliefs in one God, and they would worship each in their own way." It was with this group that Andrew began taking a more active leadership role in organizing and conducting prayer meetings and healing circles. He approached this leadership role in a very cautious manner, knowing that his leadership with this group would be short-lived, because James had told him he "would know when the time was right," and Andrew knew it was not right at that time. Until Andrew undertook the Vision Quest and was given a pipe, he was James' helper and student. After receiving the pipe, he became a Pipe Holder.

At this point, Andrew's wife Janice interjected, saying that she believes that in their present group, which consists of their immediate family and close friends, he is seen as a spiritual leader capable of conducting Sweats. Janice elaborated further, saying that Andrew does not advertise his Sweats but that many people come to him and request his help, which he cannot refuse. She continued by saying that she believes Andrew has been gifted with the gift of prophesy. Janice credits Andrew with her own spiritual development, saying that Andrew helped her move from a purely academic "head world" into an experiential spiritual world. When I asked Janice if she held any special status, she indicated negatively.

Following this exchange, I asked Janice how her involvement and experiences with Native Spirituality had affected her life. She laughed, saying that she was not so "anal retentive" and that it made her more accepting of people. Janice tends to be obsessively time conscious, highly organized and controlling. Patience and acceptance of other people's ways of doing things
comes hard for her. The relaxed, slow pace of a conversation with a First Nations Elder was difficult for her prior to her involvement with our spirituality. She also started questioning her own perception of people: She believed she had always been more open minded than most Euro-Canadians, having grown up in a predominately Native community, but now questioned whether it was a superficial acceptance that lacked understanding. Janice explained further that she has learned to "let things unfold the way they're supposed to, rather than trying to control things that happen." I countered by asking her if she feels or thinks differently about First Nations people than she did before. She candidly replied that she felt she belonged and attributed it to what she heard an Elder say at an All Nations Sundance: "That we are all related, because at the time I was on this quest of belonging, with my adoption and all those things." Janice continued, saying that "If I was the last freckled person and had to choose which culture I would like to be with I would have to say First Nations . . . because of their whole outlook on life, the whole acceptance, and that's where I felt the most belonging. So in a sense I look at First Nations people differently, sometimes with some envy . . . because they are so close."

I turned to Andrew and asked him how he would summarize his feeling and attitude toward First Nations people since his involvement with the Sweat Lodge and other spiritual ceremonies. He replied that he had definitely changed and is not prejudiced or racist towards First Nations people anymore. With that, I asked both Janice and Andrew if they would like to add or expand on anything that we had discussed; both indicated negatively, and the interview closed.

Summary of Interview Five and Six

Andrew was not raised within a First Nations cultural background and has not laid claim to any artificial sense of belonging. He was raised in an all-French community and self-identifies with that ethnic background. The Native ancestry he does acknowledge dates back to his great grandmother, who married a man
of French origin, so while he does have some Native blood, it is in his distant past. Janice, on the other hand, has no known kinship (she has researched extensively because of her adoption) in her past to indicate even a faint connection to First Nations ancestry.

Janice’s exposure to First Nations spiritual practices came early in her life because of her affiliation with Native people in the community in which she was raised in. Her present involvement is peripheral in the sense that she continues to take part in Sweat Lodges and has done so over an extended period of time, but in a passive, participatory role in comparison to her husband Andrew. Janice firmly indicates that she feels a sense of belonging and acceptance by First Nations people. She is also aware that her continued participation in First Nations spiritual practices is frowned upon by First Nations people. Janice asserts that she has the utmost respect for First Nations people and understands why First Nations people mistrust.

Andrew has immersed himself in First Nations spiritual practices to the extent that his actions now mimic that of an Elder/Medicine Man. However, Andrew openly states he does not claim to be an Elder, a Healer, or a Medicine Man. His humility reflects traditional teachings. He readily admits his racist tendency in the past, but directly credits his change of view to the experience of a First Nations healing ceremony.

It would appear that both of the respondents of this interview have a deeper understanding and acceptance of First Nations people because of their involvement in First Nations spiritual teachings. While Andrew continues to use his Sweat Lodge, I am not prepared to condemn his actions because he does not use it as a traditional Elder/Medicine man would, but uses it as a means of prayer and communication with God. Both Janice and Andrew are very secretive about the existence of the Sweat Lodge, and only close family members and trusted friends know of its existence.
Interview Seven (Euro-Canadian male)

As in all previous interviews, participant number seven was given a pseudonym: Riley. He is a middle-aged gentleman who has worked for the Provincial government for his entire career. The interview was arranged at his convenience in his home. When I was admitted into the kitchen, the family was preparing to sit down to supper and apologies were exchanged. They invited me to the table, but since I had eaten prior to arriving, I graciously declined the invitation to join them, but accepted a cup of tea. Riley, his wife, and his teenage son finished their meal while we sat and visited. I have known Riley and his family for about thirty years, so, any discomfort at arriving at their meal time was minimal and quickly dispelled. Riley’s home is situated in a small urban center in North West Saskatchewan. After the meal was completed, both the son and wife exited the kitchen.

We began the interview shortly after seven by reviewing my responsibility as researcher, and I informed him of his rights. After reading the introductory letter and permission form (both of which are enclosed in the appendix), I requested permission to use a tape recorder, to which Riley agreed. I also shared with him the questionnaire that I would be using, so he would have an understanding of what I was seeking.

I asked Riley when he first became involved with traditional Native spirituality and if he would share these experiences with me, in particular, his Sweat Lodge experience, for the purpose of this study. He replied affirmatively and recalled that he became involved with Native spirituality about four years ago through his present work placement. His first experience took place in the early summer. He was asked as part of his duties to accompany and assist a group of clients to a Sweat Lodge. Upon arriving, they met with an Elder who instructed the group how to build a Sweat Lodge. Moreover, he further recalled “We had to go out and cut the willows and everything. We started from scratch.” It was a
whole day affair." Once the lodge was completed, they all participated in a Sweat. Riley went on to say that over the ensuing summer the group attended several Sweats in the Lodge they had built. Since Riley's first involvement, he has worked with several different Elders from the area. The members and the numbers within the group that Riley attends the Sweats changes over time with the transitional nature of the clients with whom he works. The one commonality the group shares, however, is their Aboriginal ancestry, which includes the Dene, Cree, and Assiniboine.

Considering Riley's initial involvement was job related, I was curious to know the extent of his participation and if it was his choice to actually participate in a Sweat Lodge proper. He reassured me that he had the option of not participating but chose to do so. His job required that he accompany the clients, but he did not have to participate in the Sweat. He rationalized that "It seemed like a good thing to do," explaining that "the Elder was very good" and he "felt quite relaxed" and "actually enjoyed it." He described developing camaraderie with the Elder based on mutual respect. I asked Riley how many Sweats he had experienced and he replied about seventy to eighty over a period of four years. He indicated that he escorted the clients every second week to a Sweat and thus gained access to the Sweat for himself as well. He went on to say that there was a difference between the believers and the users. Explaining that some of the clients use the Sweat as a social encounter and may not be believers, he noted, "The believers go to the Sweats because they truly believe that's their connection to the Creator. The significant part of it is for those people who choose to use this connection to the Creator. I've seen some change and get a whole lot out of it."

Following the natural discourse of the conversation, I asked Riley where he fit in that scenario. He chuckled and said, "Right in the middle. Do I believe in the cultural way? No. Do I disbelieve? No. I'm going to be wishy washy." He maintained that while he believes in a Higher Power, he does not adhere to any
conventional religion, such as the Roman Catholic or United Church.

I asked him with which First Nations cultural group(s) he had been involved. He answered that the majority of his experiences were with the Cree First Nations, but that he had attended a gathering of all nations just outside of Swift Current. He described this event, by saying that it was a huge event with Aboriginal people from around the globe who were there sharing their spirituality with each other. He further explained that the Sweat he attended at the event was carried out by a Lakota Elder. He noted that there was very little difference between the Cree and Lakota way of conducting a Sweat. Riley elaborated further, by saying that the Sweat he attended was also a healing Sweat, which was different from a regular Sweat.

I asked Riley to explain the difference between a healing Sweat and a regular Sweat. He stated that while a regular Sweat has a healing round, the healing Sweat is more focused on healing the sick. "That's when the Elders invite the spirits into the Lodge, and you actually feel their presence. Sometimes you may get touched by the rattle, or feel cool air like a fan fanning you. I don't know a whole lot about healing Sweats; some smoke Peyote; for others that's strictly taboo."

In conversation I remarked to Riley that he had obviously learned a lot about First Nations spirituality and asked if he would share some of the things he had learned. He affirmed, saying that he had "been lucky enough to have some stuff shared with" him. He repeated himself, saying that he had been "lucky to be involved with these things which creates an understanding of them." He went on to say that he was "not an expert by any means." Riley's modesty is a reflection of his own character but also richly reminiscent of, and in accordance with, the teachings of Elders.

Riley went on to say that the Elders have taught him how to assist them in preparations of a Sweat, specifically by getting the rocks, the water and other
necessary materials. He was taught how to enter and walk into a Sweat, and how to pray with a pipe. He continued, explaining that "every Elder sweats differently, from the amount of water they use, what they burn on the rocks, how many rocks they use, what color of cloth they use, and how much they let someone else actually do in their Sweat Lodge." Riley continued noting differences between the Elders' preferences. "In the Lodge, some invite you to lead in a song, but I don't speak very good Cree so I do what I can. The Elder I'm working with now prays in English for your family, some don't." The one thing that he noted particularly was that "sometimes an Elder calls you apart from the group to sit down and have a cigarette and talk. He may not tell you anything, he may talk about hunting or fishing or whatever, but there's a message in what he's saying, and it's up to you to figure it out." He continued, saying, "They talk in parables, and you won't see them get angry very often, because that's not part of the teachings. They don't tell you what to do. You have to pay attention, that's why they talk in parables, so that they have your attention; if you listen, you'll learn something." He continued, saying that he learned not to ask questions of the Elder "pretty quick." "If the Elder wants you to know something he'll tell you; if you ask a question, he may not answer you for six months. That's the thing with Elders; if you need to know something, they'll tell you. It's that simple." This is a difficult lesson to accept even for those of us who are First Nations. In the interview preceding this one, Andrew continued to struggle with this. Riley's natural acceptance is unusual because most of us struggle with patience, curiosity, and the need to know.

Considering Riley's vast experience in the Sweat Lodge, and the rapport he had developed with several of the local Elders, I wondered if one of them might have given him any gifts, or, if he himself had become sensitive to dreams or songs, so, I asked him if he had been given any gifts that set him apart from the group. He responded negatively, by explaining that he had not received any
special gifts through the Sweat Lodge but felt that he was honored to be assisting the Elders. He went on, saying "that others may not think of it as a gift," but that he did. He expanded further, saying that his "acceptance, the mutual respect, and kindness" shown to him by the Elders "was a gift in itself." Further to that he claimed that he was not the type of person who wanted gifts.

Continuing the conversation, I asked Riley if he had integrated any of the Native spirituality into his daily living. He responded by saying "not really," explaining that he was an outdoor person to begin with, but that his connection to nature and Mother Earth had deepened. He jokingly said that his children often confide that they will have to provide a home for their mother once he retires because he will be in the North living in some small shack hidden away in the bush. He continued more seriously, saying "When I Sweated and prayed I felt good about it, it's meaningful for me, I prayed and sang, what I could sing, and I did the meditation. You can really get into it."

Following this dialogue, I asked Riley if he thought his involvement with Native spirituality had affected him in any way. He replied "Yep. How? It's given me a better understanding of the culture of the First Nations people. Again, it comes back to respect; I can garnish respect for the people and what they're doing. I'm not as cynical, it's like anything else, I guess: If you gain knowledge, you won't be as cynical. I've seen the spirituality and the power of Elders do some really good work."

Continuing the conversation, I asked Riley if his opinion of First Nations people had altered since his involvement with them at the spiritual level. He indicated there was not a great deal of difference. Riley grew up in mid-west Saskatchewan, where he acknowledges that he had no contact with any First Nation people until he moved to the urban center where he now resides. He explains that he went to high school with some First Nations people when he moved there, but never really noted any difference. He knew that there were
some people who expressed some negativity towards First Nations, but he had never experienced any wrong doing, "so it didn't really matter. I don't worry about my perception of First Nations people. I worry about the fourteen year olds. It's different now; there's a lot more tension. But again, thirty years ago there wasn't the Native population living in the city the way it is today. People my age don't understand, and most don't care to understand. I probably have a greater respect for First Nations people after being involved with some of their ceremonies."

He continued, further explaining that an Elder once told him that there were two kinds of Elders, "real Elders and popcorn Elders, the popcorn Elders are only in it for the monetary gains while the real Elders are not." He elaborated further, saying that "You can't expect an Elder to travel without compensating him, but that's by necessity. A real Elder, you know, they will listen more than they talk, they have a way with people, they can make them listen and gain their respect, and it's beneficial, as it would be in any culture."

I asked Riley if he had attended any other ceremonies aside from the Sweat Lodge. He replied that he had helped build a Sun Dance Lodge for one of the Elders he worked with but had never "stuck around to watch or participate." He said it was difficult to contend with "Indian time" when the group he works with are expected back at a given time and finds it to be "frustrating." He indicated that his first experience with a Feast was a lesson hard learned. When he got there, he wondered why everyone had stacks of margarine containers and ice-cream buckets with lids, but quickly learned why they were needed. He recalled being advised to bring bowls to the Feast and had indeed brought two, which to his dismay was not enough. Riley advised me that he has been to round dances, and give-away dances as well. He claims he dances as well as he speaks Cree. The one thing that Riley stated he did not relish was "sharing one bowl" with everyone at a Sweat Lodge.

Drawing the interview to an end, I asked Riley if there was anything else
that he would like to add. Riley indicated that through his involvement with First Nations people he had learned the valuable lesson of patience, that "time had little meaning or value and that it shouldn't, because with patience it gives you time to think and less time for irrational behavior."

I thanked Riley and advised him I would transcribe the interview and return with it for his approval so that he could edit it to his liking.

**Summary of Interview Seven**

Throughout Riley's interview I was amazed at the subdued approach he exhibited to all the teachings he has gathered since his introduction to First Nations spirituality. He has obviously gathered an inordinate amount of sacred knowledge, which he guards closely. He appears to have an innate sense of the cultural nuances rarely found in someone who was not raised in the culture. His experiences have taught him a deep personal humility and have engendered acceptance of and respect for First Nations people. His continued assertion that he does not know a lot demonstrates itself in his humility and acceptance of what he does know. He does not inflate his ego through the knowledge he has gained. While I have known Riley for a very long time, I was completely unaware of the spiritual knowledge he had secreted away.

After the official interview had closed, he confided that he does not share this segment of his life with anyone, including his immediate family. He stated that he found his personal spiritual connection so intensely private that he would not subject it to any possible ridicule or assault. At first I thought it was a method to protect himself from any criticism, but I realized he was protecting the Spiritual knowledge much the same as I would.

Overall, I have found Riley's interview most sincere and believe that his involvement with our Spiritual teachings has changed him and his outlook towards First Nations people. I would gladly set aside any fears of Spiritual
exploitation if all non-Aboriginal people received and honored our ways in the manner that Riley has.
CHAPTER FIVE
SUMMARY OF RESEARCH, CONCLUSIONS, AND FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

Introduction

When I began this academic journey in Graduate Studies, I quickly realized that very little study on the consequences of sharing First Nations spirituality had been done from the epistemology of a First Nations perspective, especially with regard to its methods, validity, and scope. It was my intent in doing this study to explore the implications of sharing First Nations sacred knowledge and ceremonies with non-Aboriginal people. As noted near the beginning of this document the questions that I set forth to answer were as follows:

1. What are the perceptions and cross cultural significance and value of Aboriginal people who conduct Sweat Lodge ceremonies for non-Aboriginal people who request to participate in a ceremony of this type?
2. What is the cross cultural significance of participating in a Sweat Lodge Ceremony for non-Aboriginal people?
3. What are the consequences for Aboriginal people in having non-Aboriginal people participate in their spiritual traditions?
4. What is the cross cultural significance and value of having experienced a Sweat Lodge ceremony among non-Aboriginal adults toward changing their perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs toward Aboriginal people?
5. What does the pertinent literature reveal about non-Aboriginal participation in traditional ceremonies and cultural knowledge?

Before initiating the research, I was required to submit a research proposal to the University Ethics Board for approval. I also petitioned two Elders for their assistance and their permission to carry out the study. Without the assistance given to me by the First Nations Elders, the study would have had
little significance. From my Elders and father, I was cognizant of the Cree First Nations protocol and adhered to it as best as I could. I also adhered to the ethics criteria set forth by the University of Saskatchewan while conducting research with humans. In choosing a research design that would most appropriately "fit" the intent of this study, I chose the reflective narrative approach because it was most closely comparable to the oral tradition of First Nations people and offered the most flexibility, while also being an accepted qualitative research method. Lincoln and Guba (1985) consider the qualitative research design to be "more sensitive to and adaptable to many shaping influences and value patterns that may be encountered" (p. 40). A qualitative research approach also allows the researcher to explore multiple realities constructed from social experiences (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992). The reflective narrative approach most closely fit my intentions of presenting the study in a meaningful way while, more importantly, allowing the participants' voices to be heard. I chose to investigate perceptions from two points of view: One involved interviews with four First Nations people; the other involved interviews with three non-Aboriginal people. The number four, for First Nations participants, was chosen due to its synchronicity and value in First Nations cultural beliefs.

To meet the criteria of reflective reporting, according to Wolcott (1990), four characteristics must be present: (a) the researcher must focus the story on a critical event; (b) tell the story from the participant's perceptions; c) reconstruct the event according to the participant's memory; and (d) present events in a chronological order. In compliance with Wolcott's criteria, the critical event explored was the experiences of three non-Aboriginal people's participation in a traditional Indian Sweat Lodge, and the experiences of four First Nations people who organized and conducted such a ceremony. The conversations with the participants afforded me a way to allow them to reconstruct their experience and reflect on their memory of the ceremony they attended. The reflective narrative
approach allowed me to present the participants' experiences in chronological order.

Before conducting the conversations, I completed a review of relevant literature, searching for documentation and clarification of the issues involved in the study. Lightning's thesis, *Compassionate mind, implications of a text written by Elder Louis Sunchild* (1992), was the only literature that paralleled my study, in the sense that he spoke to an Elder about traditional First Nations spirituality. Likewise, Deloria, (2000) in *Singing for a Spirit: A Portrait of the Dakota Sioux*, speaks of his family's experiences and memories passed down from his great-grandfather, and the "Yankton Dakota spiritual beliefs, rituals, and traditions..." (back cover). Other literature raised objections from both non-Aboriginal and First Nations people to the resurgence of age-old religions and unorthodox practices. Literature that appeared to be supportive of reviving ancient religions tended to offer the reader detailed instructions on how to perform authentic sacred ceremonies from Witchcraft to conducting a Sweat Lodge, while Internet literature was inclined to commodify spirituality.

The literature review pointed to the emerging spiritual restlessness among various populations that has led to interest in First Nations spirituality. Deloria (1999) notes that "Americans crave some form of religious experience, and they are unable to obtain it from any of the old mainline Christian denominations" (p. 227). Russell Means (Churchill, 1996), an American Indian Movement activist, more blatantly offers that non-Aboriginal people are "spiritually bankrupt, themselves" and "want our spirituality as well" (p. 320). Peat (1994) postulates "Today many people have begun to question the more materialistic aspects of this world view. There is an interest in meditative practices of the East, in various therapies that deal with personal growth and transformation" (p. 9).

Once I felt confident with the issues revealed in the literature review, I hand delivered my Letter of Introduction to the Elders and sought their consent to
participate in the study. The study proceeded through proposal stage and ethical review. In addition, before initiating the conversations (interviews) with the participants, I gave each respondent a copy of the Letter of Introduction, the Release of Information form, and the Interview Guide or Probe Questions as the situation warranted. We reviewed the documents together as I briefly explained how I would use each document in the study. I further explained my responsibilities of confidentiality, and their option of withdrawing from the study at any time. I also sought permission from each respondent to use audio equipment; all agreed. I explained that I would return once the conversations were transcribed, so that they could revise or delete information. I visited each respondent twice and reviewed the transcript.

When this was done I began the analysis of information from their conversations. As promised I returned them to the participants to allow them to read my interpretations. In effect this was a safeguard that I intentionally included so that no breach of sacred knowledge occurred and/or to correct or delete any mistaken interpretations of the conversations I'd had with the participants.

In the following section, I will present my interpretations of the conversations I had with all of the participants in chronological order, and add supportive evidence from the literature review. Following that I will present a collective summary of all the interviews, followed by a summary of the literature review, conclusion of findings, and recommendations for future research.

A) Interpreting Multiple Realities: First Nations Participants

Rita

The First Nations woman and man who were interviewed expressed some disagreement concerning the acceptance of non-Aboriginal people participating in the traditional Sweat Lodge. Such incongruities were similarly noted in the literature review. Means and McLeod (Churchill, 1996) strongly oppose non-
Aboriginal participation in First Nations religion, while Elder Louis Sunchild (Lightning, 1992) suggests that "our people have [been] taught these human truths and principals for the holistic survival of everyone" (p. 239). Rita expressed two concerns: first, that the non-Aboriginal participants would not approach the Sweat with an open mind; second, that the participants would not demonstrate sincerity and respect for the Elders and for the ceremony. Both of the concerns she reported were unfounded, and she felt that "everything went good." She reported "a closeness," a brotherhood that was not there before the Sweat, and concluded that the objectives of creating a better working relationship and creating an understanding between the cultures were successful. Rita, however, still adheres to the basic principle that certain sacred First Nation ceremonies should not be shared. She specifically mentioned the Sundance as a ceremony from which she believes non-Aboriginal people should be excluded. Her opposition to Euro-Canadians or other non-Native people participating reveals her fear that they may profess reaching Medicine Man status, which also coincides with the opinions of the First Nations activists and scholars in the literature review.

Aboriginal protocols have traditionally held to exclusivity in ceremonies, and very few others have been known to take part in these ceremonies. Movies, like Dances with Wolves and others, may suggest that ceremonial inclusion of white people is a natural and desirable outcome of cross cultural relations. However, the data from this study reveals a continuing variance of opinions. Some Elders approve of limited inclusion, like Sweats, but object to inclusion of other more sacred ceremonies like the Sundance. Still other Elders oppose any inclusion.

Johnny

Johnny adamantly believes that First Nations ceremonies should remain exclusive to First Nations people when he says "They have their churches, we
have our sweats." This was strongly echoed in the literature review by Russell Means and Janet McLeod (Churchill, 1996). Many other First Nations people in the literature review also echoed this mistrust and fear that "they'll find some way to use it against us." Perhaps Johnny's experiences of being abused by church people in the residential school left remnants of oppression that still linger within him and are reflected in his opposition and mistrust. While voicing his opposition clearly, Johnny did report that he thought the Sweat for the non-Aboriginal participants went well, and believes that the participants learned something. He was obviously moved by their sincerity, tears, and prayers.

_Owen_

Owen, the Medicine Man (healer), like Rita, asserts that there are certain particular sacred ceremonies from which non-Aboriginal people should be excluded (i.e. Sundances, and Thirstdances). However, his years of training and his status of Medicine Man/Elder does not allow him to refuse his services to anyone who asks him for his assistance. This may be a major factor in his acquiescence to conduct Sweats for non-Aboriginal people. He recalls feeling apprehensive when he began to conduct sweats for non-Aboriginal people. Over time, he has gained more comfort, although, if allowed his personal preference, he would not conduct sweats for such large groups of Euro-Canadians. Owen believes some Euro-Canadians benefit from the experience, however, he does not believe that a Euro-Canadian can attain traditional status of an Elder/Medicine Man, and laughs scornfully at anyone who believes otherwise.

_Old Eagle_

Elder Old Eagle is much more critical than Owen. He places an extraordinary amount of value in the ancient teachings and appears rooted in tradition. He criticizes young First Nations people for their lack of respect for and adherence to the ancient teachings. He is self-assured and confident in his judgment. While he will not deny his services to anyone who requests his
assistance, he feels that non-Native people gain nothing of spiritual value or physical healing by seeking a Medicine Man’s help. He is also contemptuous of anyone who declares themselves a Medicine Man without traditional training, gifting, and other protocols of significance to spiritual healing and helping. He says they can pretend, but they would still be "phony." Old Eagle sees no benefit in sharing our traditional Indian spirituality. He does not believe prayers offered to the Great Spirits on behalf of non-Aboriginals can be recognized because of the language differences. He states that when time first began, the Indian people prayed in their own Native language to Grandfather Rock, who was an intermediary between God and First Nations people, and he believes that Grandfather Rock cannot understand any other language. Old Eagle further believes that white men cannot offer traditionalists knowledge pertaining to their own spirituality.

B) Interpreting Multiple Realities: Non-Aboriginal Participants

Andrew

Before his involvement with First Nations people, Andrew readily acknowledged his racist beliefs and attitudes based on earlier misconceptions and socialized community influences supporting them. It is a prominent pattern of this rural French/Metis community to deny their ancestral ties to First Nations. Critical race theorist Sylvia R. Lazos Vargas (2003) posits that “race is largely a social experience” (p. 1); Lise Noel (1994) further asserts that racism is a product of the dominant culture and details how identity is affected by racism. Andrew’s acknowledged racist views prior to his involvement with First Nations spirituality were traced to his childhood community environment where ethnocentric views were perpetuated. Andrew recalls the “moving” transformation from racism to acceptance, equating it to a “miraculous healing.” He embraced First Nations spiritual and religious ceremonies while under the tutorial relationship with a Lakota Elder/Medicine Man/Healer. He combines his beliefs and practices of
Lakota teachings and Catholicism through the Sweat Lodge that he constructed with the Elder James. Andrew realizes his unorthodox religious practices would cause consternation in his home community and among First Nations people, so he vehemently guards the secrecy of his religious practices. He openly and adamantly states he does not consider himself an Elder/Medicine man or healer. He has simply found that his communication through the Sweat Lodge with the Creator to be more fulfilling and personal than Catholicism can offer on its own. Whether his preference is an aberrance that resulted from his own views on church teachings or not is unclear. However, Andrew's turn-about perception of First Nations people is undoubtedly a positive outcome of his experience.

**Janice**

Janice’s early immersion into a predominately Northern First Nations community very likely fostered an attitude of acceptance of First Nations people. She credits her own personal growth to her involvement with First Nations spirituality. Her involvement has been voluntary and has been in support of her husband Andrew and their family unit. Janice was searching for spiritual fulfillment, and found it in First Nations spiritual practices and ceremonies. Her perception of First Nations people has not been significantly altered, but she believes she has gained a deeper understanding of and appreciation for First Nations people.

**Riley**

Riley's involvement with First Nations ceremonies and spirituality evolved from his involvement with Elders through his job with the Provincial Government. Over the years, he has gained an inordinate amount of experience and knowledge as his rapport with Elders developed. His employer and the Elders gave him the option of not participating in traditional First Nations ceremonies, but he chose to do so. Riley demonstrates a profound respect for the knowledge he has received from the Elders. He states that he had not developed any
prejudices before to his involvement with First Nations. He does voice an uncanny ability to appreciate the finer nuances or implied realities of cultural knowledge and protocol. Riley feels honored and privileged to have had the opportunity to experience authentic First Nations spiritual practices. He feels that he has gained a deeper respect for First Nations people. He does not share his knowledge or experiences with anyone because he does not want to pollute its significance and, in part, he does not want to expose himself or his family to criticism or be the brunt of any jokes and teasing.

**Summary of the Literature Review and Research**

As was stated earlier in the literature review, criticism of unorthodox religious practices abound. Both non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal people are steadfast in their philosophical epistemology concerning religious beliefs and practices. Their objections are as diverse as the people themselves are. Fear of the unknown clouds any possibility of reconciliation. Religious movements by charismatic leaders that have led to complete domination over members to the point of mass suicide, Satanic religions, Witchcraft, and many other unorthodox practices have created an impenetrable hysteria that skirts the boundaries of neurosis. Unfortunately, First Nations spirituality is often linked with such religions because it does not conform to mainstream religions, and because of the mysticism associated with it.

The stereotype of the mysterious, mystic Indian of long ago has not changed for a great number of people worldwide. In fact, the mysticism is promoted and perpetuated worldwide to enable and attract a commodified market of consumers by providing a virtual grab bag of religious artifacts to unwary consumers. The sale of these cultural artifacts, arts, religion, sacred knowledge, ecological knowledge, and anything else deemed "authentic" Indian has become a booming business. Mistrust, ownership, control, and disrespect play a prominent role in the fear and objections of the First Nations people.
Unfortunately, this forgery of Indigenous peoples' knowledge became abundantly clear to me this past summer, as I had the misfortune of encountering and placing trust in a fellow who claimed to be an American Cheyenne Medicine Man at the International Healing Gathering held at Neekaneet Indian Reserve. My youngest daughter was diagnosed with cervical cancer, and after undergoing surgery, we turned to a Medicine Man. Using the vulnerability of people suffering with various illnesses, this man sold himself to the whole First Nations organization that organized the healing gathering as a powerful healer, capable of healing diabetes, cancer, and many other illnesses. His fraudulent claims endangered the health of many people who sought his help. After several months of crisscrossing two provinces, his deception was uncovered, partially through his questionable actions and partially by direct contact with his immediate family, with whom he inadvertently or foolishly allowed me to speak. He was aware of my study in this area and hoped that I would lend further credence to his forgery by substantiating his claim. Although he attempted to control the conversations I had with his brother and sister-in-law, we did manage to speak candidly without his knowledge. His family was appalled with his deception and voiced their disapproval, much to his chagrin. The Aboriginal Television Network has also uncovered such fraudulent claims this past summer.

Experience has also taught me that there are authentic Indian Medicine Men and Women who can heal through prayer, song and ceremony. With full understanding of the criticism he would encounter by Western scientific thought, Peat (1994) voices his conviction that healing does occur through prayer, song and ceremony. Many other First Nations people have experienced the benefit of traditional medicine practices. Other news headlines over the past few years have also noticed a greater tendency in people getting well sooner if they had spiritual links to different denominations. Perhaps one of the most important lessons that I have learned through this study is that unscrupulous individuals
who misrepresent themselves can victimize anyone. Because I would not wish this on anyone, I have also learned that an authentic Medicine Man never lays a finger or hand on the person he/she is healing. Despite my own misfortune of encountering a fraudulent Medicine Man, through this study and other personal experiences, I have not lost hope and trust in traditional healing.

**Collective Summary of the Interviews**

Out of the four First Nations individuals with whom I discussed the phenomena of non-Aboriginal participation in traditional spiritual ceremonies, two Owen and Rita believe that those who approach the Sweat Lodge with sincerity may benefit spiritually, and become more accepting of and less prejudiced against First Nations people. Johnny and Old Eagle both voice strong objections to non-Aboriginal participation in First Nations ceremonies. Both Old Eagle and Johnny believe that non-Aboriginal people can not gain anything from their participation in our ceremonies. Old Eagle believes that the Grandfathers and Grandmothers only understand First Nations language, and, therefore any prayer offered in English can not be understood. One Elder (Johnny) remains skeptical despite being impressed by the sincerity of the non-Aboriginal people who attended the Sweat. Old Eagle guards First Nations spirituality with intensity and sees no spiritual benefit to Euro-Canadians (or to First Nations sharing) by their participation. All of the First Nations participants reserved the right to exclude all non-Aboriginal people from specific ceremonies.

As alluded to earlier, the reasons for non-Aboriginal interest in First Nations spirituality varies from individual to individual. Janice, a non-Aboriginal participant, sought a meaningful connection with the Creator. This was congruent with one of the reasons noted in the literature review. Riley and Andrew were both drawn into Native spirituality through their chosen professions. Both of them assert that they have developed a stronger appreciation for and acceptance of First Nations people. Andrew, in particular, feels that he has overcome racism,
and has adopted the Native spiritual practice of the Sweat Lodge. This study illustrates that prejudice and racism are multifaceted, but can be influenced and affected by experiences that touch the inner spirit.

**Analysis and Conclusion of Findings**

When I began this journey, I set out to explore five main questions. Using the questions as a starting point, I had hoped to generate enough interest in the topic so that other First Nations scholars might consider research in this area. I had also hoped to build a bridge that would assist in the fight against prejudice and racism. I was inexplicably drawn to finding out what all the fuss was about concerning the protection of First Nations cultural knowledge. I could not accept that it was insignificant that non-Aboriginal people were infiltrating First Nations spiritual practices. I was abruptly shocked into reality as I opened the first pages of Churchill (1996) and discovered the extent of the problem worldwide. Still, I wondered if there were any non-Aboriginal people whose perception of First Nations had changed favorably after having been exposed to traditional ceremonies. However, the constant flux of social knowledge and experience are only momentary realities. The knowledge I have gained cannot be measured, for I have gained an invaluable experience that has reaffirmed my identity and my cultural beliefs. For this I will forever be grateful to the First Nations people who guided and supported me through the whole process.

Non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal academics support the theory that experience effects perception; as such the non-Aboriginal participants' perceptions of First Nations people is congruent with the theory of experiential learning. Peat (1994) suggests, "Traditional knowledge comes about through watching and listening . . . through direct experience of songs and ceremonies, through the activities of hunting and daily life, from trees and animals and in dreams and visions" (p. 65). Andrew and Riley's knowledge of First Nations religious practices were learned by their direct experiences and teachings from
Elders. In this study, all three non-Aboriginal people gained understanding, acceptance, respect, and appreciation for First Nations people and their ways. Because of his participation in First Nations ceremony, one person in particular has overcome his racism. Three of the four First Nation participants believed that the experience of a Sweat Lodge benefitted the non-Aboriginal participants and created a bridge of understanding of and appreciation for First Nations people, even if it were a tenuous one. One Elder has not had the occasion of participating in a Sweat with non-Aboriginal people. He also expressed the strongest opposition and condemnation of both non-Aboriginal and young First Nations disrespect for ceremonial practices.

Churchill (1994, 1996, 1998, 1999), Ermine (1995), Hampton (1995), Cajete (1994), Battiste (1995, 2000, 2000), Legare (1996), Lightning (1992), and many other Indigenous intellectuals convey the theory that knowledge perpetuates cultural norms, values, and teachings. This theory would assert that if First Nations culture is to continue in its purest form possible, protective legislation is crucial in protecting our traditional spiritualism. As mentioned earlier, there has been a movement of First Nations intellectuals who have begun soliciting the Government of Canada to introduce policies and laws that would protect Indigenous knowledge. The University of Saskatchewan is most fortunate to have within its midst two of the foremost leaders in the field of protecting Indigenous knowledge. Dr. Marie Battiste, a Mi'kmaq from Nova Scotia and graduate of Harvard and Stanford, is a professor in the Indian and Northern Education Program. She is also a United Nations technical expert on the guidelines of protecting Indigenous heritage. Her husband Sa'kej Youngblood Henderson is from the Chickasaw Nation and Cheyenne Tribe of Oklahoma. He was one of the first American Indians to graduate from Harvard with a Law Degree. He is currently a member of the College of Law, and is research director of the Native Law Center.
The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 served as a pivotal declaration in launching the Indigenous struggle against oppression. Battiste (2000) explains "The statement of principles in the Universal Declaration was transformed into two legally binding agreements: the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights" (preface). Under these agreements, the member states acknowledged and agreed that Indigenous people of the world have a right to self-determination, to determine their political status, and to seek their economic, social, and cultural development.

The Canadian government has acknowledged Aboriginal self-determination as outlined in the Universal Declaration. Dr. Erica-Irene Daes, a UN Special Rapporteur, presented The Principles and Guidelines for the protection of the Heritage of Indigenous People in 1995 (Battiste 2000). "The heritage definition means not only the ability to possess a distinct heritage, but the ability to share some aspects of this heritage from time to time with others. As long as this heritage remains within the control of a people, it can continue to be shared at appropriate times and in appropriate ways" (Battiste, 2000, p. 66). This same sentiment was expressed by the First Nations people in this study. All the First Nation participants want to be able to control what degree of sacred knowledge is shared and with whom. Battiste (2002) adds to this in "Decolonizing University Research," when she says, "This process must also respect the limitations placed on who can receive knowledge and in what contexts it can be shared widely" (p. 41). This law was tested and upheld by the Supreme Court of Canada in the cases of R. v. Sparrow (1990) and Delgamuukw v. British Columbia (1997) (Battiste 2000).

This raises the issue of inclusion and exclusion. Who decides? Intermarriages between the two cultures have been prevalent and will likely continue. How will Elders decide who is to gain or not gain by a spiritual
experience? What should be the criteria for choosing who can or cannot participate? Can exclusions be useful, practical, and valuable? For whom? These questions and many more need to be examined if First Nations are to make informed decisions about inclusions or exclusions in their ceremonies and traditions, which will continue to gain respect and notoriety. Will non-Aboriginal people see acceptance of diversity as a necessary entrance into Aboriginal peoples' traditions and ceremonies?

**Recommendations for Future Research**

I would encourage other First Nations scholars to repeat this study with a greater number of participants over an extended period of time, or address the question of inclusion/exclusion from traditional First Nations religion. The questions raised in the previous paragraph would challenge other scholars for future research as well. As First Nations scholars, we are conduits of social change. Tyson (Lopez & Parker 2003) says

"If educational researchers are to operate from epistemologies of emancipation--with frameworks that are transformative (as opposed to accommodative) in nature--and engage in methodologies that encourage the participants to challenge and change the world... the very nature of radical thought and liberatory action is that it has far reaching effects and comes with the heightened sense of responsibility for researchers whose work is based on a commitment to defy historical and contemporary racial oppression" (p. 24).

Conducting further research of this topic would provide First Nations people an opportunity to determine if there is any value in sharing their spiritual teachings. As alluded to earlier, the limitations of this study, due to the low number of participants, contributed to insufficient data to determine if other non-Aboriginal people who have experienced the Sweat Lodge ceremony gained an appreciation and understanding of First Nations people. As First Nations people forge ahead in this new millennium, I believe anything is possible and education
is the key. We must be as well equipped as our non-Aboriginal counterparts if we are to successfully challenge the status quo. First Nations populations continue to grow, and while we may be playing a catch up game, economically and politically, someday we will. We are growing in affluence, in numbers, and in power, while re-building our circle of traditional ways, making them stronger and stronger. As Innes says in his paper presented to the Canadian Aboriginal Science and Technology Society 2003 (CASTS) conference, "Aboriginal people . . . have adapted university training as a tool to facilitate the promotion of Aboriginal world views and thereby ensure their cultural survival."

In closing, I pray to the Great Spirit that he will continue to guide our people, protect us from all wrong, and bring happiness to us all. Brascoupe (2000) reminds us of our responsibility to the seventh generation using the words of Oren Lyons, faith keeper of the Onondaga Nation: "It's our job to see that the people coming ahead, the generations still unborn, have a world no worse than ours—and **hopefully better** [my emphasis]" (p. 414).

**Epilogue and Reflections**

As this academic sojourn draws to a conclusion, I would like to reflect on what I learned and believe to be of importance to others who may choose to follow the same path of study. One of the most significant lessons that unfolded before my eyes as I began this research project, was the cultural knowledge that I had gained through life experience. In the introduction I alluded to the traditional Cree cultural background that I was raised in. Unbeknownst to me the cultural teachings I had absorbed serendipitously in my home, community and nation, became invaluable tools as I journeyed through the cultural world of the Cree Elders. These were lessons that could not be taught in the classroom nor could they be measured by academic standards. For example: avoiding eye contact as a show of respect, speaking in a low unobtrusive manner, knowing what cultural protocols to follow, and comparing my limited experience in traditional Cree
ceremonies to those described in the literature I reviewed. While these lessons may appear inconsequential in academic terms, they were extremely advantageous to me while I was engaged in this study.

The extent that my cultural heritage has impacted my way of knowing and learning was also another revelation to me. Cajete (1994), Duran & Duran (1995) draw comparisons between how First Nations people approach learning and knowledge with how non-Aboriginal people perceive the cognitive process. They suggest that non-Aboriginal academics perceive the cognitive process as a process in which the learner compartmentalizes knowledge in the mind; devoid of the whole human experience; a separation of the mind, body and soul. This may create difficulty for First Nations students who approach learning as a whole. Through my personal experience in academia I realized how this had affected me. I felt I had been cheated all these years of experiencing a whole learning situation. Learning with my mind, body and spirit. I realized that up until now my academic career had been void of what was most important to me. I wanted and needed to incorporate spiritually into my study. While conducting this study, I was fortunate to be given the opportunity to experience a complete learning sensation.

Reflecting on the educational significance of this study has been hard for me to determine because of the inner reward I felt at having experienced a holistic learning experience. However, one of the significant by-products of this study may very well be in the methodology that I applied while conducting the research. I followed cultural protocols specific to the region I was working in, thereby, providing a glimpse into the finer cultural protocols used when conducting research with First Nations people. Diversity within Native communities must be taken into account when employing cultural protocols. For those not familiar with the First Nations cultural environment they may find it valuable to initiate contact with the local Band office to find out what protocols
are followed. As well, because protection of Indigenous knowledge is such a hot issue in the country today, as it is the world wide, some Bands’ may have band council resolutions that govern over research. Before investing a lot of time in a topic of study it would be prudent to contact the local Band office.

It is also my hope that by my example other researchers may witness the humility and respect that one must adopt with sincerity, if they are to conduct research that reaches beyond the cold, hard, approach of scientific research. Conducting research in a First Nations community requires a lot of diplomacy, time and patience. Elders very rarely respond to direct questions, more often they answer in stories. The learner must listen carefully. The answers are in the story. In part, Elders teach in this manner because they are not prepared to tell anyone what to do, instead, they allow the learner to come to a deeper understanding by providing the opportunity for further thought. A closed reply would not be conducive to deep thought. Researchers must be prepared to spend more time with Elders and may need to visit the Elder several times. In any case, the Elder will invite the learners back if they feel it is necessary. Researchers must also keep in mind that an Elder’s priority is to serve the communities spiritual needs and are often called upon to perform ceremonies or conduct healing at a moment’s notice. Just because an appointment time was set does not mean, the Elder will be available. Emergencies do arise.

Because of the deep personal nature of religion, and because disclosing sacred knowledge, is at the discretion of the Elders, researchers must also exhibit sensitivity. It is not that the Elders are not prepared to share, but how and what they are prepared to share must be respected as in all human research. Validity and credibility of information may be best attained by a larger sample. In this study I trusted the credibility of the respondents as I knew them beforehand, and therefore, felt confident limiting the respondents to four First Nations Elders, and three non-Aboriginal participants.
The greatest gift that I can offer First Nations people is the hope that future researchers who may read my study will respect, honour and appreciate our ways and our culture as I have been taught. The most treasured gift that I have been given from this study is the love and kinship that were offered to me by my First Nations people. I have been privileged and will forever be grateful to them. I am proud to be who I am. I am Indian!
References


Company.


York Merrill; Maxwell Macmillan Canada.


APPENDIX A
Letter of Approval from the University of Saskatchewan Ethics Committee
The University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board has reviewed the Application for Ethics Approval for your study "A Study of the Perceptions of Aboriginal And Non-Aboriginal Adults Toward the Cross-Cultural Significance of the Sweat Lodge Experience" (2001-38).

1. Your study was APPROVED on June 6, 2001.

2. Any significant changes to your proposed method, or your consent and recruitment procedures should be reported to the Chair for Committee consideration in advance of its implementation.

3. The term of this approval is for 1 year.

4. This approval is valid for one year. A status report form must be submitted annually to the Chair of the Committee in order to extend approval. This certificate will automatically be invalidated if a status report form is not received within one month of the anniversary date. Please refer to the website for further instructions http://www.usask.ca/research/behavrc.shtml

I wish you a successful and informative study.

Dr. David Hay, Acting Chair
University of Saskatchewan
Behavioural Research Ethics Board

DH/ck
APPENDIX B
Letter of Introduction

Date:

Dear Friends;

In the past we have had occasion to converse about your involvement and participation in a traditional Native Sweat Lodge. This is a subject area very near and dear to my heart and as you know I am in the process of seeking a Masters Degree in Education through the University of Saskatchewan. I am now at the stage of gathering information from individuals who have participated in a Sweat Lodge and would like to ask you for your assistance and participation in this study.

The thesis is titled “The cross cultural significance of the Sweat Lodge Experience”. My proposed research questions are: 1) What are the perceptions and cross cultural significance and values of Aboriginal people who conduct Sweat lodge ceremonies for non-Aboriginal people who request or participate in a ceremony of this type? 2) What is the cross cultural significance of participating in a Sweat lodge ceremony for non-Aboriginal people? 3) What are the consequences for Aboriginal people in having non-Aboriginal people participate in their spiritual traditions? 4) What is the cross cultural significance and value of having experienced a Sweat lodge ceremony among non-Aboriginal adults toward changing their perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs toward Aboriginal people? 5) What does the pertinent literature reveal about non-Aboriginal participation in traditional ceremonies and cultural knowledge?

This study is a qualitative study using a reflective narrative methodology which involves two interviews of approximately one to two hours and will be arranged at a mutually agreeable time and place. With your permission, I would like to tape record our discussion which will require another visit in which you will have an opportunity to read the transcriptions of the interview and decide if it is accurate or whether you would like to add clarifying text or self-identifying or other text. Included with this letter is an interview guide that I intend to use as a way of collecting the data. I would ask you to take a few minutes to examine the interview guide so you may have an indication of what I am seeking. To ensure confidentiality I ask you to choose a pseudonym that will be used to identify you in the study. Once the interviews and study are completed no one except myself will have access to the information you provide. On completion of the study if you would like a copy of the work I would be pleased to give you a copy of the final manuscript. The thesis may also be used in a journal article at a later date. I have also attached a release of information form and a self-addressed envelope with postage for your convenience, or you may choose to fax your response to me at the number provided below. You may choose to withdraw from the study at any time.

The study has been approved by the University of Saskatchewan Advisory Committee on Ethics in the Behavioral Sciences, and should you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant you may direct queries to that committee through the Office of the Research Services at (306) 966-4553.

The study is being supervised at the University of Saskatchewan by a committee
and my supervisor is Dr. Marie Battiste who would be prepared to address any further questions you may have about the research process. I would also be happy to answer any questions regarding the content and procedures of this study or any other related matters. You may direct queries to me;

Grace Felix or Marie Battiste
University of Saskatchewan
(306) 966-7576
	
e-mail
marie.battiste@usask.ca
Fax: 306-966-7549

I would like to express my gratitude to you and look forward to speaking with you. Thank-you for your time and considerations.

Sincerely

Grace Felix
APPENDIX C

Probes to be used with Traditional Aboriginal People in Conversation

Prior to beginning the interview the researcher will reiterate the purpose of the visit saying:
- I am a student at the University of Saskatchewan and that I am interested in learning how he/she came to be involved in a Sweat Lodge ceremony for a group of non-Aboriginal people.
- researcher will advise participant that I am being supervised by Dr. Marie Battiste and a committee at the University.
- that I would like their permission to use a tape recorder, if denied researcher will take field notes immediately following interview.
- researcher will advise the participant that he/she will be given the opportunity to make amendments to the transcripts prior to publication.
- researcher will explain confidentiality of name use, and advise the Elder, Medicine Man and other Aboriginal participants that if they choose to, they may use a pseudonym or may waive their right to identifying information and that I will have them sign a release of information at the end of the interview.
- researcher will explain how the data will be stored.
- researcher will explain how the information will be used.
- researcher will offer participants a copy of the bound edition.
- researcher will ask if they have any questions about the study process.

Probes:

1. How did you come to be involved with a Sweat Lodge for a group of non-Aboriginal people?
2. What preparations did the White participants have to do before attending the Sweat Lodge?
3. a) How many Medicine Men assisted with the ceremony?
   b) Where are they from?
   c) When the ceremony was over did the Medicine Men indicate to you how they felt it went?
   d) What did they say?
   e) How did you feel the ceremony went?
   f) When the ceremony was over did the White participants indicate to you how they felt?
   g) What did they say?
   h) What do you think about White people participating in Sweat Lodges?
   i) Would you do it again?
   j) Are there any ceremonies that White people should not be allowed to see or participate in?
   k) If so which ones and why?
4. How long have you been a Medicine Man? (Only applicable to Medicine Man)
APPENDIX D

Interview Guide to be used with non-Aboriginal Participants

A. Reflections of Your Experience:
1. When did you first become interested in Traditional Native Spirituality?
2. What precipitated this interest?
3. How many experiences have you had in a Traditional Native Sweat Lodge?
4. What First Nations/American Indian group or non-Aboriginal group introduced you to your first Sweat Lodge?
5. a) Have you experienced the Sweat Lodge with any other First Nations/American Indian or non-Aboriginal group?
b) If you answered yes describe the individual(s) leading the group without using given name and number of times?
6. a) Are you associated with any particular First Nations/American Indian or non-Aboriginal group whose main purpose is spiritual in nature?
b) If you answered yes describe the group without reference to any identifying information. (This may include tribal names, organized religions, and/or both)
7. a) Do you hold any special status in your group?
b) If so what?
8. a) Have you received any special gifts (songs, dreams etc.) or titles (pipe-carrier, lay minister, etc.) which sets you apart from the majority of your group members?
b) If you answered yes please explain- what? when? and who? (once again, do not use given names when identifying who)
9. In what ways do you integrate traditional Native Spirituality into your life?
10. In what ways has this been beneficial to you?
11. What knowledge of a Sweat Lodge did you have prior to your attendance at one?
12. What was your general opinion of Aboriginal people prior to the Sweat Lodge?
13. Summarize how, if any, your experience in the Sweat Lodge has affected your perception of Aboriginal culture.
14. How, if any, has attending a Sweat Lodge affected your values, beliefs or lifestyle?
APPENDIX E
Release of Information

Please read the following carefully.
I am aware that by signing my name below
- that the identification of my name is merely to alert the researcher that I am willing to
discuss the possibility of my participation in interview(s) for the study.
- that my name will not appear in any public documents or reports without my prior
permission, unless I choose to release my name and identity.
- that the information provided in the survey will be used in the study as part of the
research on non-Aboriginal participation in Traditional Indian Sweat Lodges.
- that the researcher may use the data for a journal article at a later date.
- that the researcher engaged in this study guarantees my confidentiality as a participant in
this study.
- that I do or do not (please circle) waive my rights to confidentiality, and the researcher
may use my name.
- that I will not be compensated for my participation other than in a traditional manner.
- that I have received a copy of Appendix A- Letter to the Participant and Appendix D-
Release of Information for my own records.
I have read and understand 'Appendix B-Letter to the Participant', and hereby agree to
participate:

Signed ___________________________ Date ________

Name ________________________________ (please print)

Phone
Number(s) ______________________________/fax ______________________________
(home) (work)

Mailing Address ______________________________
(street number/box number)

E-Mail address ______________________________

You may contact the researcher or research advisor at:
Grace Felix
University of Saskatchewan

Dr. Marie Battiste
University of Saskatchewan
(306) 966-7576
e-mail- marie.battiste@usask.ca
fax: 306-966-7549
APPENDIX F
Transcript Release Form

Dear Participant:

I have attached the written text from our conversation which we had for the purpose of gathering your thoughts and feelings to be used in my study, for your review and approval. I appreciate your participation and ask that you please read the transcription carefully and:

1) amend the parts you think are inaccurate;
2) add your comments, suggestions, or clarifying remarks where you feel necessary; and
3) cross out any parts which you do not want me to use in this study.

After you have read the transcription with the above in mind, please sign this release form. I will call you within a week to arrange a time and place that is convenient for both of us so that I may pick up the transcript release form and the written text.

Signature: _____________________ Date: __________
Print Name: ________________________________

If you require further information, please call me at or 445-6114 (work).
Again, thank-you for your time in helping me with this research.

Respectfully,

Grace Felix Date: