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**THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF A TRADITIONAL FEMALE OJIBWAY ELDER**

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**A THESIS  
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
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## **ABSTRACT**

**This qualitative study examined the lived experience of a traditional female Ojibway Elder and her perspectives of leadership. An emergent framework of traditional female Ojibway leadership resulted from the data, and was supported by the review of the related literature. Implicit components of the emergent framework of traditional female Ojibway leadership included culture, a belief in the Creator, community, and wisdom. Two predominant themes emerged from the data. These themes were: culture and wisdom. Culture was divided into three sub-themes. These sub-themes were: believing in the Creator, Taryn's teaching in her birth and community. Culture was considered with attention to spirituality because in traditional Ojibway culture the two complement each other in their meaning. Wisdom was discussed in terms of the importance of passing on traditional and spiritual teachings to others in her community and culture. Culture and spirituality provided the foundation on which the research participant understood her role in the world and the meaning of her life. Wisdom implied knowledge of individual roles which focused on the common good of the community. As such role specification was evident and necessary for forming parts of a whole in her community. In that process equality among community members emerged as a virtue. The emergent framework of traditional female Ojibway leadership is presented as holistic in nature. The framework is derived from the participant's world view and illustrates her intense personal integrity.**

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# **CHAPTER I**

## **THE PROBLEM**

**There is a lack of information and research regarding the cultural factor in educational administration and in leadership theory. Hallinger and Leithwood (1998) recognize that the knowledge base in educational administration addressing cultural foundations in leadership is scarce (p. 100). Their concern is that most of the published theory in administration “assumes that leadership is being exercised in a Western cultural context” (p. 100). Lopez (1998) states that scholars have discussed the pervasiveness of white/European male bias in mainstream educational knowledge base and research techniques (p. 225). According to Ferguson (1984) discussions of organization and leadership theory have been considered largely from the white male experience.**

**Leadership perspectives from outside western culture have been under-represented as has the female perspective in leadership theory. There is little information in the research field with respect to traditional Ojibway female leadership. Chuchryk and Miller (1996) state, “Until recently, much of the research upon which we have had to rely for our knowledge about Aboriginal women has reflected racist, sexist, and/or colonialist frameworks” (p. 4).**

**Leadership is a term that offers much debate when it is related to Aboriginal culture, as traditionally most of those societies did not differentiate power into formal specialized institutional structures (Boldt, 1993, p. 118). Rather, traditional Aboriginal leadership was an outcome of social systems organized around kinship groups, with relationships and duties derived from cultures which were essentially communal (p. 118). In the absence of**

formal institutions vesting authority in individuals that legitimized status, traditional Aboriginal societies vested status based on one's ability to establish a reputation for generosity, wisdom, spirituality, courage, and kindness (Boldt, 1993, p. 119). Status was given out of respect to those who had earned it. Many times, those earning special status were Elders. This work focuses on revealing the lived experience of a traditional female Ojibway Elder and her role as a leader in her community.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experience of a traditional female Ojibway Elder and her role as a leader in her community. The main research question was: What is the lived experience of a traditional female Ojibway Elder? The following questions helped guide the investigation:

1. What are the lived experiences of an Elder in her community?
2. What is the personal life history of this Elder?
3. How does the Elder perceive her role?
4. How are her leadership experiences part of traditional Ojibway spirituality?

Ultimately, this study aims to generate data and findings on the lived experience of a traditional female Ojibway Elder and her role as a leader in her community. The discussion around her role as a leader in her community will be considered in relation to Western theories of leadership.

### **Need for the Study**

**Exploring a traditional female Ojibway Elder's lived experience and her role as a leader will complement the field of leadership and educational administration. This is accomplished by broadening our understanding of leadership theory and by adding to the field of cultural research in educational administration. Hallinger and Leithwood (1998) state, "Without placing blame anywhere, it is time to enrich theory and practice in education by seeking out the diversity of ideas and practices that have existed largely hidden in the shadows of the dominant Western paradigms that have guided the field" (p. 100). Dimmock and Walker (1998) suggest that as researchers and policy makers gain access to new knowledge, there comes a responsibility to reassess the research that is produced and disseminated. This can happen, they say, if researchers stretch beyond the grounding in Western theory toward multiple cultural contexts within which educational administration takes place (p. 559). Based on this study's findings and supported by the review of the related literature, a theory of traditional female Ojibway leadership emerged.**

**Aboriginal communities were organized to focus on the best interests of the community (Boldt, 1993, p. 118). Within Aboriginal communities, Elders have been traditionally bestowed leadership roles (please see the definition of terms regarding the term "Elder"). The purpose of an individual's duties and obligations was to contribute to the welfare of the community (Boldt, 1993, p. 150). Leadership roles in these Aboriginal communities were a product of this communal existence. An individual's leadership traits included wisdom and spirituality, qualities gained from years of life experience.**

Ethnohistorical descriptions of tribal life in the past have placed the focus on men and men's roles causing the roles of women either to have been ignored altogether or placed in a position of subservience and/or secondary importance (Chuchryk and Miller, 1996, p. 6). The first hand knowledge imparted by a traditional female Ojibway elder lends itself to enlightening the field of research on Aboriginal women, and gives voice and legacy to the people of this geographic region. This study has emphasized the importance of Aboriginal female knowledge as a means to illuminate leadership theory in general by exploring a traditional female Ojibway elder's lived experience and her role as a leader in her community.

### **Personal Ground**

Over the last ten years, I have felt an increasing need to make positive and personally meaningful contributions to my community and to my culture in general. I believe that as Aboriginal people we need to make a conscious effort at honoring our Elders. Their wisdom and guidance is their for our seeking; I have heard many Elders comment that their counsel is not sought after enough. Our Elders are leaving this world for the next. I believe that careful and respectful documentation of their knowledge is essential both socially and politically at both the micro and macro levels. I believe this to be especially important in the growth and development of our young people. Increased cultural awareness about traditions, history and language and other general knowledge carried by our Elders is of important social purpose by aiding in the development of self-esteem and self-concept in our young people.

**I am a graduate student in the Master of Education program at Lakehead University. My educational background, employment and life experiences have been focused closely on my culture and community. As a graduate of the University of Alberta's four year Bachelor of Arts in Native Studies program, I have a broad understanding of Aboriginal history, culture and language and of current social and political issues. I graduated from Lakehead University's Bachelor of Education program in 1998. I have been able to use this knowledge, as well as that which I gained from my Native Studies degree, within the elementary panel and in first year college, where I have taught Aboriginal students.**

**I have worked in my community in the areas of justice and education. As a community legal worker, I became aware of legal issues facing my community, and advocated on behalf of many band members. As a chairperson to the Local Education Authority, and trustee to the area's Public School Board, I learned of issues in education facing band members. My position as trustee was an appointment by Chief and Council. Therefore, I worked on behalf of our First Nation members.**

**I have held a long time belief that many of our Aboriginal traditions and oral histories are leaving with the Elders as they pass on. Oral histories of Aboriginal people in this geographic region need to be documented, albeit in a respectful and careful manner. I believe that we need to keep these stories alive for our children and for people in general. The result could be an offering of understanding to us all.**



## **Definition of Terms**

The following terms were defined for the purposes of this study.

**Aboriginal** - For the purposes of this study Aboriginal people are defined as original peoples of Canada having been put here by the Creator (Charter of the Assembly of First Nations, 1999, p. 1).

**Aboriginal Leadership** - For the purposes of this study Aboriginal leadership is defined as a process that exists by and for the people. Power is not differentiated by specialized institutional structures. Power and authority are vested in the community as a whole, and consensus is the goal of which decisions are made (Boldt, 1993, p. 118). Qualities such as kindness, generosity, autonomy, noninterference, sharing and the importance of community are desirable in a leader (Garret, 1996, p. 17).

**Civilizing** - For the purposes of this study, civilizing is defined as a term historically used by the Canadian Government when referring to the goal of the assimilation process of Aboriginal people into European or Western society (Tobias, 1983, p. 39).

**Culture** - For the purposes of this study, culture is defined as a set of values, rules, and attitudes which guide behavior and give meaning to social life. Culture provides the guidelines for establishing relationships and social links; it tells us why these relationships are important and meaningful. Religion, language, beliefs, myths, and symbols are all part of this cultural meaning (Brizinski, 1989, p.3).

**Elder** - For the purposes of this study, an Elder is defined as someone who is honored as highly respected person because of the lifetime's worth of wisdom he or she has acquired

through continuous experience (Garrett, 1996, p. 16). An Elder bears an important responsibility for the tribal community by functioning as a parent, teacher, community leader, and spiritual guide (p. 16).

### **Research Design**

This is a study of one traditional female Ojibway woman's lived experience and her role as a leader in her community. The research design, phenomenology, included open-ended interviews, field notes and participant observation. Open-ended interviews were conducted during six sessions. Field notes were written. Data was collected via participant observation during ceremonial events.

### **Limitations**

This study, as with qualitative research in general, cannot be generalized because it only considers one subject's personal lived experience. Leedy (1997) notes that, "Qualitative research which operates in natural settings is at times so specific and context-bound that the results cannot be generalized" (p. 108).

### **Delimitations**

The importance of this study rested in gaining an understanding of who this woman was - examining her lived experience with respect to traditional Ojibway leadership. In saying that, one particular boundary was created. Because the study focused largely on her traditional belief system, there was the need for discretion and

respect. I believe that sharing her traditional beliefs is deeply personal and requires discretion, so I limited the amount of English language that was used by the participant.

On language, Kirkness (1998) states,

**Most of our culture is in the language and is expressed in the language. Language is best able to express most easily, most accurately and most richly, the values, customs and overall interests of the culture. If you take away language from the culture, you take away its greetings, its curses, its praises, proverbs, its cures, its wisdom, its prayers...when we lose our language ....we do not merely lose a lexicon of words, but we lose our culture and the essence of who we are. (p. 84)**

Unfortunately, with translation, came this loss. However, allowing the participant the opportunity to speak in her true voice enriched the data collected in the research process

### **Assumptions**

1. It is assumed that the information given during the interviews is based on the actual subjective lived experience of the participant.
2. It is assumed that the Elder is a knowledgeable and credible participant for this research.
3. It is assumed that the translator for the participant is a knowledgeable and credible Ojibway language speaker.
4. It is assumed that the researcher's interpretation of the meaning of what is heard may be culturally bound in a different way than the participant's.

## **Organization of the Thesis**

**In chapter two the reader will encounter the review of the related literature. Information about Aboriginal perspectives of leadership, Canadian Government Aboriginal policy and Aboriginal women's lived experiences are presented. In the third chapter the research methodology is presented. Research design, questions which guided the research, the research process, ethical considerations, data collection, data analysis, and methods for achieving validity are discussed. Data collection strategies and findings are presented in chapter four. In the fifth chapter the interpretation and discussion of findings is presented in which understandings arising from this study are discussed. In the sixth chapter the conclusion and implications for further research are presented.**

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE**

#### **Introduction**

It is a commonly held view that the history of the Canadian government's relationship with Aboriginal people has affected Aboriginal culture. This is evident in the Canadian federal government's Aboriginal policy and the reclamation of culture by many Aboriginal people in Canada. As the writer will reveal, through the literature, the intention in designing the federal government's Aboriginal policy was to ultimately assimilate Aboriginal people into mainstream society. In a society, leadership is rooted in culture. Assimilation, a process by which Aboriginal culture was to be replaced by the Canadian mainstream culture, affected Aboriginal leadership as a result. The lived experiences of Aboriginal women, are testaments to the ongoing struggle to revive Aboriginal tradition and spirituality in an effort to perpetuate Aboriginal culture.

In the first section of the review of related literature, leadership is explored from cultural and Aboriginal perspectives, in which the Western traditions and Ojibway perspective of leadership are discussed. In the second section, the history and evolution of Canada's policy regarding Aboriginal people is explored from the perspective relating to the Indian Act. In the final section of the review of the related literature Aboriginal women's lived experiences are explored.

## **Cultural and Aboriginal Perspectives of Leadership**

Leadership theory is a growing body of knowledge. More has been written about leadership than any of the other behavioral sciences (Sergiovanni & Corbally, 1984). In the literature, it is revealed that Ojibway and Western leadership perspectives share a focus on the importance of considering leadership from the viewpoints of context and culture.

Bolman and Deal (1992) distilled theories of organizations into a series of paradigms (structural, human resource, political, symbolic). They used these paradigms to highlight the different styles of leadership used by leaders of different cultures. They found that leadership, in their particular study, was contextual. Their study indicated that different styles of leadership surfaced in different situations and was different for people of different cultures (p. 314-329). One conclusion was that leadership style was contextual or situational. O'Toole (1995) believes that context is so pervasive in leadership theory that relativism reigns (p. 7). O'Toole (1995) holds that good leaders are guided by principles that are not "context dependent, but that represent universal beliefs about right and wrong" (p.7). Alternatively, Duke (1998) supports the view that leadership is context dependent. Duke (1998) states, "separating leadership from context is analogous to identifying the food one wants for dinner while ignoring where it is to be consumed" (p. 166). Hesselebein (1996), Shein (1996), and Covey (1996) hold similar beliefs. The authors believe that leadership style depends on circumstances and its relation to culture and community. Brizinski (1989) defines culture as a set of values that guide behavior and includes such aspects as religion, language, beliefs, and myths. Sergiovanni (1984)

**considers community to be the centre of the order of symbols, values and beliefs that govern society (p. 9). Sergiovanni (1984) states:**

**Centres (Communities) provide a sense of purpose to seemingly ordinary events and bring worth and dignity to human activity within organizations. Centres, therefore, are cultural imperatives - normal and necessary for establishing social order and providing meaning. (p. 9)**

**Sergiovanni (1984) holds that values and beliefs form the central zone, which is what governs society (p.9). Community, as a forum in which to apply values and beliefs, creates social order and provides meaning. Sergiovanni (1984) believes that values and beliefs stem from a community's religion or spiritual belief system (p. 9). He refers to every society as having its own religion. Sergiovanni (1984) states that religion is considered to exist in many different forms as either having secular, pluralistic or tolerant aspects (p.9). Sergiovanni (1984) holds that religion is the source from which values and beliefs are derived (p. 9). He states:**

**Developing, and nurturing centre value patterns and accepting centre norms which dictate what one should believe and how one should behave represent a response to felt needs of individuals and groups for stability and order and for a mechanism whereby the new and varied can be absorbed in a meaningful fashion. (p. 9)**

**Beebe (1997) states that most religions of the world emphasize a common spiritual theme that is illuminated when ethical codes or fundamental principles of the world's peoples are considered (p. 15). The idea of a common spiritual theme among cultures is mirrored in Covey's (1996) concept of principle-centred leadership. In this concept of leadership, values, and principles are compared to compasses in that they do not change or shift. Covey (1996) contends that by using principles one is prevented from becoming lost,**

confused or fooled by conflicting voices and values (p. 115). The invariability of values, beliefs and fundamental principles offer stability to community members who develop, nurture and accept them. Peck (1997) says that values are derived from principles (p. 3). Peck (1997) holds that principles are like territory and that values are like the maps we use to navigate through the territory (p. 3).

Bolman and Deal (1992), Duke (1998), Hesselebein (1996), Shein (1996), and Covey (1996) have stated that leadership theory has evolved to focus on culture. Sergiovanni (1984), and Covey (1996) hold that culture reflects values, beliefs, and a set principles. Covey (1996) contends that principles have been discussed in terms of their origin in a community's religious or spiritual belief system. Leadership then, has shifted to focus on context and culture, and is presented here as having spiritual or religious affiliations when it is considered in the context of culture and community.

The interconnectedness of leadership between culture and spiritual belief is similar to that of the Ojibway perspective of leadership. Spirituality or religion and culture are not mutually exclusive categories, with respect to Aboriginal societies. Aboriginal spiritual life is founded on the belief in the interconnectedness of all natural things, all forms of life, with primary importance being attached to the land, Mother Earth (Meno Bimahdizewin). Here then lies the importance of considering leadership from the Western and Aboriginal perspectives.



## **Western traditions**

**Many current theories of leadership are based in the structural functionalist paradigm. Leadership from the structural functionalist perspective focuses on organizing actions sequentially for the purpose of maximizing efficiency (Scott, 1998, p. 33).**

**Structuralism is based in rationality and as such structural functionalists use reason and science to understand leadership (Slater, 1995, p. 455). Structural functionalists believe that leadership is a set of measurable behaviors or skills (Slater, 1995, p. 451). Western leadership theory, although derived from a structural functionalist base, has evolved to include a more natural or nonrational perspective. This is evident in transformational, reconceptualist, aesthetic and critical humanist theories of leadership.**

**In the Western tradition a natural system of organization emerged in large part from the inadequacies of the rational system. The rational system refers to, “the extent to which a series of actions is organized in such a way as to lead to predetermined goals with maximum efficiency” (Scott, 1998, p. 33). The emergence of the natural system shifted this focus from being exclusively goal oriented to collective oriented. The shift focused more on people, their feelings and thoughts. The shift focused more on the entire organization, albeit the entire person, than only on outcomes.**

**A people-centred focus is reflected in human relations management theories which functioned between 1924 - 1933 (Sergiovanni, 1984, p. 5). The Hawthorne plant of the Western Electric Company was the site of research by Elton Mayo, a pioneer in the human relations movement (Sergiovanni, 1984, p. 5). In his research, Mayo found that people**

were primarily motivated by social needs and that they received their greatest satisfaction from their relationships at work as opposed to their work-related tasks (p. 5). He concluded that management robbed work of meaning, and that meaning was found in the social relationships of the job (p. 5). Scott (1998) proposes that it is important to recognize that when this shift in humanizing the work place originally occurred, it was “viewed primarily as a means to increase productivity, not an end in itself” (p. 65). Although more humanizing, the ultimate goal was still to maximize efficiency. Important in the shift is the idea that administering a social organization without consideration to the nonrational aspects of social conduct seemed nonrational (Scott, 1998, p. 56).

Research in the field of leadership has continued to emerge in such a way that addresses nonrational aspects of social conduct (p. 56). Barnard (1938) states that rational systems require nonrational systems. According to Barnard (1938) “Formal organizations arise out of and are necessary to informal organization; but when formal organizations come into operation, they create and require informal organizations” (p. 120). He holds that informal structures encourage communication and cohesiveness (p. 122). Informal organizations also enable leadership. Barnard (1938) states that informal organizations create the willingness of the followers to serve thus enabling the stability of the leader (p. 122). Thus, when goals are imposed from the top down, their attainment relies on compliance from the bottom up.

Ultimately, leadership has been met with differing definitions from researchers (Slater, 1995, p. 451). Slater (1995) believes that scholars disagree on a definition of leadership because of their different assumptions and paradigms or reference points.

Lambert (1995) suggests that amid different definitions of leadership patterns emerge characterizing what leadership is and what leaders do (p. 30). Some of those definitions characterize leaders as being inviting to others in sharing authority, and responsibility, and as fostering mutual respect, building teams, and working with followers for a common purpose (Lambert, 1995, p. 30).

Hesslebein (1996) believes that great opportunities lie ahead for leaders to lead their enterprises and countries into a new kind of community of healthy children, strong families and work that dignifies the individual (p. 124). It is in this arena that leaders with new mind-sets and visions will forge new relationships, crossing all three sectors to build partnerships and community (p. 124). Hesslebein (1996) states that wise leadership brings together all those concerned into a circle that includes the corporation, the organization, the people and the community (Hesslebein, 1996, p. 124). Hesslebein (1996) and Shein (1996) hold that leaders will transform their leadership styles to accommodate the needs and desires of community members. The emergence of a focus on context and community addresses the individual while at the same time remaining mindful of society.

Transformational, reconceptualist, aesthetic and critical humanist theories are theories of leadership which address the emergence of this focus on community and society.

Transformational, reconceptualist, aesthetic and critical humanist theories of leadership propose that leadership is context bound and sociological in nature. According to Burns (1978) transformational leadership is a “mutual exchange of resources in which both or all parties involved are transformed by the interactions” (p. 171). Leadership is a social relationship between the leader and the follower. Slater (1995) holds that, “Without

followership there can be no leadership; without followers there can be no leaders” (p. 449). In that sense leaders derive their meaning and power from those who are being lead. Stogdil (1974), in reference to interactionist theory, holds that leadership is a function of action and “truly exists only when acknowledged and conferred by other members of the group” (p. 14). In transformational leadership theory leaders and followers transcend their immediate self-interest and engage in such a way that both the follower and leader are raised to higher levels of motivation and morality (Duke, 1998, p. 171). Bennis (1984) states that the transformative power of leadership is the ability to raise human consciousness. He states, “It is vision, purposes, beliefs, and other aspects of organizational culture that are of prime importance” (p. 70).

Reconceptualists share this view in that leadership is best understood, “in the beliefs of the beholders than the behaviour of the beheld” (Duke, 1998, p. 174). This view is noted as far back as in the relationship between Machiavelli and the Prince. Machiavelli told the Prince that his subjects’ perception of him was the most important aspect of preserving the nation-state (Duke, 1998, p. 174).

Duke (1998) developed an aesthetic theory of leadership based on the growing interest in leadership as a matter of perception (p.176). In the aesthetic theory, leadership only exists when it is perceived by an observer (p. 176). Duke (1998) states, “A leader’s proclamation of leadership by itself, therefore, is of little value...for the perception of leadership to occur, an observer must find something about a leader meaningful” (p. 176). He further states that meaning may be derived from a leader’s actions or what the leader symbolizes (p. 176). This interest in the social aspect of leadership is specific in critical

humanist leadership theory.

Critical humanist leadership theory focuses on the symbolic aspects of leadership. Critical humanists believe that social structure is socially constructed (Slater, 1995, p. 453). They disagree with structural functionalists in that social science research is value-free. It is the critical humanist perspective that values are an inherent component in the decision-making process (Slater, 1995, p. 455). Critical humanists are committed to society and emphasize the importance of transcending the limitations of existing social order (p. 455).

Hesslebein (1996) states, “Key to societal significance of tomorrow’s leaders is the way they embrace the totality of leadership, not just including “my organization” but reaching beyond the walls as well” (p. 123). This shift in the Western tradition of leadership theory to focus on context and community is similar in those respects to the Ojibway perspective of leadership. The shift is focused in celebrating individual circumstances, or context, while at the same time remaining mindful of community. It is a focus with the view that both the individual and community must work together to achieve balance and harmony. This focus is a tenet of Ojibway culture.

### **Ojibway perspective of leadership**

The literature reveals that present day Western leadership theories have shifted to focus on context, culture, and community. Boldt (1993) state that Ojibway leadership was traditionally communal with the interest resting in what was best for the community (p. 278). The importance of community and an individual’s obligation to his fellow

community members was manifested in individual roles in society and in bestowing leadership on Elders, as they were the logical choice.

The European-Western idea of authority and hierarchy was rooted in feudalism and its associated belief in the inherent inequality of men (Boldt, 1993, p. 278). The Enlightenment concept of egalitarianism emerged as a response to hierarchy in order that a more human political structure would result (p. 278). Boldt (1993) writes, "In traditional Indian society, however, the idea of egalitarianism did not emerge as a reaction to excesses of hierarchical authority" (p. 278). Further, the author states that authority or the organizing and regulating force in traditional Aboriginal society was custom and tradition. Boldt (1993) states, "conformity to custom was a matter of religious obedience that accorded with the generally accepted moral standards of the tribe, the mechanism used in traditional Indian society was direct participatory democracy and rule by consensus" (p. 278). Boldt (1993) holds that in a very real sense, people constituted the government as there was no evidence of a body politic, and no authority or hierarchy (p. 119). Working toward a common goal was a cultural imperative, whereas individualism with no shared goals or vision, was a cultural liability. The prospect of working toward common goals in Aboriginal society is a difficult process in today's society and post modern era where individualism reigns (Maracle, 1996, p. 41).

Bloom (1991) suggests that post modern thought, a product of our democratic society, breeds individualism and individual thought (p. 26). Slater (1995) discusses democracy as a product of the Enlightenment period in which the central principle was reason or science and not authority, which was derived from religion, family and the

community (p. 467). Slater (1995) argues that an individual in a democracy is encouraged to follow reason as opposed to authority (p. 467). In this process, individuals are given the freedom to think things through and arrive at one's own opinion. Aboriginal communities, in their quest to maintain equality, remained non individualistic. Boldt (1993) states, "Equality was derived from the Creator's founding prescription" (p. 278). In discussing post modernist beliefs, Bloom (1991) considers cultural relativism, and suggests that it is contributing to the detriment of our society. It is his view that a society open to "all kinds of men, all kinds of life-styles, all ideologies" without any "shared goals or vision of the public good" questions whether or not the social contract is at all possible (p. 27). Bloom (1991) further states that even with all of the self-interest, and apparent independence of thought doubt will emerge among individuals (p. 27). Bloom (1991) holds that when individuals are in doubt they will look to some kind of authority to assist in the decision-making process. He states, "In the absence of anything else to which to turn, the common beliefs of most men are almost always what will determine judgement. This is where tradition used to be most valuable" (Bloom, 1991, p. 247).

Boldt (1993) states, "Traditional Aboriginal societies had a fundamentally different theory of the individual in relation to the community from that implied in Western-liberal ideology" (p. 150). Boldt (1993) states that an individual in Aboriginal societies was defined in terms of duties and obligations to the collectivity (p. 150). In Western-liberal ideology individuals were defined in terms of their legal rights (Boldt, 1993, p. 150). Boldt (1993) states individuals in traditional Aboriginal society were expected to subordinate individualism and respect the customs and traditions of the community (p.

150). Customs engendered mutual respect and loyalty and held communities together (Boldt, 1993, p. 150). Luik (1991) holds that when individualism reigns, individual truths become the virtues and religion, family and tradition no longer become our intellectual authorities (p. 246). Bloom (1991), and Luik (1991) challenge the majority's claim that there is truth in the existence of individualism and independence of thought. Bloom (1991) finds that, "The paradoxical result of the liberation of reason is greater reliance on public opinion for guidance, a weakening of independence" (p. 247). Luik (1991) states:

The confusion between equality of prospects and equality of outcomes, between judgement based on the arbitrary and irrelevant and judgement founded on the justifiably germane, between the right to have an opinion and the rightness of an opinion, between the equality of claim and the equality of capacity, between the relevant as the contemporary and the relevant as the timeless, between the tradition as imprisoning and tradition as liberating.  
(p. 9)

Traditional Ojibway teachings require of individuals not to seek their own happiness but the well-being of others. Maracle (1996) states, "this means that the self-indulgent ideology of me first runs contrary to our laws. In fact, individualism destroys the potential of each of us to contribute to the development of the nation" (p. 41). Boldt (1993) believes that today's challenge is in retaining what is left of traditional Aboriginal communalism (p. 151). He holds that this will help to perpetuate human dignity offered in the traditional customs of an individual's role geared to the best interests of the community (p. 151). Tradition, inherent in Ojibway culture, is derived from the belief in a higher power. The literature revealed that principles are like compasses and stem from culture (Covey, 1996, p. 115). Principles in Ojibway culture have traditionally specified



roles for men, women, and elders based on spiritual laws. Spiritual beliefs were the major components in bestowing decision-making power (Boldt, 1993, p. 27). In fact, spiritual beliefs were the foundation of which Aboriginal culture functioned traditionally. The Ojibway people's holistic view of leadership is a product of their traditional culture and beliefs.

Role specification in Ojibway culture enables the society to function efficiently. Men and women have their own tasks and positions in the culture which complement each other and therefore create meaning for all participants in their community. It is analogous, to a degree, to a hierarchical organizational (minus the hierarchy) structure such as that of the rational paradigm where each member of the hierarchy has distinct roles that he/she must perform to maximize efficiency. In their roles, individuals in Ojibway culture are considered to carry special gifts which ultimately complement the community. Spiritual gifts derive their meaning from the relationships created among all members of the community. They carry these gifts into the predetermined roles that were traditionally based in a spiritual belief system. In traditional Ojibway society individuals were cast into predetermined roles by being expected to perform specific tasks, which complemented the tasks of others in the community. Other revered qualities such as kindness, generosity, autonomy, noninterference, sharing and the importance of community are qualities that also befit a leader, in the traditional sense (Garret, 1996, p. 16). Auger (1999) stated, "The seven spiritual gifts bestowed upon us by the Creator, such as humility, love, respect, honesty, truth, bravery, and wisdom is supposed to be passed down and shared with others in our community (p. 41).

**In Aboriginal societies the power of leadership and decision-making was traditionally bestowed upon Elders. Elders exerted political, social and moral influence in their traditional communities (Boldt, 1993, p. 119). In an oral culture, Elders had the essential role of transmitting tribal customs and traditions to the younger children (Boldt, 1993, p. 119). In traditional Aboriginal societies, Elders have been those bestowed the role of leader based on their knowledge of the spirituality of their cultures and the traditions inherent therein. Boldt (1993) states that the colonial political and bureaucratic structures that were imposed in Aboriginal communities, lead to the decline of the influential role of Elders, with the elected leadership provisions in the Indian Act (p. 199). Today, Elders hold different positions that vary among communities. Some believe that Elders' roles have become largely unofficial, while other believe that Elders remain respected for their social and moral influence and participation in sacred ceremonies (Boldt, 1993, p. 120).**

**Traditionally, Aboriginal leaders were servants to their people. Today Elders hold a lot of responsibility in their roles as parents, teachers, community leaders and spiritual guides (Garret, 1996, p. 16). Specifically, leadership is fostered through self-mastery, inner strength, and the development of individual abilities. Elders gained these qualities through years of experience and knowledge. Boldt (1993) states that with the advent of colonial political and administrative structures, based on hierarchical structures, Aboriginal leaders of today are, without choice, cast into a ruling-class system (p. 120). Today in Canada, Aboriginal people have faced an alien leadership system imposed on them by the Government. Boldt (1993) holds that "for more than a century the Canadian Government**

has purposefully aimed its policies and practices toward the goal of replacing traditional Indian leadership systems, philosophies, and norms, with colonial institutional structures, philosophies, and norms” (p. 120). Boldt, (1993) further states that the Department of Indian Affairs, acting under the authority of the Indian Act, served as the paramount instrument for destroying traditional leadership systems (p. 120). It is, therefore, important to give general consideration to the history and evolution of Canada’s Aboriginal policy.

### **History and Evolution of Canadian Federal Government Policy Regarding Aboriginal people**

A general understanding of the history and evolution of Canadian Federal Government Aboriginal policy is helpful in gaining insight into Aboriginal people and how that policy lead to the systematic attempted eradication of Aboriginal culture. The history of Aboriginal people in Canada has been a bleak one and the history and evolution Canadian Federal Government Policy regarding Aboriginal people has been no better.

Canadian Federal Government Policy regarding Aboriginal Policy has had three main goals: protection, civilization, and assimilation (Tobias, 1983, p. 39). Historically, the government believed that Aboriginal people needed protection from European exploitation (p. 39). The development of the government’s paternalistic attitude stemmed from the early Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal contact. The advance of non-Aboriginal settlements resulted in the inability of Aboriginal people to defend themselves or their land. The Government became the buffer between the two cultures (Gibbins & Ponting,

1986, p.25) This distinction was made part of the constitutional structure of Canada through the British North America Act of 1867 (Tobias, 1983, p. 39). However, legislation used by the Government to fulfill this responsibility, has always had the ultimate goal of extinguishing Aboriginal special status (Tobias, 1983, p. 40). Tobias (1983) holds that the means by which the Government attempted to effect assimilation was through what the Government termed *civilizing* (please see definition of terms) Aboriginal people (Tobias, 1983, p. 39). Through civilizing Aboriginal people, the Government believed that Aboriginal identity and culture would be eliminated thereby making Aboriginal people more assimilable (Tobias, 1983, p. 39). The Federal Government defined a civilized person in Canada at that time as someone who was allowed to vote, own land, speak and write either English or French, practice Christianity and be of good moral character (Tobias, 1983, p. 40). Ironically, many new immigrants to Canada at could not meet these requirements. The Canadian Federal Government policy of 'civilizing' Aboriginal people required Aboriginal people to become even more civilized than Europeans immigrants. The concept began after 1815 and would form an integral part of the Federal Government's relationship with Aboriginal people (p. 40). By 1830, the Federal Government initiated several attempts at their Aboriginal civilization mandate. Christianizing Aboriginal people and instituting the reserve system were established as means to that end.

In the 1830's Aboriginal people were encouraged to settle on isolated reserves where they were taught to farm and receive religious instruction and education (Tobias, 1983, p. 41). The policy of assimilation was strengthened by the spread of Christianity to

the Aboriginal population. One way in which the government attempted to Christianize Aboriginal people was through the educational system and residential schools. Many Elders today recall their experiences at residential school. It is a widely held belief that many of those experiences were unpleasant ones.

Boldt (1993) says, "It is clear that the Canadian Government created a great crime against Indians and their cultures when it forced Indian children at ages five to fifteen to attend residential schools" (p. 188). Common and Frost (1994) state that the "entire educational program for the last 250 to 300 years was designed to change and assimilate the First Nations of Canada" (p. 10). In the early years, the Government delegated the responsibility of educating Aboriginal people to the Church (Gibbins & Ponting, 1986, p. 27). Religious residential schools isolated Aboriginal children from their families, culture and European settlers. This had a two-fold effect. It deprived Aboriginal children of their culture, their language and family support and replaced them with an institutional environment which provided instruction in English and in Christianity. Gibbins and Ponting (1986) state that this process further deprived Aboriginal people of practicing not only their traditional beliefs but speaking their language as well (p. 28). Further, Kirkness (1998) states that residential schools were devised to isolate children from their parents, families, and influence of the reserve, in an effort to prepare children for a domestic, Christian life (p. 101). Kirkness (1998) provides an account from a residential school survivor:

**We were removed at age five (sometimes earlier) from our parents, community, dumped into an alien hostile environment of residential schools ...we were allowed to see our parents two months out of the year ... we**

**were beaten for speaking our languages. We were ridiculed when we spoke of our customs and teachings...we were taught European values and when we returned home to our own communities we had become strangers - little brown white men who couldn't speak their language, or make a simple fire or track an animal through the woods. (p. 101)**

**Residential schools are noted for their high mortality rates. It is estimated that nearly fifty percent of the children who attended residential schools did not survive; many died from loneliness (Kirkness, 1998, p. 101). The issues facing the residential school system have become moral dilemmas for both the Federal Government and the Church. Aboriginal leaders have since demanded government assistance in order to revive their languages and cultures.**

**Residential schools were additionally unable to provide Aboriginal children with a secular education (Gibbins & Ponting, 1986, p. 28). The Federal Government believed that a secular education would help assimilate Aboriginal children into wider Canadian society (Gibbins & Ponting, 1986, p. 28). However, the isolation of many of the residential schools prevented this. The Federal Government believed that separating the two cultures by the process of isolate reserves would replace the need for residential schools and help Aboriginal people cope with Europeans (Tobias, 1983, p. 42).**

**Tobias (1983) states that in 1850 an evaluation of the reserve system was needed because of the resistance of Aboriginal people to settle in these isolated communities (p. 42). The Federal Government looked at the American system and found that Aboriginal people in Michigan were more easily assimilated when located near European settlements (Tobias, 1983, p. 42). As a result the Federal Government maintained the reserve system but located them closer to European settlements. No longer was it interested in merely**

having Aboriginal people taught how to cope with Europeans but how to actually become European and to become fully assimilated into colonial society (Tobias, 1983, p. 42).

Therefore, in 1857 an Act was passed to “encourage the gradual civilization of the Indians in the Province (Ontario) and to amend the laws respecting Indians” (Tobias, 1983, p. 42).

Legislation regarding Aboriginal people proceeded to define an Aboriginal person. Legislation outlined that Aboriginal people would not be accorded the same rights as European Canadians until he or she could meet certain criteria, such as being able to write or speak English, be free of debt and of good moral character. It would follow in 1869 that the Act for the gradual enfranchisement of the Aboriginal population would become law (Tobias, 1983, p. 43). The enfranchisement provisions of the Indian Act equated citizenship with cultural characteristics. It was only those Aboriginal people who did not cling to their Native traditions and who fit the dominant cultural mold, who could become full citizens (Gibbins & Ponting, 1986, p. 29). While enfranchisement offered various rights such as the right to vote, the enfranchise system failed as less Aboriginal people opted to relinquish their Aboriginal special status and treaty rights. It was not until 1960 that all Aboriginal people were granted the right to vote in federal elections (Gibbins & Ponting, 1986, p. 30).

Over the years the Indian Act would undergo several amendments and revisions. Some amendments would be received with greater resistance than others. In 1969, as part of Prime Minister Trudeau’s Just Society agenda, the Liberal Government introduced the White Paper (Boldt, 1993, p. 65). This particular piece of proposed legislation is one example of the Canadian Federal Government’s continued attempt of extinguishing

**Aboriginal special status.** The 1969 White paper proposed that the legislative and constitutional bases of discrimination be removed and therefore called to repeal the Indian Act (Gibbins & Ponting, 1986, p. 33). The 1969 White Paper was met with enormous Aboriginal resistance (Boldt, 1993, p. 66). The new Canadian Federal Government at that time had a strong Liberal ideology of stressing individualism and upholding individual rights (Gibbins & Ponting, 1986, p. 34). The 1969 White Paper proposed to remove all legislative and constitutional bases of discrimination in an effort to promote equality (Gibbins & Ponting, 1986, p. 34). The Indian Act was to be repealed on those grounds (Gibbins & Ponting, 1986, p. 34). The federal responsibility to Aboriginal people was to come to an end. Trudeau would later concede in a 1983 First Minister's Conference saying:

**Clearly, our Aboriginal peoples each occupied a special place in history. To my way of thinking this entitles them special recognition in the constitution and to their own place in Canadian society, distinct from each other and distinct from other groups. (Boldt, 1993, p. 24).**

**There is certain irony in Trudeau's statement when considering the general history and evolution of the Canadian Federal Government's policy regarding Aboriginal people which had the main goal of assimilating Aboriginal people. Following 1812 with Aboriginal people no longer being considered as useful allies in times of war, and the fur trade gradually being replaced by agriculture, a shift occurred that focused on European values and norms (Gibbins & Ponting, 1986, p. 25). As such, the ideology of civilizing Aboriginal people was the focus of policy for the government (Gibbins & Ponting, 1986, p. 25). This insight into the oppression faced by Aboriginal people is specifically notable**



with respect to women. The role of Aboriginal women in Canadian history and the effect the Canadian Federal Government's Aboriginal policy had on those roles is useful when considering their lived experiences.

### **Canadian Federal Government Policy Regarding Aboriginal Women**

Over time Aboriginal women have been assigned lesser fundamental legal rights than either Aboriginal or Canadian men and women. Several aspects of the Indian Act discriminate against Aboriginal women; this is reaffirmed with the passing of Bill C-31 in 1985.

In its ruling in 1981 the United Nations Human Rights Commission declared that with its section 12 (1) (b) of the Indian Act, Canada was in direct contravention of article 27 of the U.N. Charter of Rights. Section 12 (1) (b) of the Indian Act denied Aboriginal status to Aboriginal women who married non-Aboriginal men (Boldt, 1993, p. 208). Aboriginal women would lose their status upon marrying a non-Aboriginal man or upon marrying an Aboriginal man, who relinquished his status through previous legislation. By not repealing that section of the Indian Act the Canadian Federal Government would have also been in direct contravention of its own Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Boldt, 1993, p. 208). Conversely, there was no legislation according the same fate to men, who married non-Aboriginal women. In fact, non-Aboriginal women gained status upon marrying an Aboriginal man. According to Boldt (1993) the Canadian Human Rights Commission stated that section 12 (1) (b) amounted to blatant gender discrimination (Boldt, 1993, p. 13). As a result Bill C-31 (1985) was passed which reinstated status to

**Aboriginal women, who had married non-Aboriginal or non-status Aboriginal men who lost status under previous legislation.**

**Aboriginal women's marriages to non-Aboriginal men date back to the eighteenth century. In the last 20 years, approximately half of all Aboriginal women's marriages have been to non-Aboriginal men (Jamieson, 1986, p. 125). During the fur trade, a recognized form of marriage emerged between Aboriginal women and white male fur traders. These "customary marriages" were instrumental for white fur traders because Aboriginal women possessed a number of important skills. These skills proved to be indispensable and of considerable economic benefit. Their ability to make snow shoes, skin clothing, preserve meat, and interpret language became vital to the survival of their white husbands (Jamieson, 1986, p. 114). Significant events would prove to weaken this role of Aboriginal women. One such event was the gradual shift of the economy from fur trading to agriculture.**

**Aboriginal women's roles in today's society can be considered a reflection of the discrimination they have faced in the past. Some Aboriginal women's lived experiences highlighted in the review of the related literature reflect history and Canadian Federal Government policies.**

### **Aboriginal Women's Lived Experiences**

**Many of the themes derived from the literature on Aboriginal women's lived experiences, are a product of a history of oppression. This section will explore Aboriginal women's lived experiences.**

### **Women in Aboriginal communities**

Women play an important part in Aboriginal communities. Discussing women with regard to traditional Aboriginal society Armstrong (1989) states:

**It was women who shaped the thinking of all its members in a loving, nurturing atmosphere within the base of the family unit...We find ourselves and our power in our ability to be what our grandmothers were to us: keepers of the next generation in every sense of the word - physically, intellectually, and spiritually. (p. xi)**

It is her view that it is the strength of the female who holds the families and nations together, providing the bridge to the next generation. Women are the key to survival (p. xi).

The importance of the role of the female is reaffirmed in Wall's (1993) compilation Wisdom's Daughters. Conversations with Women Elders of Native America in which a female elder states:

**We as Indian people have never forgotten the status of women. Those who have gotten away from the traditions may act as if they don't remember, but all of us know inside. Our memories are long, as long as the line of generations. The elders have always passed on this knowledge. (p. x)**

Downey (1993) noted that it is time for recognizing what women think and say (p. 12). She says, "It might be prophesied or doesn't have to be prophesied, but the feeling is so strong that the women will come out and voice their feelings...whether people want to hear it or not, it's going to come because it's meant to be - it's that time" (Downey, 1993, p. 12). In light of the oppression and marginalization women have faced, Downey believes the time has come that women's voices and thoughts are heard. The subjugation of Aboriginal women, however, has been a process encouraged in Canadian history and

colonial society.

Beverly Hungry Wolf (1993) acknowledges that even with the advent of colonialism and the attempt to Christianize Aboriginal people, many Aboriginal societies remained very strong. The female roles in these societies were and continue to be important, and yet equal to the role of males. Although women's daily roles were different from men's, they were interdependent (Hungry Wolf, 1993, p. 78). Hungry Wolf (1993) states, "In all our important tribal ceremonies, women play an equal part with the men, and most ceremonies would not take place without women" (p. 78).

Specifically, with respect to ceremonies Hungry Wolf (1993) asserts:

Usually, it is the woman who has the job, morning and evening, of making incense for the bundle; she also has the job of taking the bundle outside every morning and bringing it in every evening. And she has her role to play when it is time to open the bundle. There are specific songs that are sung for her. When it comes time to unbundle the pipe, that too, is her job. (p. 78)

The role of women in Ojibway society exists simultaneously with others in their communities. Each person's role complements another's all in an effort to work communally for the benefit of the community as a whole.

The literature reveals that there is a resurgence of culture and tradition that is noticeable when Aboriginal women speak of their lived experiences. The importance of retrieving, retaining and perpetuating their language and cultural values was evident for Ojibway women. Cultural values were discussed in terms of retaining them and passing them on to children so that they may be passed on to future generations. Some ways in which language and cultural values were passed on were through the role of Elders, through

spirituality, and through moontime (menstruation) teachings.

**Language.** The importance of retaining your Aboriginal language is important for being able to relate to mother nature, your Elders, and to perpetuate your culture. Paul (1999) says, “Language. Holy critters, if you don’t have your language, that’s how I relate to Mother Earth, our songs, drumming, and singing. That’s my life, singing and drumming” (p. 5). When you are communicating with the Creator and the spirit world, you are understood because you are speaking your language. Mosher (1999) an Ojibway elder lost her language when she left home to attend residential school. Her view is that Native language is very important because the teachings are imbedded within it. Mosher (1999) says, “Native language is very important because our teachings are in the language. You miss the meaning when you talk about it in English” (p. 160). So important is language in retaining your culture, that Penashue (1999) says, “Language and culture are related. If you know the language you understand the culture” (p. 212). The intertwined nature of language and culture is a tenet of Aboriginal society.

Mosher (1999) reflects on the importance of respecting elders by examining the protocol required when one is seeking an Elder’s guidance, wisdom or prayers. She says that it is very important for one to understand how to properly address an Elder. Mosher (1999) says:

**An Elder is one that knows the teachings. To approach an Elder the tobacco offering always comes first. An Elder is not going to tell you anything until you offer that tobacco and you pray with that tobacco first, you don’t just go and buy it. You can feel that tobacco when you’re holding it when a person comes and gives it to you, you can feel it if there’s no heartbeat in that tobacco, then that person did not say their prayers for that tobacco, on what they**

wanted it for. Because they see it done, they don't understand so they just know you're supposed to give tobacco to an Elder but they don't know the meaning of it. (p. 148)

Many times their counsel was sought for their wisdom and years of life experience. Elders were able to explain cultural practices and spiritual laws.

**Elders.** Elders or the “keepers of wisdom” (Garret, 1996, p. 16) are the gatekeepers of traditional knowledge used to perpetuate social order and provide meaning. They are honored as “highly respected persons because of the lifetime’s worth of wisdom they have acquired through continuous experience” (Garret, 1996, p. 16). Traditionally, Elders held diverse positions in which they were revered as leaders and teachers in passing on cultural values. As teachers Elders passed on knowledge through dream interpretation and storytelling. As leaders, Elders were sought and respected for their ability to make decisions based on their wisdom from many years of experience and spiritual insight.

Cajete (1999) says that almost without exception Aboriginal cultures valued dreams (p.58). Dreams were used by different cultural groups for a variety of reasons. It was a valued method of learning. Mosher (1999) considers that many times insight into life’s meaning was derived from understanding the significance of one’s dreams (p. 161). Dreams remain highly regarded in Aboriginal culture because of the teachings they offer. Some sought their significance in determining and understanding the future, others used them in search of a deeper understanding of themselves. Generally speaking, the dream state was of special significance because it was in this state that one could be in contact with spirits to gain power and knowledge from them (Cajete, 1999, p. 58). Paul (1999)

has learned a lot from her dreams. Many of the songs that she has learned to sing have been taught to her in her dreams (p. 20). She says, "In my dreams, this old woman is teaching me the songs, those are the songs of the living and the dead" (p.20). Mosher (1999) acknowledges dreams as phenomena which have helped her through life (p. 161). Many times it was Elders who helped her as they interpreted their significance. Nitsch (1999) describes dreams as personal experiences that consist of past experiences and prophecies (p. 85). Nitsch (1999) says that dreams like prophecies will provide information of things to come in the future (p. 85).

Another way in which Elders passed on knowledge was through storytelling. Storytelling was an effective way of teaching traditional way of life. Elders tested and trained the memories of the listener so that history and traditions could be preserved and passed on (Beck, Walters, Francisco, 1996, p. 57). The art of storytelling helped children to exercise skills like memory, imagination, verbal and non-verbal communication (Cajete, 1999, p. 56). The hidden symbolism inherent in storytelling caused the listener to read between the lines for hidden meanings, concepts or ideas (p. 56). Stories taught by Elders might include sharing their own experiences, and teaching about cultural values like respecting the animals, the land and the importance of sharing. Storytelling provided knowledge about ceremonies, and models of behaviour that helped one understand the world (Beck, Walters, & Francisco, 1996, p. 58).

Elders were also respected as leaders because of their insight and ability to make decisions. Penashue (1999) on Elders and leadership says, "A leader was chosen because of his knowledge and experience of the land. It was usually an elderly person who was a

good hunter, the best one. This leader knew everything in the country, knew where the animals were” (p. 204). It was only when one earned the role as leader that one could give direction (1999, p. 204). Penashue (1999) further stated that once an Elder assumes the role as leader, he or she is listened to without disagreement (p. 204). Elders were obeyed, and respected (Kulchyski, McCaskill, & Newhouse, 1999, p. 260). In describing the seven stages of life of the Midewiwin tradition of which she practices, Mosher (1999) says that the seventh stage is when you are reflecting on life. This stage is reserved for Elders. They are to be the teachers to pass on knowledge to the children (p. 159). Elders continue play a significant role in Aboriginal society today.

**Spirituality.** The spiritual belief system of Aboriginal people is diverse.

However, a common belief in the Creator and in traditional practices was evident in the review of the related literature. Paul (1999) began learning more about her spirituality as an adult. She was raised by her mother, a practicing Catholic, who used to support the family by selling baskets made of sweetgrass. As Paul (1999) grew older, her mother would provide her with leftover sweetgrass to use while she prayed. Although their spiritual beliefs differed, Paul’s mother encouraged her daughter’s revival of their traditional spirituality (p. 6). The sweat lodge ceremony was also apparent among women in reviving their traditional spirituality. Penashue (1999) commented on the use of sweat lodges in her culture in which they were used for praying and healing. Penashue (1999) states, “Sweat lodges were used for healing....my sweat lodge is now for women, but men can come in. It’s a praying sweat for sharing burdens. It’s good to use in dealing with our daily problems” (p.206). Mosher (1999) also used sweats to heal herself and for



prayer. She states:

**I wanted so much to leave drugs and alcohol. I wanted to get better and I was willing to try anything and that was my last resort. And boy, that was the best time of my life, the best time of my life was when I first went into the sweat lodge. Even my first sweat was a healing sweat. I just cried and cried in there... when I came out of there I was just floating on air, I wasn't even touching the ground. (Kulchyski, McCaskill, & Newhouse, 1999, p. 146)**

**Mosher (1999) believes that she was healed by the Creator in the sweat lodge.**

**Paul (1999) believes that she and her people need to go back to a belief in the Creator for help in healing. She says, "That's why a lot of us people have to go back...to help you to struggle with drugs or alcohol or whatever is going on out there" (p. 24). Returning to the teachings of their spiritual belief system was an essential element in their quest to heal themselves and understand who they were.**

**Moontime.** Many of the teachings women received were passed down by other women. Certain teachings such as those surrounding moontime (menstruation) were those which were only appropriate for women to impart. Learning about moontime was important for young women in Aboriginal society because during their moontime that they were considered spiritually strong. Menstrual blood was equated with power which could be used for healing or curing. It was believed that a women on her moontime could cure a sick person by walking over the sick person's body (Beck, Walters & Francisco, 1996, p. 213). Moontime teachings are still important today, as will be noted in the data collection section.

**Moontime laws varied among Aboriginal cultures but there were some common features. Moontime laws were spiritual in nature because they were derived from a**

spiritual belief system. Women were generally separated from the rest of the community members at this time because of its spiritual significance. Young women were normally isolated for four days during their moontime (Beck, Walters & Francisco, 1996, p. 213). While in isolation women ate their meals separately from the rest of the community members (Beck, Walters & Francisco, 1996, p. 214). They either prepared their meals themselves or another woman who was attending to their needs prepared them (Beck, Walters & Francisco, 1996, p. 214). Young men would not eat from the same dish or drink from the same cup of a woman during her moontime.

While on their moontime, women were not allowed to touch any sacred bundle or object or enter a lodge where these items were kept (Beck, Walters & Francisco, 1996, p. 214). Menstrual blood was equated with power. It was believed that the association of menstruating women with others at this time, especially during ceremonies was disruptive to social order grounded in its spiritual belief system and its associated laws.

Moontime teachings were important so that young women knew what their roles were while they were menstruating. As an Ojibway woman, who has been taught by a traditional Ojibway female Elder, my experience has been that moontime teachings are still being taught. We are always reminded not to participate in ceremonies while we are menstruating, or to prepare food for others. We are also taught that if we carry a pipe, drum or other sacred objects we are not to handle them at this time. We are reassured that these teachings are not to imply that women are unclean but that we are spiritually strong during our moontime and that we must be very careful. As women learning these teachings, it is expected that we will teach other women, especially the younger women

about moontime teachings.

### **Summary**

The review of the related literature provides information on Aboriginal cultural and how traditional Aboriginal communities have been affected by Canadian Federal Government Policy regarding Aboriginal people. The role of the Canadian Federal Government Aboriginal policy is discussed in terms of how that policy upset traditional Aboriginal communities and the roles of Elders and Aboriginal women. Canadian Federal Government policy is presented with respect to its mandate to assimilate Aboriginal people into mainstream society and its subsequent effects. One of those effects, a returning to traditional teaching, is highlighted. Elders, the traditional teachers in Aboriginal cultures, are considered in terms of the similarities of their roles as teachers and leaders. Leadership is discussed in terms of its evolution to focus on context and community. In so doing, a traditional Aboriginal perspective is provided in terms of its focus on community.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study is to examine the lived experience of a traditional female Ojibway elder and her perspectives on leadership. This chapter is organized in two sections. First, there is a focus on research design, including the research question, and the methodology used in the research process. Second, there is a focus on the protocol used to gain participation of the participant, ethical considerations, and methods for data collection and analysis.

#### **Research Design**

A phenomenological approach was used to explore the lived experience of a traditional female Ojibway Elder. LaRocque (1989) suggests that research about Aboriginal people in general is significant in that it brings another perspective of Canada into light. LaRocque (1989) states:

Not only do we offer new ways of seeing and saying things, but we also provide new directions and fresh methodologies to cross-cultural research; we broaden the empirical and theoretical bases of numerous disciplines, and we pose new questions to old and tired traditions. (p. 12)

On phenomenology and lived experiences, Van Manen (1994) states: “To do phenomenological research is to question something phenomenologically, and also, to be addressed by the question of what something is “really” like. What is the nature of this lived experience?” (p. 42). He also brings attention to the importance of being

**“constantly mindful” of one’s original research question as it will aid in becoming “oriented to the lived experience that makes it possible to ask the “what it is like” question in the first place” (p. 42). Emphasis is always on the meaning of lived experience with phenomenological research. Meaning is derived from human experiences which is the data of human science research (p. 63).**

**Van Manen (1994) states that hermeneutic phenomenological research “may be seen as a dynamic interplay among six research activities”(p. 30). These strategies encourage the researcher to choose an area of interest to study that will allow for an investigation of experience as it is lived rather than how it is conceptualized. The strategies also allow the researcher to reflect on the essential themes that characterize the phenomena through writing and rewriting about them. Ultimately, the strategies encourage the researcher to maintain a strong orientation to the phenomena being studied and to balance the research context by considering parts and whole (Van Manen, 1994, p. 30).**

**Van Manen (1994) states that the interview process in hermeneutic phenomenological human science serves specific purposes. It may be used to explore and gather experiential narrative material in order that a deeper understanding of human phenomena is reached and it may also be used “to develop a conversational relation with the interviewee about the meaning of an experience” (Van Manen, 1994, p. 66). In the process, however, he says that it is imperative that the researcher is “disciplined by the fundamental question that prompted the need for the interview in the first place” (p. 66). This means that the researcher needs to keep the main research question in mind at all**

times. This process was supported by the use of close observation as the researcher maintained a close relationship with the participant, and gathered relevant information with respect to the main research question.

On the topic of close observation, Van Manen (1994) states:

close observation involves an attitude of assuming a relation that is as close as possible while retaining a hermeneutic alertness to situations that allows us to constantly step back and reflect on the meaning of those situations. (p. 69)

Close observation was an important tool in the research process for two main reasons. Since the lived experience of this subject revolves around the Ojibway spiritual belief system, it was assumed the opportunity to participate in ceremonies would present itself. The researcher knew from previous experience with the research participant that ceremonies often open and close discussions focusing on teachings, and conversations about spiritual life. For the purposes of this study, it was necessary to use close observation as an objective and reflective participant observer. Close observation was also important in facilitating a descriptive understanding of the participant's surroundings, such as the home, healing circle, and other appropriate locations of data collection. It was recognized that these descriptions would be necessary to provide the researcher with a clear picture and deeper understanding of the research process and of the data collected.

Van Manen (1994) notes that, "the researcher who is involved in closely observing situations for their lived meaning is a gatherer of anecdotes" (p. 69). Anecdotes, narratives with a point, need to be "trimmed of all extraneous, possibly interesting but irrelevant aspects of the stories" (p. 69). Descriptions were transmitted via

anecdotal information.

### **Research Questions**

The main research question was: “What is the lived experience of a traditional female Ojibway Elder?” The following four questions helped guide the research:

1. What are the lived experiences of an Elder in her community?
2. What is the personal life history of this Elder?
3. How does the Elder perceive her role?
4. How are her experiences part of traditional Ojibway spirituality?

### **Research Process**

#### **Protocol to gain consent of research participant**

The participant in this study is an Ojibway woman who is also a traditional Elder in her community. She is considered a traditional Elder due to her life’s grounding in the Ojibway spiritual belief system, which focuses on the Creator and the respective spiritual laws derived from that belief system. She is a pipe and water boy drum carrier and participates in sacred ceremonies. Pipe and water boy drums are gifts bestowed upon those who are chosen to carry those gifts for their people. The term carry is significant. Gifts such as pipes and drums are not owned by those upon whom they are bestowed. They are carried for the people and used to help them in times of need. For example, some people may need counselling, healing or prayer. Those who carry gifts such as pipes, and drums will use them to help others in times of need.

The selection of the participant involved a specific process to gain consent consisting of three steps: Taryn's dream, the Elder's permission, and Taryn's decision. The protocol involved the researcher, the research subject Taryn, her son Heath, and two other Elders, who are Taryn's traditional teachers. These Elders travel from a First Nation community in Manitoba to Northwestern Ontario three times a year for the Spring, Summer and Fall Ceremonies. Heath would prove to be my own personal teacher, leading me through the protocol process and traditional ways of doing things. Protocol included offering Taryn and the Elders tobacco, and gift(s).

**Taryn's dream.** I was told by one of Taryn's son's that she knew someone was coming to visit her to ask her to talk about her life and her teachings. She told her son that she dreamed about it. When I visited Taryn at her home and offered her a pouch of tobacco to ask her if I could write about her life story, I was brought into her smoke room where she, her son and I prayed. I do not know exactly why we were praying but I know it had something to do with her dream. I did not ask why. But it was comforting to know that my interest in writing about her lived experience was, in some way, related to Taryn's dream. Taryn was initially skeptical explaining that she did not want to appear that she was trying to "out-do" or be "higher" than anyone. She said that I needed to contact the old men, her (our) teachers and tell them what I wanted to do. If they approved, she agreed to participate and share her life story. I assured her that I would speak to the old men at the upcoming annual fall ceremonies. Fall ceremonies are spiritual ceremonies held at a provincial park in Northwestern Ontario where land has been set aside for the Ojibway people of the surrounding treaty nine area. The provincial park is built on land



that is part of the Ojibway people's traditional hunting and trapping grounds. Land in the provincial park is no longer used for hunting and trapping but it has been set aside so that the Ojibway people may use it to practice their traditional culture and spiritual beliefs, which includes erecting teaching lodges and sweat lodges for ceremonial use.

**The Elders' permission.** It was during one of the afternoon rest periods of the Fall ceremonies between the feast and the sweat lodge when I approached the old men with tobacco and explained what I wanted to do. I told them that I wanted to document Taryn's life history. I explained my field of work and what I was doing in school. I told them the requirements that I needed to fulfill in order to graduate. I also told them of my desire to enrich the field of education with our own cultural knowledge and values. After listening to me, they explained why they thought that it was good for me to document Taryn's life. They said that as we get older, our medicine bundle gets full of teachings and we must share those teachings because that is why we are given them. They also said that it was up to Taryn to decide if she wanted to share her life story with me.

**Taryn's decision.** Heath and I went back to his mother and told her what the old men had said. She agreed to share her life with me when I was ready. I explained that I would not be starting until the University gave me approval and that this process may take a few months. Upon approval to begin my data collection, I contacted Heath and arranged an interview date with this mother. I then travelled home, and visited Taryn at her home. I followed protocol once again, by offering her tobacco and sitting with her for the first time to discuss her life with her.

## **Ethical Considerations**

### **Informed consent**

The process of gaining informed consent included the use of a letter to the participant and translator describing the study (Appendix A) and a consent form to the participant and the translator (Appendix B). The participant does not read English, therefore, the letter and consent form were read to the participant to ensure that she understood the research process.

The participant and translator were made aware that there were no risks to them in their participation in the study. They were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time even after signing the consent form. They were made aware that anonymity and confidentiality would be assured with regard to all information that would be collected about the participant. They were assured that neither the participant nor the translator would be identified in any way. It was explained that each participant would be assigned a pseudonym, which appears in reports of the findings. The participant in the study, including the translator, were assured that the data generated in the research process would be confidential. The translator was made aware that all of the data collected in the study would be kept confidential.

All of the data that were collected in this study are being securely stored for seven years in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home. The results of the study will be securely stored at Lakehead University for seven years. The dissemination of the findings of the research which is in the form of a thesis will be in the Lakehead University Library and will be made available to the participant upon completion of the study.

## **Phenomenology**

**Phenomenological research is the study of lived experience (Van Manen, 1994, p. 9). It is the study of life as it is being lived, rather than by reflecting on it. It is recollective rather than introspective (Van Manen, 1994, p. 9). As such, phenomenology does not focus on offering theories in which to explain or control the world in which we live. Instead, phenomenology offers insight as a means to understand the nature of experiences as they are being experienced (Van Manen, 1994, p.9). It requires the researcher to “step into the shoes” of the participant in an effort to understand the essence of the participant’s lived experience.**

**Phenomenology is necessary in order to uncover the lived experience of a traditional female Ojibway elder. It allows the researcher the first hand opportunity to experience life alongside the participant. It is not a process by which the researcher is attempting to describe the frequency of particular events or relate them to other events. It is a process by which the researcher is attempting to understand what life is like as a traditional female Ojibway Elder. The researcher having lived with the participant for four days during traditional spiritual ceremonies, contributed to the validity of the research.**

## **Trustworthiness**

**The method for achieving validity was to focus on the trustworthiness of the study. Trustworthiness of this study is based in prolonged engagement of the researcher at the data collection site, persistent observation, as a participant observer with the research participant during the fall ceremonies, and through member checks, by confirming that interpretations were correct in discussing them with the research participant and translator.**

**Guba (1981) states that trustworthiness in naturalistic inquiry can include the use of prolonged engagement at a site which allows for a researcher to check his or her own developing perceptions (p. 84). In this particular study the researcher remained at the fall ceremony grounds for the duration of the ceremonies as it was one of the data collection sites. Guba (1981) also states that trustworthiness is achieved through persistent observation which leads a researcher to understand the relevant or irrelevant aspects of the phenomena in question (p. 85). As a participant observer in the fall ceremonies along with the research participant, the researcher was able to achieve persistent observation. Guba (1981) holds that, “member checks are the single most important action inquirers can take, for it goes to the heart of the credibility criterion” (p. 85). The researcher participated for the duration of the fall ceremonies in partnership with the research subject. Through feedback from participant, the researcher was able to check her perceptions and interpretations for their relevancy. Once the document emerged as a complete draft, Heath was given the document to read. He suggested few revisions, which were made. Prolonged engagement, persistent observation and member checking were all employed during this study.**

## **Data collection**

The entire process from selection to data collection took quite some time. Upon approval to begin the study, data collection commenced. Conversations were conducted during two separate visits and in two different sites. The sites selected for the study included Taryn's home and the fall ceremony grounds. The first conversation took place at Taryn's home and lasted approximately five hours. The second conversation took place at the fall ceremony grounds during the third day of the four day ceremony. Anecdotal information was gathered throughout the four day ceremony. It is important to note that some of the information gathered during conversations required the use of a translator since the participant preferred to speak Ojibway, and since the researcher does not speak Ojibway fluently. The researcher discussed with the participant the need for a translator. The participant requested that her son act as a translator. The use of the particular translator was important for two specific reasons. Firstly, the translator needed to be someone that the participant trusted with the personal and spiritual information she imparted. Secondly, the translator needed to be able to understand certain spiritual and/or cultural concepts as they emerged in order to aid the translation process. The participant's son was chosen for these reasons.

The lived experience of Taryn, the participant, was obtained through the use of a tape recorded conversations (Appendix C), close observation and anecdotal information. Conversations with Taryn in her living room were straightforward. We sat together on the sofa, and her son, the interpreter, sat next to us. I began by explaining that I needed to

read her a letter and consent form so that she understood the research process and what her rights were. Her son interpreted what I said, and they signed the consent forms before the interview process began. The data gathered through conversations was an exchange between the interviewer and the interviewee. For example, the participant was asked the question, "How much have your spiritual beliefs been a part of your life?" The participant responded at length describing her birth, "I was born in (nearby) an open fire. My dad told my mom to go out and have that baby outside. So my mother went out got ready for childbirth."

Taryn's resides in a community that was established in 1950. Prior to the establishment of this reserve, the people who now inhabit this community lived in other isolated communities with most of them migrating from a nearby village approximately one hour and a half away. Therefore, much of the traditional land of these band members was not included when the reserve boundaries were established. This is an ongoing source of grievance with respect to political issues and economic development.

Taryn's home was welcoming and simple. Her living room was sparsely decorated, mostly consisting of pictures of her family on the walls. The living room window was covered with curtains that seemed to never be opened. I thought this may be due to the regularity of healing circles, at which time the room is darkened. It was a dimly lit room with a sofa, chair, coffee table and television. Taryn's home mirrored what I have gathered to be her philosophy of life over the last three years of knowing her. I have come to recognize that Taryn's philosophy of life reflects simplicity and quality. She is full of purpose. She does not have a lot excessive decorations, and she does not spend a lot time

and money on things that she does not need. But she will share what she has with someone in need.

**Fall ceremony site.** The second conversation was more involved as it was held during the fall ceremonies at the fall ceremony site in the provincial park. The conversation occurred at a separate site away from any distractions. She was very careful about not advertising this process. The conversation was initiated by traditional Ojibway protocol. On the evening of the first night, I offered her tobacco and gifted her with a blanket. The blanket was specially chosen for her. It had a picture of a male lion on the front of it. Taryn has an affinity toward the male lion. She once told me that considers him to be a special and very powerful animal.

Interacting with Taryn at the fall ceremony included participating with her in the teaching and sweat lodge. It also involved taking her direction in terms of what tasks needed to be done. I had set up my tent beside Taryn's which allowed us to interact on a more intimate level.

Tents dotted the ceremonial ground in family groupings. A teaching lodge was erected near the entrance of the camp where the noon feasts were held. There were specific places for men and women in the teaching lodge. During the ceremonies the male Elders sat at the front of the lodge on the west side. The women elders sat to their left on the north with the other women beside them. Inside the teaching lodge the men sat across the teaching lodge from the women, who sat on the south side. The entrance to the lodge was on the east side, where a "smudge bowl" was placed. People who entered the teaching lodge for the feast could smudge or purify themselves when they entered. A

sacred fire burned in the middle of the lodge for the duration of the four days. Over those four days, Fire Keepers kept watch over the fire, to ensure that it stayed lit. Firekeeping is said to be a difficult job because it involves collecting and chopping wood and watching the fire for long hours concurrently. Sacred items, such as drums, eagle feathers, and pipes remained at the west side of the lodge for four days. It has been said that sacred items can visit and talk with each other during this time.

A make-shift kitchen was set up nearby. There seemed to be one woman participant dedicated to taking care of the kitchen. This woman bore most of the responsibility for cooking, but was assisted by other women, who helped her washing dishes and preparing food. A special food tent flanked the kitchen. This was where all of the dry goods were stored.

The sweat lodge was set up on the east side of the grounds, near the lake. This is a sacred area. Children were encouraged not play in this area. A special fire burned in front of the eastern door of the sweat lodge. This was where the grandfathers or rocks were heated for the sweat lodge ceremony. Women are always expected to wear their skirts in the sweat lodge area, and during most of their stay at all ceremonies. Toilet facilities were located a short distance from the main camp, and were made accessible by a number of different paths.

Everyone had a job to do during ceremonies. Women were responsible for preparing the food, the berry offering for the sweat, and taking care of the sweat lodge and the teaching lodge. They cleaned these lodges prior to the next gathering. Men were responsible for collecting the grandfathers (rocks) used during the sweat lodge. They



were also responsible for collecting and chopping all of the wood that was used for the fires in the teaching lodge and for the fire that heated the grandfathers for the sweat lodge. Some men were also given the role as “skabesh” or helper. These helpers heated the grandfathers and passed them through the door of the sweat lodge. He also closed and opened the door of the sweat lodge during that ceremony. These were men’s duties.

It is accepted that everything happens in its own time when ceremonies are going on. It is important to focus on the ceremonies first, and all other activities second. As a result, our conversation came second. However, the indirect and anecdotal data gathered aside from the process of conversation offered a wealth of information in terms of men and women’s roles, and how these roles are manifested in the teachings they offer. There is special significance in every role. There are teachings in these roles, so they hold enormous meaning. For example, it was the women’s job to clean the sweat lodge and teaching lodge and the men’s responsibility to collect rocks or “grandfathers” for the sweat lodge ceremonies.

The first day was spent setting up the camp and preparing for the first sweat. People arrived hugged each other, and told each other how good it was to see them again. It was a welcoming time, with good feelings all around. By the time evening arrived and the sweat was over, everyone was tired and ready to rest. Following the traditional protocol of tobacco and gift offerings, Taryn and I spent some time chatting, laughing and generally socializing. I felt a bit anxious at this point because I needed more clarity of when our next conversation would take place. However, I did not want to be “pushy” or disrespectful so I accepted that the conversation would proceed when the time arrived.

The second day began with breakfast. I made Taryn some tea and took it to her tent. We joined others in the kitchen, where we sat around the picnic table and talked with the Elders. I made them coffee, we smoked cigarettes and talked about what had been going on in our lives. Not long after breakfast, Heath, his other brother, and his nephews began getting ready for the afternoon feast and sweat by collecting wood and grandfathers. I spent some time keeping Heath's little daughter distracted, and checking in on Taryn now and then with tea. She rested throughout the day in her tent, and would sneak cigarettes from those who visited her. Heath did not like her smoking due to her health problems, so she sneaked cigarettes when he was not around.

Near noon, the feast was held in the teaching lodge. The men and women Elders, and other men and women participants took their respective seats on either the north, south or west sides of the lodge. Taryn sat at the top of the north side near the male Elders who sat at the front on the west side. It is difficult to know what one is able to impart from participating in these ceremonies, but my intuition and judgement tell me that what was said in there, just as in the sweat lodge, is to be kept in there. However, I think that I can say that Taryn, because of her regard as a female Elder, was asked to sing a song to thank the Creator. She sang "Meegwetch Manitou" or "Thank you, Creator" before the feast ended.

After the afternoon feast, Taryn told me that the sweat lodge needed to be cleaned. This was her indirect way of telling me to go there and make sure it was clean. I went to clean the sweat lodge with another woman. We shook out the mats, that covered the floor of the sweat lodge and we then made a cedar trail. The cedar trail follows the fire

into the sweat lodge and around the interior pit where the grandfathers will rest when they are brought in during the ceremony. Taryn came by to check on me and to make sure that I had put the cedar down the right way. She told me that the dark part of the cedar has to be facing up. Some time later I asked her why cedar has to be place with the dark side facing up. The reason she gave me was that is the way the boughs grow on the tree. I would learn that a lot of the answers to my questions would reveal themselves by watching, listening and being patient.

Taryn and I met back at our tents to get ready for the sweat. We changed into the clothes we were going to wear. I put on a t-shirt and removed my bra. We are not supposed to go into the sweat lodge with metal, or other foreign objects. Most of us take off our jewelry when we arrive at the ceremonies and do not put it back on until the day we leave. Once we were dressed, we grabbed our towels and tobacco and headed to the sweat lodge. Tobacco is offered at each sweat to the “skabesh” who puts it into the tobacco bowl.

The sweat lodge ceremony is sacred. We are not supposed to discuss what we see or hear in the lodge. All that I feel that I can say from this point on is that I sat beside Taryn in the lodge, watched, listened and learned from her.

Following the sweat lodge ceremony that evening, we retreated to our tents to change out of our wet clothes. We met at the kitchen to eat some chili and to socialize with the others. After everyone was finished eating, one of the Elders began playing songs on a hand drum. It was a very peaceful time, because the moon was out, and we all held hands and danced around the fire. I held Taryn’s hand and tried to help her so that she

would not trip over any stumps. I soon found out that she was very adept at walking in the bush and did not need much help from me.

Following the drum songs, we returned to our tent, sneaked another cigarette together, and talked for awhile about our day. We said goodnight and retreated into our own tents.

The third day began like the previous day with breakfast and socializing. After breakfast, Taryn approached me and asked me if I wanted to do my interview. I accepted the invitation and we walked to my car and closed the doors. She told me the story of when her mother became ill and she had helped her. We were interrupted by her nephew who just arrived with his girlfriend. He explained that his girlfriend just got out of the hospital with pneumonia. Taryn was very concerned and told him to take her to her tent to lie down. We both left my car to attend to her nephew's girlfriend. I offered to move out of my tent and bunk with my friend. I later learned that her nephew had brought his girlfriend to the ceremonies to ask for help from the Elders.

The afternoon and evening proceeded uneventfully from the feast to sweat lodge. Most of us turned in early, as we needed our rest to get ready to leave the next day. This day would involve a lot of work packing up our tents, the kitchen and other things that needed to be put away.

It rained heavily that night after we went to bed. I awoke the next morning in a pool of water. I emerged from my tent and went to visit Taryn to see if she was okay. She explained that there was lightning that night and because of that she did not get much sleep. She said that when there is lightning you are supposed to put a light on and sit up.

She said when you do this, the thunder birds (lightning) that are out will be able to recognize you. Putting a light on and sitting up is done out of respect for them.

I had to pack up and travel for six hours to get back home. Before I left, I helped with cleaning up the lodges and putting the groceries away. Following these chores, I said farewell to those who were there, gave Taryn a hug and told her that I would see her again soon.

### **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

The data collected in the conversations, as a participant observer and through anecdotal information were transcribed as soon as I returned home. Emergent themes developed through data analysis. Van Manen (1994) offers a useful analogy with respect to understanding themes. He states, "Themes are the stars that make up the universe of meaning we live through. By the light of these themes we can navigate and explore such universes" (p. 90).

Just as anecdotal information simplifies and reveals important aspects in a conversation, lending significance *while* something is happening, themes emerge *after* one has gathered the material (Van Manen, 1994, p. 69). In isolating thematic statements, Van Manen (1994) describes three approaches to revealing thematic aspects of a phenomenon (p. 92-93):

1. **The holistic or sententious approach;**
2. **The selective or highlighting approach;**
3. **The detailed or line-by-line approach.**

For the purposes of this study, the third option of the *detailed or line-by-line* approach was used (Appendix D). Each sentence or sentence cluster was analyzed to uncover what it revealed about the phenomenon being described (Van Manen, 1994, p. 93), the phenomenon in this case being the nature of traditional Ojibway female leadership. Notes were made directly on the transcripts. These notes were then the basis for deriving themes. These themes were then interpreted and discussed in relation to the research questions. The themes were composed through the development of paragraphs and formed the basis of the written study.

#### **Method for achieving validity**

Qualitative research focuses on the nature of data. Qualitative research is characterized by being a descriptive process, in which meaning about phenomena occurring in natural settings is sought, with a researcher as the key research instrument (Bogden & Biklen, 1992). Phenomenology is the qualitative research approach used in gathering the data in this particular study of lived experience. The validity of the research or its trustworthiness is discussed in terms of prolonged engagement at the site, persistent observation and member checking.

**CHAPTER IV**  
**PRESENTATION OF DATA**

**Introduction**

This chapter is presented in two sections. In the first section there is a description of the research participant. In the second section there is a discussion of the findings presented in the form of emergent themes.

**Description of Research Participant**

Taryn is a very humble, respectful and happy woman. She is seventy two years old and she has lived in “the bush” her entire life. She has a strong spirit and sharp mind. She is a very wise woman, who uses storytelling as a means of teaching. I have a pleasant feeling being in her company. Taryn can be seen with her long grey hair in a braid most days. As an Ojibway speaker, she prefers not to speak English. She can often be heard telling non-Ojibway speaking Aboriginal people to learn to speak their native language. She tells them that the Creator will be happy if they do.

Taryn has firm beliefs in the Creator. One of her bedrooms has been converted into what is referred to as the “smoke room.” This is where she and her son keep all of their sacred objects: water boy drums, eagle feathers, rattles, drying sage and other sacred items. I have spent a lot of time in this room with them over the last few years. I have watched how carefully she and her son care for the sacred items they have been given to carry for their people.

Taryn is respected for her beliefs and often is offered tobacco by others who wish to seek her counsel. She will light her pipe and pray for people in the sweat lodge, healing circles, and in her smoke room. I have been told that she says, “pray for others and not yourself.” She says, “good things will come to you if you pray for others.” Sometimes her smoke room is too small to accommodate those who visit her house for healing circles. Furniture will then be moved out of her living room to make room for a circle that will accommodate everyone.

Taryn has five children, three boys and two girls. All of her children follow traditional ways. She lives with her youngest son, a very traditional man, who spends a good deal of time praying to the Creator. Taryn lives next door to her daughter. Her other children are not very far down the road. They have great respect for their mother and take very good care of her. She and her children teach her grandchildren traditional ways.

Taryn is often heard saying, “Yeesh, yeesh na!” as an exclamation to something that surprises her.

### **Findings**

Leadership roles and responsibilities, were revealed as inherent aspects of Taryn’s lived experience as a traditional Ojibway female Elder. Leadership roles and responsibilities were also illuminated through the review of the related literature. It is hoped that the research findings will add to the field of leadership theory and educational administration by offering an emerging framework of traditional female Ojibway



**leadership. The data gathered from the study of the lived experience of a traditional female Ojibway Elder as well as information from the review of the related literature forms the basis of the framework. The framework emerged as an implicit concept which included components such as: culture, a belief in the Creator, community, and wisdom. It is hoped that this framework will broaden our understanding of the lived experience of a traditional female Ojibway Elder and add to the fields of leadership theory and educational administration.**

**Two predominant themes emerged from the data. These themes were: culture and wisdom. Culture, considered a way of life, was addressed with attention to spirituality because in traditional Ojibway culture the two complement each other in their meaning. Culture was divided into three sub themes: believing in the Creator, Taryn's teaching on her birth and community. Wisdom was discussed in terms of the importance of passing on traditional and spiritual teachings to others in her community and culture. The research participant's obligation to society included her role of imparting women's spiritual teachings to other women. The spiritual teachings that were prevalent were those on the menstruation cycle and what Taryn referred to as moontime teachings. The emergent themes are used to present the interpretation and discussion of findings.**

## **Culture**

**Culture and spirituality emerged together as predominant themes because together they formed the basis of how Taryn understood her world. Her cultural and spiritual beliefs provided the foundation she used to understand her role in the world and the**

meaning of her life.

**Believing in the Creator.** Belief in the Creator was a fundamental component of Taryn's life. She derived her meaning of life, in how the Creator prescribed that we live it, "By the way, I'm good way, now today. I know now, Indian used the good way." It would seem that Taryn became confident about and proud of her cultural beliefs as she got older. She was not encouraged as a child to believe in or practice her traditional spiritual beliefs. As an Elder, not only did her beliefs affect her life, but those around her as well. Her deep resolve to impart her beliefs and teachings was directed to her own children and grandchildren. She believed that the traditional teachings were being revived. On imparting teachings to her family, Taryn said:

Everything you see I keep for now. I keep it for my grandchildren. I didn't tell my dad about the dreams, my mom told me not to tell him. She kept her bundle bag (traditional teachings) with her always, it was in her heart. She kept it, now I know why, for her children, grandchildren. It's coming back now, slowly it's coming back.

She taught her children and grandchildren that her way of life is something to be proud of. She reaffirmed that the Creator was central to practicing traditional beliefs and ways of life:

...don't be shy to be traditional ways, to play your drum, light your sage, light your sweet grass, to put your tobacco down even when a lot of people are there. That is the trail that we have been given to use. Don't ever be shy.

This was a testament to her fierce resolve in the Creator, and what she considered a component of the gift of the teachings given by the Creator. Taryn stressed that the teachings that one received need not be imparted exclusively by people but may be offered

in dreams as well. Dreams were met with great respect and given enormous significance, “you dream about it if you do it this way (traditional way), if you believe it. If you want to learn this way.” Dreams were indeed a matter of faith as imparted in her lived experience:

When I dreamed I dreamed of food, apples, oranges, jam, and baloss and tea and candies and when I got up I asked my mom, Can I have an orange,? Where is those candies (raisins)? My mother told me I was dreaming, that the dream I was having is way far up ahead in the future. In the future you are going to see lots of that. The dreams of the future are what I have now, now that I see these apples, oranges now I am happy. There is a lesson to be taught in that.

Taryn believed in the significance of dreams. Although Taryn was not explicit about the lesson to be taught in her dream, it may be suggested that the lesson is directly related to the importance of having faith in and respect for your dreams. She believed that dreams were prophecies. She dreamed of fruit and of other food that did become a reality for her and this is what her mother told her. It could also be suggested that the lesson is also a lesson in having faith and respect for your parents or elders. In traditional Ojibway society, parents’ and Elder’s roles are important as they transfer knowledge and traditional teachings to the younger generation. In that process it is expected that each child will have respect for those teachers and learn from their teachings. Taryn’s dream became a reality, and it could be suggested that she learned a lesson about having faith in her mother’s teachings.

Taryn’s faith was reaffirmed when she was asked, “Why do you think that it is important that your children and grandchildren learn this way?” She responded, “because it is important for what it teaches you” and she pounded on her heart. They were very

important to her. Further to her opinion about her culture, she was asked if she was proud of her way of life. She responded, "Yes, I am proud. Those dreams they come from the bush not the town or city. Nanabush. Those things that are big, kids need to know." She confirms the importance of children being taught their culture and traditional ways of life.

Her belief in the traditional way of life and in the Creator consisted of spirits, other supernatural life forms, and a belief in the significance of animals. She explained that during a thunderstorm and lightening, "Thunderbirds" came around to visit people. She said that during the fall ceremony, when there was thunder and lightning she sat up in her tent with a light on. She explained that when she sat up and put a light on, she was acknowledging their presence, and by doing so they would know her. She also believed that animals are part of the circle life:

Even my daddy, he doesn't want too many white mankhan (things). If a moose is calling, don't bother him. Just go and get him if you want one. Moose, she says, she make if food for people. Never left over dead moose. White people, when they hear moose calling, they grab the gun. She is not calling for nothing, she make it food for us.

I understood her to mean that when moose were mating and calling they were making food for people by procreating and people need to be respectful of that. If too many moose are hunted during mating season, people will have no food for the future.

Her role in ceremonies, from preparation to participation, was pervaded by her spiritual beliefs. She taught others how to lay a cedar trail for the sweat lodge. As an Elder woman at the fall ceremonies, she was asked to sing the song to the Creator to give

thanks. She played her water boy drum and sang “Meegwetch Manitou” or “Thank you Creator.” She also offered her tobacco during the fall ceremony. It is said that when the tobacco you offer is placed in the fire, the smoke carries your prayers up to the Creator.

Taryn spoke about the time her mother became ill. Her mother was disoriented in the bush and her father could not understand what was wrong. It was Taryn’s belief in the Creator that guided her in helping her mother. Taryn recollects a conversation between herself and her father. She said:

My mom tried to hide behind some trees. “What happened your mom?” (Her father asked her) I tell him exactly. “What he do people?” (Has someone done something to your mother?) Tabiga (and to think) I was young. I was fourteen (She thought she was quite young to understand what she thought was happening) “You know he do people today? (There are many Christian Aboriginal people today) You know, Paba (father) you can use the bible lots. You won’t come in good,” I tell him (Taryn believed the answers to her mother’s illness were to be found in traditional Ojibway spirituality). “Can you let me do what I wanna for mom?” (She wanted to pray to the Creator for her mother) He said, “No, not when I see you.” He just left her. Just like that. Me, I didn’t give up on her. I wanted her to live, I want everybody, my sisters to see my mother again.

Taryn and her father’s beliefs conflicted. This is apparent in their differing views on her mother’s illness. Her belief in the Creator was so strong that she used to hide her teachings from her father, an Anglican minister. She said, “Keemootch (secretly) my father was an Anglican minister. My dad didn’t want to teach me too much about church way but I still did it out of respect.” Taryn kept her spiritual beliefs a secret from her father because she did not want to disrespect him. She would learn later in life that her father knew that she was to be an Elder with spiritual wisdom and that was why he did not

pressure her into practicing Christianity. This is reaffirmed in Taryn's teaching on her birth.

**Taryn's teaching on her birth.** It became quite obvious from the data gathered in the interviews that she believed that her role as a teacher was formed at birth. This insight would not become apparent until Taryn was older. As a child growing up with knowledge on her birth, Taryn often wondered why she was the only one required to be born outside since all of her other brothers and sisters were born inside. Taryn shared the story of her birth. This story is very significant in understanding her life as an Elder and teacher. She stated:

I was born in an open fire. My dad told my mom to go out and have that baby outside. So my mother went out and got ready for childbirth. She put cedar. First she made a fire and then she put cedar. She put spruce on bottom and then cedar to make it softer. He told my mama to go out and have that baby. After she made the bed where I was born, my mama used some rabbit skins. She dried them in the open fire, before my birth. She used rabbit skins and moss...when I was 13 I started asking why my father asked her to go outside to have birth. I always used to wonder why my dad did that and when I got older I felt it in my heart why my dad did that (because she was chosen to be a spiritual guide and elder). I asked him why he wanted to use me? (She wanted to know why her father chose her to be born outside but none of her other siblings). My dad had me work really hard from when you have moontime. And every time I worked hard I used to wonder why I was born outside. And when I didn't want to work hard I used to think about why I was born outside. He used to say he only tell me one time or we used to get punished. "Paba (father) why you wanna use me? You chased my mama out when I was a new born baby, me, just me, and 14 in the family." I feel bad when I couldn't tell my brothers or sisters I couldn't be born inside...me only. "I wonder why mom" I asked my mother and my said, "I don't know why." I asked her if it is because I am another man's child and she said, "No, no honest to kitchi manitou (the Creator), no." I tell this story a lot. Now I know why. I am happy. It gave me a good feeling. There was one

person who tell me why. This old man told me why. He said, "Elder woman, I'll tell you why your dad did this, be happy what he did. Your paba (father), you don't like what he did," that elder said. "Stop being mad at your dad now," that old man told me. "Your dad knew what you were going to do in the future and out of 14 children he picked you."

Taryn learned that her role as an Elder, teacher and spiritual guide was decided at her birth. Taryn believes that her father knew this and that is why he wanted her to be born outside. Her birth outdoors was a means to cement her relationship with nature and pay respect to the Creator. This was a very powerful message, as it gives credence to her life and offers insight to those who wish to understand her life's meaning and the role she chose to live.

**Community.** In her role as an Elder, Taryn believed that the traditional way taught you how to live a good life. This was expressed in the conversations. Taryn's concern was that in today's society not enough focus is placed on tradition or the way things used to be done. She said, "It is different days now. There's too much. Too much White people things. It's gonna get hard time to get it back." She finds that amidst Aboriginal people's focus and participation in mainstream society, traditional ways are being lost and that men and women, boys and girls are forgetting how to live off of the land the way they used to. She stated:

He can't go hunting (men do not know how to hunt today), even girls, they can't put a net (they can't set up a net to catch fish). They can't set rabbit snares. Us guys, me and my sisters, maybe when I was fourteen or sixteen, my mom we sit down and watch. Tepwe (really), I do it (she would watch her mother perform traditional tasks so as to retain the knowledge).

Taryn believes that traditional ways of life and their teachings are being lost because they are not being taught to the next generation. When she was young, she said that her mother was an important teacher in teaching the girls how to perform certain tasks. She stated:

I did what my mother wanted me to do. If you want to set a net all you have to do is sit down and set it. We get a net in morning and bring in lots of fish. It happened. He won't do it (no one will do it today). Kinwes (it is hard). I don't think it was hard. I think that's my life piko (only). That's what I think. I go with my mom to set the net.

Her concern is that no one is learning how to practice traditional ways of life, "Now what's going to happen? No one knows how to do any of it." She said that traditionally children were taught by watching and doing. She and her siblings would watch how to hunt or to set up a fish net and then they would have the knowledge to do it themselves. Her concern was that no one is teaching children these tasks anymore and because of that lack of teaching, it will be hard to continue with a traditional way of life.

The value of retaining traditional knowledge and roles for men and women in her culture was a virtue. The prevalence of the western world or as she said "white people things" caused hardship in perpetuating her cultural/traditional ways. Her daily life was consumed with her belief in the Creator and how that belief prescribed behavior. She stated:

The women were told all the time not to walk over the men's things they used in the bush, their snow shoes, guns. A long time ago, the men were treated with respect because they went to get the food and bring it home. I used to tell my brothers go now, go hunting and bring food back because we treated them with respect. We used to dry their clothes, hang up their boats, everything they used



to go hunting but my mom used to hang up the snow shoes because they were too important for young girls to touch.

Prescribed behavior included everyone in her society. The behavior that is expected of individuals was meant to serve the larger purpose of society. Young women were accorded specific tasks as were the men. These roles were followed because they complemented each other and aided in the efficiency of the operation of their culture.

### **Wisdom**

Wisdom emerged as a predominant theme from the findings. In her life Taryn adhered to spiritual laws. Wisdom implied knowledge of individual roles focusing on common goals. These roles geared to the common good of the community meant a belief in specific duties for men and women. Men and women each formed parts of a whole. Although there were specific roles for women based on their moontime, the virtue of equality reigned because no one person's role was considered to be more important than another's. Each person's role complemented the other's and therefore, gave them meaning. The data from the research revealed that a woman's role was, in large part, based on her moontime or menstrual cycle. Taryn explained that a woman's moontime was core to understanding her role in traditional Ojibway culture.

**Moontime.** Moontime, the time when a woman menstruates, was considered a sacred time in which a woman was purifying herself. It was regarded with great respect and signified the roles of women. Taryn said:

**When young girls now, when I was young, on my moontime, my mother used the same cup every time I ate. And she used to get charcoal and wipe my hands really good and my mom wiped charcoal on herself and then she could start eating. It's not dirty, it's just strong (spiritually), powerful.**

**The belief was that women on their moontime had to be separated from the rest of the community because of the spiritual strength associated with it. This was why her mother would make sure that she only ate from specific dishes and use charcoal for cleansing before they ate. Young women on moontime, were normally guided by their mothers or other women in the community. Taryn was taught moontime laws by her mother. She stated:**

**When I was on my moontime, my mother make it trail (cedar trail) for me...one family cloth (to be used outside to cover your face). And you covered up your face from the sun and the moon out of respect for the sun and the moon. Good time to learn somebody. You heard Medicine Man? Good time to learn from your grandmother and elders.**

**The powerful nature of moontime was reaffirmed by women covering their faces from the sun and the moon. Out of respect for the sun and the moon, women would hide their faces and hence hide their power so as not to appear more powerful than the sun and the moon.**

**Taryn explained that a woman was so powerful on her moontime that she would affect ceremonies if she was nearby. She states:**

**When a woman on moontime and if there's a big ceremony going on and there's elders sitting at the front (their seating position during ceremonies) and if a woman comes in and she is on moontime, those elders will know. The ceremonies will stop. You put everything away. It's not because she's dirty. It's because a woman with moontime is very strong (spiritually strong, and very**

powerful). It's not out of disrespect for women.

Elders have the ability to discern if a woman is on her moontime or not. The strength associated with moontime will affect ceremonies and the sacred bundles that are present. Women on moontime should know their role well especially because of this reason. It is the responsibility of other women to make sure the teachings about moontime are passed on. Specific acts are required during a woman's moontime. She explained the process that she had to go through during this time. She states:

When we had moontime, we were put in a tent. And we were taken there. My mother gave us black cloth. I got nothing what I am going to use. Black cloth to wear for five days. Same thing five days.

This process, she explained was manifested in the roles that all women performed to help each other during their moontime, "When girls used to get moontime women used to go hunting, rabbit snaring four days after. I watch him my sister when they get moontime, watch them really good, get their food and tell them what not to touch. It was hard those days. Things I used to do a long time ago." Taryn reinforced that having her moontime was not an easy time when she was young. Regardless of how difficult it may have been, she accepted it as part of her life as a woman, "It was hard in winter time because it would freeze and they had to sit by the fire for awhile and take it out. In the summer we would go to the lake where no one would see us and clean up there."

The spiritual law or teachings around moontime, she explained, organized her society. It specified a woman's action at that time, and thus how she could or could not interact with others. She said, "Young girls can't walk over their brother's snow shoes,

she can't use his mitts, she can't use his snow shoes, she can't walk over his brother's things...all the time, your brother took them for hunting. Whatever he wants she get it right away." The spiritual strength of moontime would affect not only ceremony but hunting gear as well. Women were very powerful when they were on their moontime and they had to be responsible in their actions and roles.

In her traditional Ojibway society, it seemed that each person's role complemented the other's and equality was achieved by being upheld as a virtue and that which should be strived. In this sense, she explained that even the leader was considered equal. No one was higher than another. She said, "There is this lake, I could tell you every Elder knows about this lake. I could tell you but I don't want to be higher than anyone. Everyone is equal from a baby to a grandmother." She reinforced the tenet of equality. The process of acquiring access and permission to write about her lived experience was a testament to that fact. She made it clear that I needed to ask her teachers if I could write about her life, before she would agree. She did not want to be perceived as trying to be better or greater than anyone by having her lived experience researched. Once the approval was sought and gained, she agreed and only then could the research process begin. Her unfailing devotion to equality prevailed and revealed itself in the data. She said:

How you feeling? I am not perfect (she is saying that she is not trying to be better than anyone), like how young you are. I am the same, everyone is equal, no is perfect, everyone is equal doing this kind of way (traditional way). A long time ago we didn't have any clothes. I kept wearing the same clothes for one week to two weeks and now a woman has lots of clothes. I am not going to say you're perfect or me. No one is perfect.

Equality among men and women were upheld as a virtue in traditional Ojibway society. No one was placed in a higher position than another. Everyone's roles were valued and their roles complimented each others, gave them meaning and were necessary for the efficiency of the society.

### **Summary of Data**

The data gathered in the research process were discussed as emergent themes that allowed for insight into the lived experience of one traditional female Ojibway Elder. In that process the importance of culture as a prevailing theme included Taryn's belief in the Creator, her role as an Elder as imparted in the story behind her birth, and community focus. Wisdom was presented as an Elder's obligation to impart the knowledge prescribing specific roles for men and women. Moontime was presented as one prevalent example. These themes provided for some understanding of how she lived her life and the method she used to make her life's choices. Ultimately, her spirituality manifested in her belief in the Creator, and obligation to the greater good of her community were used as moral compasses. The wisdom of role specificity for men and women, and the prevalence of equality in those roles, were derived from her spiritual belief system. The behavior expected of men and women was seen as a larger obligation to society. This study revealed that the method in which members of her society perpetuated those traditional values was largely the responsibility of Elders. Taryn alluded to the underlying role of an Elder to impart traditional teachings to children and other members of society. In this role, an elder was looked to for guidance, and therefore, a leader in traditional Ojibway

**culture. Once Taryn understood the teaching on her birth, she realized that her role was to be an elder in her community and guide its members in such a way that traditional ways of life would be understood and maintained.**

## **CHAPTER V**

### **INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

**This chapter is presented in two sections. In the first section of the interpretation and discussion of the findings, the threads of research are addressed. In the second section understandings arising from the research are organized and discussed in the form of emergent themes arising from the research.**

**The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experience of one traditional female Ojibway Elder in a Northeastern First Nation community and her perspectives on leadership. The data which resulted from this study emphasized the importance of Aboriginal female knowledge as a means of illuminating leadership theory in general. In so doing, an emergent framework of traditional female Ojibway leadership resulted. Themes derived from the data support the emergence of a theory of leadership from one traditional Ojibway female Elder's perspective. A greater insight into the lived experience of one traditional Ojibway female Elder and her perspectives on leadership as an outcome of this study leads to a greater understanding of the social purpose of Aboriginal female knowledge and adds to leadership theory in general.**

### **Threads of Research Addressed**

The main research question was, “What is the lived experience of a traditional female Ojibway Elder?” The following questions helped guide the investigation:

1. **What are the lived experiences of an Elder in her community?**
2. **What is the personal life history of this Elder?**
3. **How does the Elder perceive her role?**
4. **How are her experiences part of traditional Ojibway spirituality?**

The research questions were designed to uncover the lived experiences of one traditional Ojibway Elder and the Elder’s perspectives on leadership. At the same time, anecdotal information was gathered from a fall ceremony site where the researcher participated in spiritual ceremonies with the research participant. The data gathered from the responses given to the research questions, and that which was gathered as anecdotal information were compiled into themes. The themes derived from the data support the view that a perspective of leadership did emerge. Themes formed the basis for discussion and have been used as the method to interpret and discuss the findings.

### **Understandings Arising from the Research**

The data gathered from the research and the review of the related literature revealed the following two predominant and emergent themes: culture and wisdom. Culture was divided into three further sub themes. These sub themes were: belief in the Creator, Taryn’s teaching on her birth and community. Wisdom was presented as that



which held traditional and spiritual knowledge about roles for men and women. The emergent theme of moontime teachings prevailed as that which held teachings for a woman's role in traditional Ojibway society. These themes form the basis for the interpretation and discussion of the findings.

## **Culture**

Culture and spirituality emerged together as predominant themes. They were the foundation of which Taryn derived meaning in her life and formed the basis of how she understood her world. The Ojibway culture is not homogeneous. It varies in its practices, beliefs, values and norms from community to community. One community's spiritual beliefs may differ from another's. Although each community may have members who believe in the existence and importance of the Creator, their methods of prayer and ceremonial practices may differ considerably. For the purposes of this study, Taryn's traditional Ojibway spiritual belief system was the focus and the context from which the exploration was launched to understand her lived experience.

Among their differences, Aboriginal cultures have suffered in the evolution of the Canadian government's Aboriginal policy. Taryn understood that teaching and learning traditional ways have been in jeopardy. Her life's meaning was derived from her belief in the Creator and she believed she was a vessel for perpetuating her beliefs to others by teaching traditional ways to her children, grandchildren and others who came to her to learn. Downey (1993) holds that in light of the oppression Aboriginal women have faced, that the time has come to recognize what Aboriginal women have to say (p. 12). Downey

(1993) further states that the oppression has been encouraged by the Federal Government's history of colonizing Aboriginal people (p. 12).

The Canadian Government's Aboriginal policy has had three main goals, protection, civilization and assimilation (Tobias, 1983, p. 39). Tobias (1983) states that the ultimate goal in Canada's Aboriginal policy was to abolish Aboriginal special status (p. 40). In this process Aboriginal cultures in Canada have undergone systematic attempted eradication. Historically, the Government became the buffer between two cultures. Gibbins and Ponting (1986) state that the advance of non Aboriginal settlements was manifested in Aboriginal people's inability to defend themselves (p. 25). The Canadian Government, in their paternalistic relationship with Aboriginal people, in their role as buffers between two cultures, eventually lead to the creation of reserves. Tobias (1983) states that the evolution of the Federal Government's relationship with Aboriginal people changed from protecting Aboriginal people to assimilating them into colonial society (p. 42).

This reality is reflected in Taryn's lived experience. Teaching traditional ways of life was regarded as a necessity because of the past and current difficulties traditional culture faced with the approach of non-Aboriginal settlement and the development of mainstream society. Concerns were apparent in the data about the need to revive Ojibway culture. Taryn said, "It's different days now. There's too much. Too much White people things. It's gonna get a hard time to get it back." She reaffirmed this in her discussion about young men and women, who were not being taught the traditional ways of life. It was her view that traditional ways of life were being lost and replaced with the values of

mainstream society's. Gibbins and Ponting (1986) hold that after 1812 when Aboriginal people were no longer required as war allies, and when the fur trade was replaced by agriculture, there was a shift to focus more on European values and norms (p. 25). In this process of relying on mainstream values and norms, Taryn believed that Ojibway people were forgetting how to live off the land. She said, "He can't hunting, even girls, he can't put a net. He can't set rabbit snares...Now what's going to happen? No one knows how to do any of it." The prevalence of the Western world or as she said "white people things" caused hardship in perpetuating her cultural and traditional ways.

Traditionally, Taryn said that children were taught first by watching and then by doing, or discovery learning. As a child she remembered that her mother used to take the time to teach her children how to set fish nets, and rabbit snares. She said, "I did what my mother wanted me to do. If you want to set a net all you have to do is sit down and set it...Us guys, me and my sisters, maybe when I was fourteen or sixteen, my mom we sit down and watch. Tepwe (really), I do it." Taryn's mother's role was described as passing on traditional culture by teaching her children. Armstrong (1989) states that the strength of women holds families together and provides a bridge to the next generation and key to survival (p. xi). Wall (1993) states that "We as Indian people have never forgotten the status of women" (p. x). In Taryn's opinion no one was learning how to practice traditional ways of life to the degree that would maintain the culture. Taryn's life's work reflected her love for her culture and the teachings that it had to offer. She felt that there were not enough people teaching children traditional ways of life. Taryn was asked why she thought it was important to teach traditional ways to children and she said, "because it

is important for what it teaches you” and then she pounded on her heart. Her life was devoted to passing on traditional knowledge. Understanding her devotion was realized in the teaching she received on her birth and about community of which she was devoted, were derived from her lived experience.

### **Believing in the Creator**

Taryn’s lived experience was embedded in her culture and spiritual belief system. Taryn’s experiences were part of traditional Ojibway spirituality in their totality. Her life had been consumed with her belief in the Creator. It was significant because of what it taught others about the significance of dreams and participation ceremonies as means to preserve cultural identity. On culture, Brizinski (1989) stated, “Culture provides the guidelines for establishing relationships and social links; it tells us why these relationship are important and meaningful. Religion, language, beliefs, myths, and symbols are all part of this cultural meaning” (p. 3). Taryn’s culture needed to be considered concurrently with her spiritual beliefs, as it was her fierce resolve in a higher power or spiritual belief system which informed her life, and gave it meaning. Taryn stated, “Kikendum (he know) Manitou (God) anyway, nobody he can beat Manitou. He (mortal people) think long time ago I’m gonna be the God but he’s not.” This faith in a spiritual belief system organized her society and the functions imbedded therein. Her sense of the world and her role as an Elder was founded on a belief in the Creator, and the principles found within her spiritual belief system. They all informed her on how to live her life. Paul (1999) states that Aboriginal people need to go back to believing in the Creator for help and healing (p.

24). Believing in the Creator was a basis from which Taryn was able to interpret the essence of her life. Her experiences were a testament to her belief in the Creator and were revealed her faith in dreams and the necessity of participation in ceremonies.

Taryn often dreamed about things she had never seen before. She had dreams of fruit and she did not know what they were. Her mother told her that she was dreaming of the future. Nitsch (1999) described dreams as personal experiences that consisted of past experiences and prophesies and that they provided information of things to come in the future (p. 85). Cajete (1999) said that without exception almost all Aboriginal cultures valued dreams (p. 58). Dreams were a valued teaching tool and that insight into life's meaning was derived from understanding the significance of one's dreams (Mosher, 1999, p. 161). Mosher (1999) reflects the advice of Taryn's mother and says that dreams were what helped her through her life (p. 161). Paul (1999) said that she learned a lot from her dreams. As a traditional Aboriginal singer, she said that many of the songs she learned came from dreams. Paul (1999) stated, "In my dreams, this old woman is teaching me songs, those are the songs of the living and the dead" (p. 20). The dream state was of special significance because it was in this state that one could be in contact with spirits to gain power and knowledge from them (Cajete, 1999, p. 58). Dreams were met with great respect and given enormous significance. Taryn stated, "you dream about it if you do it this way (traditional way), if you believe it. If you want to learn this way." Taryn's experiences of dreams were based in her spiritual belief system.

Practicing her spiritual beliefs were additionally manifested in her participation in ceremonies. Her role in ceremonies from preparation to participation was precluded by

her spiritual beliefs. As a traditional female Elder at the fall ceremonies, Taryn's roles included teaching other women how to lay a cedar trail for the sweat lodge and singing the song of thanks to the Creator. The sweat lodge was an important ceremonial practice among Aboriginal people. Penashue (1999) reflected on the use of the sweat lodge in her life. She stated, "Sweat lodges were used for healing...my sweat lodge...it's a praying sweat for sharing burdens. It's good to use in dealing with our daily problems" (p. 206). Mosher (1999) believed that the Creator healed her in the sweat lodge (p. 24). Returning to traditional teachings was an essential element in healing themselves. The findings reveal that her belief in dreams, and participating in ceremonies were significant aspects of her lived experience with respect to her spirituality. The awareness this provides may be used to create a cross-cultural fertilization of ideas. The resulting ideas may serve a purpose academically, or socially. Ultimately it adds to current information about traditional Ojibway female elders and reinforces the social purpose of Aboriginal female knowledge in general.

### **Taryn's teaching on her birth**

The personal life history of this Elder was grounded in traditional Ojibway culture and spirituality. Taryn's personal life history was focused on a belief in the Creator. Imparting this aspect of her life in the research process was significant because of the insight it offered to others about understanding the Ojibway culture. The findings revealed that the teaching she received on her birth was a significant event that shaped her personal life history. The teaching she received on her birth and what that meant for her life would

prove to come into direct conflict with her Christian father.

The literature regarding Aboriginal cultures revealed that they were marginalized in the process of the Canadian Government's relationship with Aboriginal people as manifested in the Canadian Government's Aboriginal policy. Spiritual beliefs, imbedded in Aboriginal culture were marginalized as a result. Early Canadian Government policy with respect to Aboriginal people focused on Christianizing Aboriginal people as a means to assimilate them into mainstream society. In the early years, the Government delegated the responsibility of educating Aboriginal people to the church (Tobias, 1983, p. 41).

Taryn's father was a testament to the success of this policy.

Taryn's father was an Anglican minister who followed Christian beliefs. He and Taryn's beliefs conflicted. She said, "Keemootch (she kept her traditional Ojibway spiritual beliefs a secret from her father) my father was an Anglican minister. My dad didn't want to teach me too much about church way but I still did it out of respect for him." She kept her spiritual beliefs a secret from her father but she would learn as she got older that her father knew what her role would be later in life. She thought that perhaps that was why he did not want to teach her too much about Christianity. Taryn learned later in life that her father knew that she was to impart traditional spiritual beliefs as she got older. This understanding was derived from the story she received about her birth and the explanation about her birth story that she received from an Elder as an adult.

When she was born, Taryn's father ensured that she was born outside. Taryn stated, "I always used to wonder my dad did that and when I got older I felt it in my heart why my dad did that (because she believed that she was chosen to learn traditional

teachings and live a traditional way of life). Throughout her childhood she did not understand why out of fourteen children she was the only one required to be born outside. Taryn stated, "I was born in an open fire. My dad told my mom "go out and have that baby outside." So my mother went out and got ready for childbirth.." After consulting with an Elder she learned that her father chose her to follow the traditional way of life. She said, "this old man told me why, he said, Elder woman...be happy what your father did...your dad knew what you were going to do in the future and out of fourteen children he picked you." This was a very powerful message and it gave credence to her life and offered insight in understanding her life's meaning and the role she had chosen to live. She reveals that this role was in her heart and part of her life as far back as she can remember.

### **Community**

As an Elder and leader, Taryn was in a position to impart the principles inherent in her culture. This process focused on community and was practiced in the best interests of society. Garret (1996) states that Elders today have a lot of responsibility in their roles as parents, teachers, community leaders and spiritual guides (p. 16). As a community leader, Taryn revealed that teaching traditional ways and perpetuating spirituality characterized her role in the community. As a teacher, Elder and leader, Taryn taught traditional ways and spiritual laws to all people.

Teaching traditional ways was a predominant message regarding her the lived experience. Taryn stated, "Everything you see I keep for now. I keep it for my



grandchildren.” She reaffirmed the importance of children learning the traditional ways of life, she said, “Yes, I am proud. Those dreams they come from the bush not the town or city. Nanabush. Those things that are big (important), kids need to know.” Taryn was stating the children need to be taught their traditional ways of life. Taryn exuded a traditional way of life. She was asked why she thought that it was important to teach her traditional way of life to others. She replied, “Because of what it teaches you,” and she pounded on her heart. The significance of Taryn’s traditional ways, prescribed by the Creator, is reaffirmed when she stated:

...don’t be shy to do traditional ways, to play your drum,  
light your sage, light your sweet grass, to put your tobacco  
down even when a lot of people are there. That is the trail  
that we have been given to use. Don’t ever be shy.

Taryn believed that the Creator gave Aboriginal people teachings and that as Aboriginal people, they should not be ashamed or shy to practice them. It was Taryn’s role as an Elder in passing on that knowledge. Boldt (1993) states, “In a society with an oral culture Elders played the essential and highly valued function of transmitting the tribal customs and tradition to the younger generation” (p. 119). The data revealed the importance of Taryn’s role as a teacher and henceforth as a leader in perpetuating spirituality and teaching traditional ways. Reference to these roles as an Elder and teacher was made both explicitly and implicitly. These principles existed in her varied roles as a teacher, elder and leader in the process of imparting traditional ways and spiritual teachings.

In imparting spiritual teachings Taryn prayed and participated in ceremonies. Praying for others was a very important part of Taryn's life. Taryn's son revealed that his mother told him "to pray for others and not yourself." He said that she told him that "if you pray for others good things will come to you in time."

Taryn's home has a separate room they call a smoke room that is set aside for their sacred bundles, their pipes, drums and other sacred items. They have healing circles in there sometimes. People come to Taryn with tobacco and ask her to help them by holding healing circles or sweats so that she can pray for them. Taryn said that as an Elder once you are given tobacco you have to do what you have been asked, whether it is to have a healing circle or hold a sweat. She said that you cannot tell people that you cannot help them if they are offering you tobacco.

Her participation in the fall ceremonies revealed her role as an Elder, teacher and leader as varied and multi disciplinary. During the fall ceremony, Taryn was looked to for spiritual guidance as an Elder when she was asked to sing the song to give thanks to the Creator. She also played the role of teacher in imparting women's teachings to other women. Her role as a leader was evident as was her role as a teacher.

In ceremonies participants were taught that all people were equal and that Elders were to be respected. Boldt (1993) states, "elders' roles today have been limited to social and moral influence, to spiritual counselling, and to carrying out ceremonial functions at traditional gatherings, sacred ceremonies and meetings (p. 120). In her role as an Elder Taryn believed that spiritual teachings taught you how to live a good life. Taryn stated, "By the way, I'm good way now, today, I know now Indian used the good way." Her

role was significant because of the understanding one was able to cultivate regarding traditional Ojibway society.

Taryn's role as a teacher included passing on knowledge about what women were expected to do in traditional Ojibway culture. She taught other women spiritual laws and teachings. In addition to showing them how to lay down a cedar trail for the sweat lodge, she taught women that it was their job to take the grandfathers (rocks) out of the pit in the centre of the sweat lodge. She showed them how to take the grandfathers out of the West door of the lodge. She also showed them how to clean inside the lodge, in preparation for the next sweat. This exemplified Taryn's roles as an Elder and teacher.

Taryn taught traditional and spiritual teachings in a kind and gentle way. When she wanted to teach someone something she did so indirectly, often through telling stories. Teachings were implicit in the stories she told. Many times the subject of her stories was presented in the third person. For example, she would not say, "You should take those grandfathers out of the sweat lodge. Don't let them sit there too long. The Creator won't like that" but she might say, "As women we are to take the grandfathers out of the sweat lodge, the Creator will be happy if we do that." This was her gentle way of teaching you something. Garret (1996) states that qualities befitting leaders in the traditional sense included, kindness, generosity, autonomy, noninterference, sharing and the importance of community (p. 16). Taryn was looked to as a teacher, Elder and leader and subsequently held a diverse role in her culture. Her non interfering approach is characteristic of traditional Aboriginal leadership.

**Wisdom**

Wisdom, a quality befitting Elders, is presented here as the characteristic by which traditional and cultural information was held. Taryn perceived her role as an Elder member of the community as someone who was always conscious about maintaining equality and transferring traditional knowledge about women's teaching to other women. Taryn shared her knowledge about moontime teachings. However, the wisdom of traditional knowledge was greatly impeded by the arrival of Europeans and the Eurocentric world view.

Over time, one can observe that women's traditional roles in Aboriginal societies were significantly affected by the Canadian Government's Aboriginal policies. Historically, and to the present day, Aboriginal women's roles can be considered a reflection of the discrimination they have faced in the past. The literature revealed that Aboriginal women's roles changed dramatically from pre contact, with western society, throughout the fur trade and to present day. Traditionally, Aboriginal women were the strength that held families together. Armstrong (1989) stated, "It was women who shaped the thinking of all its members in a loving, nurturing atmosphere within the base of the family unit" (p. xi). During the fur trade Aboriginal women became indispensable and of considerable economic benefit because of their varied abilities in making snow shoes, skin clothing, cooking and interpreting (Jamieson, 1986, p. 114). Significant events such as the shift from the economy based on fur trading to that of agriculture, proved to weaken the role of Aboriginal women further.

Subsequent Canadian Government legislation continued to marginalize Aboriginal women. Legislation determined that Aboriginal women's status was dependent on the husbands they chose to marry. Section 12 (1)(b) of the Indian Act denied Aboriginal status to Aboriginal women who married a non-Aboriginal man. Later, in 1986, the Canadian Government repealed this section of the legislation due to pressure from the United Nations Human Rights Commission and Aboriginal political groups such as the Native Indian Brotherhood (Boldt, 1993, p. 208). The United Nations Human Rights Commission declared that section 12(1)(b) of the Indian Act was in direct contravention of article 27 of the United Nations Charter of Rights. In spite of the negative effects legislation had on Aboriginal women, Taryn's life was an attempt to maintain traditional beliefs and impart those beliefs to others in her culture.

Maintaining equality and transferring traditional knowledge was significant because she perceived this to be the foundation of which to retain her culture. This was her role. Taryn stated, "There is this lake, I could tell you about every Elder knows about this lake. I could tell you but I don't want to be higher than anyone. Everyone is equal from a baby to a grandmother." Hungry Wolf (1993) acknowledged that in traditional Aboriginal societies the female roles were important and equal to men's. She stated, "In all our tribal ceremonies, women play an equal part with the men, and most ceremonies would not take place without the women" (p. 178). The roles of women existed simultaneously with others in their communities. These roles existed in direct relation to moontime teachings.

**Moontime teachings.** In her role as a female Elder, Taryn acknowledged that a large part of her responsibility was to teach other women about the women's menstrual cycle, what she has referred to as moontime teachings. Moontime teachings were very important consideration in traditional Ojibway society. Taryn elaborated on moontime teachings because of its significance in determining a woman's participation with others in the community. Taryn stated that when she was on her moontime she would be separated from the rest of her community and given specific dishes and utensils to use when she ate. Discussing moontime, Beck, Walters and Francisco (1996) on moontime stated that women were required to be in isolation for four days during their moontime, and that while in isolation they ate their meals separately from the other community members (p. 213-214). The belief was that moontime was spiritually powerful, with the ability to affect ceremonies nearby. They further noted that learning about moontime was important for young women because of its spiritual strength. Menstrual blood was equated with power which could be used for healing or curing (Beck, Walters and Francisco, 1996, p. 213). Women on their moontime were not allowed to attend ceremonies because the spiritual power associated with it. Taryn stated that when a ceremony was in progress, Elders would know if a woman on her moontime was present. The Elders would stop the ceremonies. She emphasized that it was not because women were dirty but spiritually strong during their menstrual cycle. Beck, Walters & Francisco (1996) reaffirmed this in saying that when a woman was on her moontime, they were not allowed to touch any sacred bundle or object or enter a lodge where these items were kept (p. 214). Taryn reinforced the importance of teaching moontime laws to other women because they

organized society and the roles of women in her society. It specified a woman's actions at that time, and how she could or could not interact with others. She said that a young woman needed to know how to behave when she was on her moontime if traditional Ojibway culture was to be practiced and if she was to live in the context of her spiritual belief system. Taryn believed her role as an Elder was to impart these teachings in the process of her participation in traditional Ojibway culture.

### **An Emerging Framework of Traditional Female Ojibway Leadership**

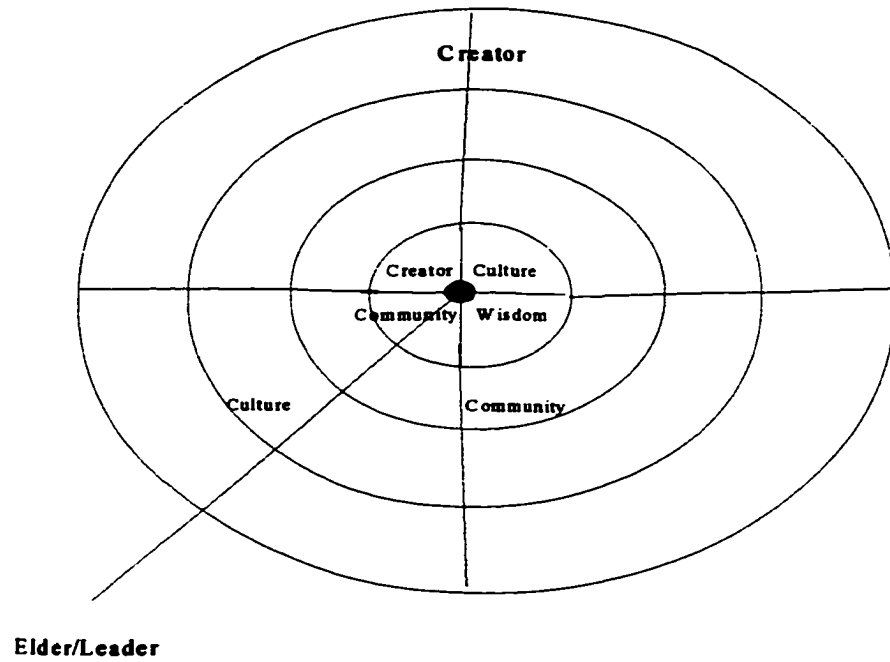
The data that were gathered regarding the lived experience of one traditional female Ojibway Elder revealed the importance of her role as a teacher, Elder and henceforth leader. An important finding in the study was that, leadership in the sense of a traditional female Ojibway Elder, was holistic. Leadership emerged as existing concurrently with Taryn's world view. Taryn's world view is presented in Figure 1. as an emergent theory of traditional female Ojibway leadership. Taryn's world view included four components: culture, a belief in the Creator, wisdom, and community. At the centre of Taryn's world view framework, leadership exists as part of a whole and is shown to be comprised of the Creator, culture, community and wisdom.

#### **The belief in the Creator**

The belief in the Creator forms the outside circle. As an all encompassing theme, the belief in the Creator as presented by the data, is the basis from which Taryn received her life's meaning. O'Toole (1995) holds that leaders are guided by principles that are not

**“context dependent, but that represent universal beliefs about right and wrong” (p. 7). Sergiovanni (1984) believes that values and beliefs stem from a community’s religion, or spiritual belief system (p. 9). Beebe (1997) suggests that most religions of the world emphasize a common spiritual theme which is illuminated when ethical codes and fundamental principles of the world’s peoples are considered 15). Boldt (1993) states that spiritual beliefs were the major components in bestowing decision-making power and the foundation of which Aboriginal culture functioned traditionally (p. 27). Taryn’s spiritual belief system or the belief in the Creator forms the outer circle and is the foundation of her world view.**





**Figure 1: An Emerging Framework of Traditional Female Ojibway Leadership**

## **Culture**

Culture is presented within the belief in the Creator as the next inside circle. Culture was informed from a belief in the Creator. Bolman and Deal (1992), Duke (1996), Hesslebein (1996), Shein (1996) and Covey (1996) state that leadership theory has evolved to focus on culture. Sergiovanni (1984), and Covey (1996) hold that culture reflects values, beliefs and a set of principles. Covey (1996) contends that principles find their origin in a culture's religious or spiritual belief system (p. 115). In that sense, Covey (1996) suggests that principles do not change or shift thus preventing one from becoming lost, confused or fooled by conflicting voices and values (p. 115). Bloom (1991) states that cultural relativism reigns in today's society by its openness to all kinds of ideologies (p. 27). He further states that amidst the varying ideologies and independence of thought, doubt will emerge. Bloom (1991) states, "In the absence of anything else in which to turn, the common beliefs of most men [and women] are almost always what will determine judgement. This is where tradition used to be most valuable" (p. 247). Tradition and custom were the regulating forces in traditional Ojibway society (Boldt, 1993, p. 278). Boldt (1993) states that "conformity to custom was a matter of religious obedience that accorded with the generally accepted moral standards of the tribe, the mechanism used in traditional Indian society was direct participatory democracy and rule by consensus" (p. 278). In Taryn's culture equality was key. Taryn stated, "I am not perfect, like how young you are Michelle, I am the same, everyone is equal doing this kind of way." In traditional Ojibway society individuals were equal and their roles were based on the best

interests of the community. The Ojibway perspective of leadership is generally a process that exists of, by and for the cultural collectivity. Taryn's strong cultural affiliation was necessary in perpetuating her culture amidst the past and current difficulties traditional culture has faced in Canadian history and in the development of mainstream society. Concerns were apparent in the data about the need to partake in the difficult but important task of reviving Ojibway culture. Culture was the foundation on which Taryn derived meaning in her daily life and it formed the basis of how she understood her world.

### **Community**

Community formed the third inside circle. Community was the immediate or more tangible focus for Taryn's life. Taryn's lived experience teaches us that leadership is contextual, community-focused and based in a belief in a higher power. The tasks she performed, the traditional and spiritual teachings she imparted were part of her obligation to society and her love for her people and culture. Taryn's behavior in her community was informed by her cultural beliefs. Garret (1996) states that in traditional Ojibway society individuals were cast into predetermined roles by being expected to perform specific tasks, which complimented the tasks of others in the community (p. 16).

Today, Western theories of leadership have evolved to include a focus on context and community, a tenet of Ojibway culture. Much of Western leadership theory has traditionally been based in structural functionalism. Structural functionalism is based in rationality, order and regulation, and actions are organized in such a way as to lead to predetermined goals with maximum efficiency (Scott, 1998, p. 33). Western leadership

theory has shifted to be mindful of community. More recently, transformational, reconceptualist, aesthetic and critical humanist theories of leadership have emerged which focus on context and community.

According to Burns (1975) transformational leadership allows all parties to exchange resources and as a result become transformed in the process (p.171). Reconceptualists share this view in that leadership is best understood, “in the beliefs of the beholders rather than the behavior of the beheld” (Duke, 1998, p. 174). Duke (1998) developed an aesthetic theory of leadership. He suggests that an aesthetic theory of leadership only exists when it is perceived by an observer (p. 176). This interest in the social aspect of leadership is specific to critical humanist leadership theory which focuses on the symbolic aspects of leadership. Critical humanists believe that social structure is socially constructed (Slater, 1995, p. 453). They disagree with structural functionalists’ views that attempt to be deterministic and value-free. It is the critical humanist perspective that values are an inherent component in the decision-making process (Slater, 1995, p. 455). Critical humanists are committed to society and emphasize the importance of transcending the limitations of existing social order (p. 455). Transformational, reconceptualist, aesthetic and critical humanist perspectives of leadership are similar in nature to the Ojibway perspective where society, and community are the focus.

Hesselbein (1996) states, “Key to societal significance of tomorrow’s leaders is the way they embrace the totality of leadership, not just including “my organization” but reaching beyond the walls as well” (p. 123). This focus on society was apparent in Western leadership theory. On leadership and context, Duke (1998) stated, “Separating

leadership from context is analogous to identifying what one wants to eat for dinner while ignoring where it is to be consumed” (p. 166). Hesselebein (1996) and Shein (1996) held similar beliefs in that leadership style depended on context and community. They stated that leaders would transform their leadership styles to accommodate the needs of community members. Ultimately, wise leadership brought together all those concerned into a circle that included the corporation, the organization, the people and the community (Hesselebein, 1996, p. 124).

The transformation of Western leadership perspectives have become more holistic. The transformation has been an attempt to include more parties into the leadership process. This is a huge difference from its roots in feudalism which believed in the inherent inequality of men (Boldt, 1993, p. 278). The Enlightenment concept of egalitarianism emerged as a response so that a more human political structure would result (p. 278). The focus on humanizing the process of authority has been a long process in the Western tradition. In traditional Ojibway society egalitarianism did not emerge from an existing concept but was founded in the Ojibway society’s spiritual beliefs. The Ojibway perspective of leadership was and continues to be a holistic process. It incorporates culture, a belief in the Creator, community and wisdom.

## **Leadership**

Leadership forms the core of Taryn’s world view and it is divided into four quadrants based on what the data revealed about essential elements and qualities befitting an Elder in the traditional sense. These four qualities focus on knowledge of and affection

for: the Creator, Culture, Wisdom, and Community. A leader embodies a focus on these four qualities and is the vessel in which they are enacted, and in the traditional Ojibway perspective, is chosen because he or she possesses all four. Therefore, leadership is bestowed on and not a position to be assumed by an individual. Garret (1996) states that in Aboriginal societies Elders have been the ones to have the role of leader bestowed on them based on the spirituality of their cultures and their traditions (p. 16). Further, Garret (1996) states that Elders still hold the responsibility as community leaders and spiritual guides (p. 16). The Mediwin tradition described the seven stages of life in which the seventh stage was reserved for Elders, and for reflecting on life. Elders were considered to be those who were to pass on knowledge to their children (Mosher, 1999, p. 159). In that sense, Elders were obligated to perpetuate traditional teachings as a means to maintain their society and culture.

The holistic nature of leadership as shown in the four quadrants is closely guarded by what has been presented as Taryn's world view in the larger circles in which they are encompassed. As illustrated in Figure 1, each quadrant is encircled by each component of Taryn's world view - the Creator, culture, and community. The quadrants do not exist separately from one another but in coexistence inform each other and give meaning as Taryn's world view. For example, a leader's knowledge of and affection for her culture is guarded by the wider view of the Creator, culture, and community. Similarly, a leader's knowledge of and affection for wisdom is equally guarded by the same principles. The same holds true for the knowledge of and affection for community and of the Creator.

The holistic view of leadership as illustrated by Figure 1, is informed by the Creator, culture, and community. Leadership, the centre of this holistic view, exists in an individual who possesses the qualities of: knowledge of and affiliation with Creator, culture, wisdom, and community. Taryn's life's work teaches us that leadership exists when it is bestowed upon an individual by the people of a community.

### **Summary**

The relationship and conclusions drawn between the interpretation of the findings and the review of the related literature was significant with respect to emergent implicit traditional female Ojibway elder's perspective of leadership. The prevalent themes culture, believing in the Creator, community, and wisdom were key. The research participant, Taryn's lived experiences were distinguished by her personal characteristics that were based upon and guided by believing in the Creator, and living a traditional life. In living a traditional life, Taryn epitomized a humble servant to traditional teachings of equality and teacher to others about traditional laws. Traditional Aboriginal leaders are often defined by their wisdom, experience, kindness, generosity, and spiritual insight. Her resolve to maintain and perpetuate traditional Ojibway culture in her daily life with such qualities was a testament to her role as a traditional female Ojibway leader. A leader in the traditional sense seeks not power from above but is empowered by the community members. Their authority was vested in the community and decisions were made by consensus. Her determination to maintain equality and include all community members in ceremonies and offer teachings in those processes speaks of her role as a leader.

**Traditional Ojibway leadership was a gift that she offered and was based on qualities, that she possessed. The traditional female Ojibway perspective of leadership implicit in her lived experience and supported by the review of the related literature emerged from her world view. Her world view included a belief in the Creator, the importance of Culture for informing society, and the need for a community focus in our daily lives and actions. Leadership, at the core of this world view, was and is bestowed on those who have knowledge of and affection for the Creator, culture, wisdom and community.**

**Taryn's life work teaches us that leadership is not a position that is taken but one that is given. Leadership exists for the best interests of society and is not based in individualism. Leadership in traditional Ojibway society upholds equality as a virtue and in that process, non-individualism emerges. The findings of the research are paradoxical to those noted in a post-modern society, in which equality breeds individualism. Individual truths are the authority and everyone is equal in their ideas, opinions and life choices. In Taryn's traditional female Ojibway concept, equality is maintained along with the social fabric. This is possible because of the principles reflected in traditional Ojibway spirituality. Taryn's spiritual belief system requires individuals to perform specific tasks. Each task complements that of another's and no one person's task is more revered than another's. Together these tasks create life's meaning while maintaining equality among its members at the same time.**



## **CHAPTER VI**

### **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

#### **Introduction**

The summary of the data generated in the research process centred on themes related to culture, a belief in the Creator, community and wisdom. The emergent themes formed the basis of Taryn's world view and informed leadership at its core.

Cultural and Aboriginal perspectives of leadership were revealed as similar in their focus on context and community. Traditional Aboriginal Elders were discussed as the key to passing on traditional knowledge in their roles as teachers and as a result were looked for leadership. Elders held a significant position in traditional Ojibway society because of their wisdom, years of experience, and spiritual insight. Maracle (1996) discusses Aboriginal ideology about leadership and how leadership is an obligation to society and not a self-indulgent focus on individuality.

The advent of colonialism was presented as a factor which disrupted traditional Aboriginal value systems. The process of assimilation, largely a product of the Canadian Government's Aboriginal policy, as legislated in the Indian Act was a key factor in the disruption. Boldt (1993) stated that the Canadian Government purposefully aimed its policies toward extinguishing Aboriginal special status, by replacing many traditional structures with colonial structures. Tobias (1983) upheld this view in stating that early Canadian Government policy used the church as means to assimilate Aboriginal people. The systematic disintegration of Aboriginal spiritual belief systems lead to the disruption

of traditional value systems and spiritual laws. Traditional Aboriginal teachings based in spiritual laws were considered as a necessity in perpetuating cultural and ceremonial practices.

Much of the legislation seriously undermined the position of Aboriginal women as interpreters and traditional teachers of culture in their communities. In recent years, efforts have been made to preserve traditional teachings and to emphasize the importance of women's roles and teachings within that structure. One of the key findings of this study concerning women are women's moontime teachings as essential for their understanding of the context of their roles in the community. Beck, Walters and Francisco (1996) reaffirmed this fact in their consideration of moontime, noting that women were required to separate themselves from others during their menstrual cycle, because moontime was regarded as a time of spiritual strength. The importance for these teachings to be passed on to other women is regarded as an essential element in Ojibway society.

### **The Lived Experiences of an Elder in Taryn's Community Concentrated on Teaching and Leading**

An Elder is given the role of transferring traditional knowledge to others in the community. The lived experiences of an Elder in her community are distinguished by the Elder's role as teacher of traditional ways and as a leader. An Elder's role is revealed as being multi faceted, and includes teaching about areas as diverse as teaching traditional ways, and spiritual laws. Teaching traditional ways of life is considered as being disrupted by the approach of European mainstream society. It is emphasized that retaining traditional Ojibway culture is a difficult process because of the assimilation of Aboriginal

people in a non-Aboriginal society.

Assimilation has prevented continuity in teaching traditional Ojibway culture. An Elder's role is that of a teacher and many times implicit in that role is leadership. In the traditional sense, leadership was defined as a social obligation with power and authority resting in the collective and not in one particular individual. With the advent of colonialism, traditional Ojibway leadership systems were cast into a ruling class system, where a hierarchical leadership structure was the foundation. In spite of the adversity faced, Taryn continued in her traditional role as a teacher of traditional ways of life and as a leader in the traditional sense.

#### **Taryn Perceived Her Role as Perpetuating Cultural Values**

The findings revealed that Taryn's resolve in maintaining the cultural tenet of equality and teacher to other women about traditional laws regarding moontime teachings (menstruation) was important. Her role as a traditional female Ojibway Elder was discussed in terms of the significant effects of history on Aboriginal women's traditional roles in Aboriginal communities. Armstrong (1989) stated that women's roles were influential traditionally, because of their ability to affect and care for the family unit. European contact, presented in the contexts of the fur trade and in Canadian Government legislation, impacted Aboriginal women's roles. The culminating effect of these events was the systematic attempted marginalization of Aboriginal women. Boldt (1993) considered this by reflecting on the Indian Act legislation which withdrew Aboriginal women's status upon marriage to a non-Aboriginal man. The United Nations challenged the Canadian Government's policy regarding Aboriginal women and viewed it as a blatant

**process of discrimination.**

**Aboriginal women were cornerstones in traditional Aboriginal society, of considerable economic benefit during the fur trade and victims of the government's legislative discrimination. In spite of these difficulties, Taryn perceived her role as a traditional female Ojibway Elder. Her continued participation in her cultural practices and spiritual beliefs was a testament to her role as an Elder and in that process, and a leader in the traditional sense.**

### **Taryn's Personal Life History Largely Centred around Spirituality**

**The researcher's findings revealed that the personal life history of this Elder was shaped at birth and by the conflicting relationship that she had with her father. Her belief in the Creator served as a backdrop to these considerations. Throughout her teenage years she was in conflict with her father, an Anglican minister of the Christian tradition. Although she respected his spiritual belief system, she found that her father would not teach her too much about Christianity. He knew that her role was to be that of a traditional female Elder who followed traditional spiritual teachings. As an adult Taryn learned that her father was instrumental in determining her life's work as a traditional Ojibway female Elder. For years, she wondered why she was born outside as opposed to the other thirteen children who were born in her parent's house. The reason was revealed to her as an adult, through consultation with another Elder. She was told that her father chose her out of all of his children to be born outside so that she would be welcomed and blessed by the Creator and so that she would carry on the traditional ways of life.**

### **Taryn's Experiences are part of Traditional Ojibway Spirituality**

The study of Taryn's lived experience revealed her belief in the Creator and in her spiritual beliefs. Her faith in dreams and need to participate in traditional Ojibway ceremonies as means to preserve her cultural identity prevailed. On culture, Brizinski (1989) reinforced the important role that culture played in providing guidelines and establishing social links. Taryn imparted her belief in the significance of dreams and the importance of ceremonies in living her culture. As a young girl, she experienced dreams as prophecies, and continued to value them into adulthood. Her participation in ceremonies was an aspect of her life for which she held enormous respect. It was during various ceremonies where Taryn's cultural beliefs were manifested from her preparation to participation in teaching and sweat lodge ceremonies.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experience of one traditional Ojibway female Elder in a Northwestern First Nation community and the Elder's perspectives on leadership. This study has emphasized the importance of Aboriginal female knowledge in its investigation of one traditional Ojibway female Elder. In doing so the study has broadened our understanding of leadership theory and how it included a belief in, respect for and perpetuation of traditional and spiritual values. The study has considered many aspects of traditional Ojibway society in which culture, a belief in the Creator, community and wisdom have lead to a greater understanding of Ojibway culture and leadership in general.

### **Implications for Further Research**

**In the process of uncovering one traditional Ojibway female Elder's lived experience and her perspectives on leadership observations revealed the need for further research. Additional research would provide an explicit understanding of traditional female perspectives on traditional leadership. Discussions of Western leadership theories have largely been focused on the white male experiences. Women's perspectives have been under represented and Ojibway women's perspectives are lacking. More qualitative research would add to the understandings of Aboriginal female leadership theory by uncovering the similarities in the lived experiences of other Aboriginal women.**

**Aboriginal Elders have largely filled the roles as leaders as they held the qualities befitting leaders in the traditional sense. It was understood from the findings and the review of the related literature that traditional Ojibway culture faced adversity in many respects. One important respect was the degree to which Aboriginal people were integrated into mainstream society. The research participant, Taryn, imparted concern that not enough people were practicing traditional ways of life or passing on traditional teachings to the younger generation. In that process, the elders of today are leaving this world for the next and many of their stories, wisdom, and teachings are going with them. Additional research regarding elders and traditional Ojibway leadership needs to be conducted in a timely fashion. Realizing that culture is not static, and that Aboriginal cultures within North America are not homogeneous, it is conceivable that new and other theories of Ojibway leadership will emerge from other research processes. Ultimately, it is**

hoped that additional research in the field of traditional Ojibway leadership will be undertaken to benefit the field of leadership theory, the field of educational administration and society in general.

In summary, recommendations for further research include:

1. Lived experiences of traditional female and male Ojibway Elders representative of the same geographic region as the participant in this study.
2. Leadership-specific inquiry about traditional Ojibway Elders.
3. Lived experiences of Aboriginal female and male Elders throughout North America.
4. Leadership-specific inquiries about Aboriginal female and male Elders throughout North America.

I am hopeful that additional research in the above noted areas will enhance the field of leadership theory, the field of educational administration and society in general.

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**Appendix A: Letter to Participant and Translator**

**Dear Participant:**

**Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study on traditional Ojibway female leadership.**

**The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experience of your traditional Ojibway life as a leader and to discuss this experience with consideration given to other theories of leadership.**

**During this study you will be asked to participate in a series of conversations which will be structured around these questions:**

- **What are the lived experiences of an elder in her community?**
- **What is the personal life history of this elder?**
- **How does the elder perceive her role?**
- **How are her leadership experiences part of traditional Ojibway spirituality?**

**The interview process will take approximately three days. I am suggesting that we meet for three hours a day, for an approximate total of nine hours of interview time. I will be traveling to your community to conduct these interviews, therefore, I will allot a total of seven days in which to schedule them. This will provide additional time if circumstances suggest that we need to reschedule any interviews.**

**There are no risks to you as a participant in this study. You may withdraw from this study at any time. All of the information that is collected about you during the study will be kept confidential, and you will not be identified in any way. The data of this study will be securely stored at Lakehead University for seven years and will be made available to you upon completion of the research. The dissemination of the findings of the research will be in the form of a thesis which will be in the Lakehead University Library.**

**I look forward to your participation in sharing your lived experience with me. I know that this research will enrich the study of women in leadership, particularly the work of Aboriginal women leaders about which little is known.**

**If you have any questions concerning the study, I can be reached at: (807)345-8787. Please mail your consent to participate to me as soon as possible so that I can begin making appropriate arrangements for our meetings. Meegwetch.**

**Respectfully,**

**Michelle Frost**



**Dear Translator:**

**Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study on traditional Ojibway female leadership. The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experience of a traditional Ojibway female leader/elder.**

**During this study you will be asked to participate as a translator in conversations occurring and spanning a time convenient to the participant's discretion. I am suggesting the use of seven days to gather the data. More specifically, I am suggesting that we meet for three hours a day for approximately three days. This an approximate conversation time total of nine hours.**

**There are no risks to you as a participant in this study. You may withdraw at any time. All of the information that is collected about you during the study will be kept confidential, and you will not be identified in any way. You will also be required to keep all of the data confidential that is collected during these interviews. The data of this study will be securely stored at Lakehead University for seven years and the results will be made available to you upon completion of the study. The dissemination of the findings of the research will be in the form of a thesis which will be in the Lakehead University Library.**

**I look forward to your participation as a translator in this project of sharing the lived experience of a traditional Ojibway female elder/leader.**

**If you have any questions concerning the study, I can be reached at (807)345-8787. Please mail your consent to participate as soon as possible so that I can begin making appropriate arrangements for our meetings. Meegwetch.**

**Respectfully,**

**Michelle Frost**

**Appendix B: Consent form to Participant and Translator**

**Research Participant**

1. **“What is the Lived Experience of a Traditional Female Ojibway Leader/Elder?”**
2. **I, \_\_\_\_\_ consent to take part in a study which will examine my lived experience as a traditional female Ojibway elder/leader.**
3. **The purpose of this study is guided by the following questions:**
  - **What are the lived experiences of an elder in her community?**
  - **What is the personal life history of this elder?**
  - **How does the elder perceive her role?**
  - **How are her leadership experiences part of traditional Ojibway spirituality?**
5. **Michelle Frost, the principal investigator, has explained to me that I will be asked to meet with her for interviews scheduled at my convenience. I understand that the interviews will be approximately three hours long per day and take approximately three days to complete for a total of approximately nine hours of interview time. I also understand that Michelle Frost has set aside a total of seven days in which to schedule them.**
6. **I understand that I am encouraged to speak in my own language and that my son has volunteered to translate for me.**
7. **I understand that there will be no risks to me as a result of participating in this study. I also understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time, even after signing this form.**
8. **All of the information that is collected about me during this study will be kept confidential, and I will not be identified in any way. Michelle Frost has informed me that the data of this study will be stored securely at Lakehead University for seven years and that the results will be made available to me upon completion of the study.**
9. **The dissemination of findings of this study will be in the form of a thesis which will be in the Lakehead University Library.**

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**Signature of Participant**

**Date**

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**Signature of Witness**

**Date**

10. **I have explained the nature of the study to the participant and believe he/she understood it.**

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**Signature of Researcher**

**Date**

### Research Participant's Translator

1. **“What is the Lived Experience of a Traditional Ojibway Female Elder/Leader?”**
2. I, \_\_\_\_\_ consent to take part in a study as a translator for my mother, who will be speaking in her own language - Ojibway.
3. Michelle Frost, the principal researcher has explained to me that I will be asked to translate conversations that will occur and span a time, location, and site suitable to my mother.
4. I understand that there will be no risks to me from participating in this study. I also understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time, even after signing this form.
5. I understand that all of the data collected during these interviews must be kept confidential. I agree to keep all data confidential that is collected during these interviews.
6. The dissemination of the findings of the research will be in the form of a thesis which will be in the Lakehead University Library.

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**Signature of Translator**

**Date**

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**Signature of Witness**

**Date**

## **Appendix C: Interview Questions Sample**

## Interview Guide

<b>Legend</b>	
<b>Interview Guide Question Headings</b>	
<b>Heading</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Numbered headings (1 - 4)</b>	<b>Questions which guided the research</b>
<b>▶ (bulleted headings)</b>	<b>Questions which guided the interviews</b>
<b>R: (Researcher generated questions)</b>	<b>Questions generated by the researcher during the interviews</b>

1. **What are the lived experiences of an Elder in her community?**
  - ▶ **What was childhood like?**  
R: What was your childhood like?  
R: Why do you tell the story of your birth?
  - ▶ **Are there different roles (tasks/chores) for men and women? If so, can you give me an example?**  
R: When you were growing up, were there things that you girls had to do that were different than the boy's?
  - ▶ **If there are roles for men and women, have these changed over time?**  
R: How come it is different now a days?
  
2. **What is the personal life history of this Elder?**
  - ▶ **What can you tell me has been one of the most important parts of your life?**  
R: Why do you think it is important for your children and grandchildren learn the traditional way of life?  
R: Now you're teaching your children and your grandchildren the traditional way of life. If somebody asked you why you do that, what would you tell them?

3. **How does the Elder perceive her role?**
- ▶ **How would you describe your roles, responsibilities when you think about your role in your family and your community?**  
R: Why were the women taken away during their moontime?  
R: So a long time ago, women were taken away to a tent during moontime, what else can you tell me about moontime?
  - ▶ **Do other people, such as your family or community members, have certain expectations of you?**
  - ▶ **What are two or three main tasks you value in your role?**
4. **How are her experiences part of traditional Ojibway spirituality?**
- ▶ **What can you tell me about the traditional path you are on?**
  - ▶ **What is that life like, such as what do you do?**  
R: You walked on a cedar trail when you were on your moontime?
  - ▶ **How do you pray?**  
R: How much have your spiritual beliefs been a part of your life?  
R: How come your father followed the church way? How come you kept doing the traditional way?  
R: So, you are proud of this way of life?

**Appendix D: Transcript Sample**



### **Transcript Sample**

► **What was your childhood like?**

**I was born in an open fire. My dad told my mom to out and have that baby outside. So my mother went our got ready for childbirth. She put cedar. First she made fire and then she put cedar. She put spruce on the bottom and then cedar to make it softer. He told my mama to go out and have that baby...and then as I was growing up from when I was born until I was 13 I kind of knew what happened and then I started asking my father why my father asked her to go outside to have birth.**

**R: Why do you tell the story of your birth?**

**I tell this story a lot. Now I know why. I am happy. It gave me a good feeling. There was one person who tell me why. This old man told me why. He said, "Elder woman, I'll tell you why your dad did this, be happy what he did. Your paba, you don't like him what he did," that elder said. "Stop being mad at your dad now," that old man told me. "Your dad knew what you were going to do in the future and out of 14 children he picked you."**