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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this chapter, you should be able to

- explain how two-eyed seeing enables us to focus on the strengths of both Western knowledges and ways of knowing and Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing, centring Indigenous knowledges when working with Indigenous peoples
- outline and describe the 10 components of w/holistic practice and assessment
- identify components of assessment and practice that might be applied to case scenarios

Seeds of Thought

The Earth is a living organism in itself. The interdependence of human and other life forms is only possible if Earth itself is a healthy organism. (Erickson, 2018, p. 34)

The ultimate aim of Indigenous science is learning about understandings, responsibilities, and relationships, and celebrating those that humans establish with the world. It is about mutuality and reciprocity with the natural world, our responsibility to care for, sustain, and respect the rights of other living things, plants, animals, and the place in which we live. (Cajete, 2004, p. 45).

Our Connection to the Content

Social location and background are important features in professional and other relationships, including those with clients and colleagues. These refer to our experience of race or ethnicity, gender identity, age, socioeconomic class, and more. Our background and identity in relation to that of others is important when building trust and establishing a relationship. In our view, life experience is a part of our story as human beings and also has connections with our social location.

Tuula Heinonen. I enjoy continuing to write and work with students even though I have officially retired from full-time teaching work at the University of Manitoba. The chance to rethink assessment and practice using a w/holistic approach opened up new ways of thinking and seeing, moving from the models and guidelines that had been more familiar to me from my own education, reading, and experience to a broadened approach. In the social work positions I have held in health care in the past, time was a critical issue, as was the need to interview clients (patients in hospital) quickly. Little follow-up could be done because of time constraints; community resources were meant to take over any remaining needs and issues after discharge from hospital. So often, I appreciated the many issues, backgrounds, and stories of those I worked with in hospital settings and wished I had more opportunity to spend the time to hear and listen well to them. I know that such challenges remain for social workers where time is a crucial factor, but knowing about people's situations when they need our help is essential too, as assessment and practice work require it.

Deana Halonen (Anungishkodaye-Ikwe or Star Fire Woman). I am an Anishinaabe (Ojibway)/Métis of mixed heritage, raised in the traditional lands of the Ojibway Nations of Treaty Three Territory in Northwestern Ontario. Throughout my social work education, I was immersed in mainstream, Eurocentric social work theories, models, and approaches. It was in my social work practice with First Nations, Métis, Ojibway, Cree, and other Indigenous Peoples that I learned about Indigenous knowledges, ways of knowing, being, doing, and helping. This w/holistic assessment and practice model helps me to explore and understand people in ways that go much deeper than the assessment models studied during my social work education.

Introduction

Chapter 1 provided the context of assessment in social work practice from the work of social work scholars whose textbooks and articles have informed our thinking for many years. In this chapter, we adapt and move from these ideas, methods, and tools of assessment to a broader and more w/holistic model. We also define in some detail what is meant by each of the components, according to our perspectives and understanding. After defining and discussing the 10 components, we show how the components might be applied in relation to case scenarios presented in the chapters that follow.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the foundation of social work assessment was set in place over a century ago, drawn from practical experience, observation, and the application of concepts and theories that were often borrowed and adapted from psychology, sociology, education, economics, environmental studies, and human geography. These have evolved over the years as we added new perspectives and approaches developed by social work scholars and practitioners for use in social work.

Two-Eyed Seeing

In the w/holistic assessment model (see below), we draw on M'ikmaq spiritual Elder Albert Marshall's teachings of *Etuaptmumk*—two-eyed seeing—to pull together the strengths of both Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing and Western knowledges and ways of knowing to ensure increased universality and inclusivity (Marshall, 2020; TEDx, 2016). Working to see the world through both lenses, Western and Indigenous, builds greater capacity for all social workers who work with people of a multitude of ethnic and cultural backgrounds, histories, and traditions. Two-eyed seeing, or learning to see the strengths of the other, enables social workers to support all peoples, as they move beyond surviving to thrive through resistance and resilience. Incorporating foundational Indigenist principles and an anti-colonial stance supports social workers to engage in assessments that recognize the ongoing devastating impacts of colonial assimilative processes, push back against colonizing theories and tools, and instead focus on centring Indigenous knowledges and practices to create w/holistic understanding of communities, families, and individuals as they grow, transform, and learn to fly in a different way (Evans, 2016).

Today, we have a new form of economy: knowledge and education. As we pursue social work knowledge and education, we are reminded by M'ikmaq Elder Albert Marshall (2020) that “we must always be mindful that not just the cognitive domain must grow, the spiritual domain must grow as well” (7:50 min). In terms of social work helping relationships, the following excerpts from Thomas's (2016) poem *Etuawaptmumk* say it best: “You have two eyes. / Yet you only have one view ... With my [M'ikmaq] heart and eyes, I have a completely different view / ... Each of our worlds has its strengths / ... We bring to the table something that is able to change / ... That a lot can come from a [w/]holistic concept of the Earth / ... Open your other set of eyes / ... Take a pause and start breathing. Welcome to the world of two eyed seeing.”

Assessment and practice need to be grounded in concepts and ideas that help us to understand and make sense of people's situations. To aid in doing that, we have developed a 10 component model for w/holistic assessment. Each component offers help-

ful concepts, ideas, or theories that have been tested, observed, or learned in our lives and in social work practice settings. For example, ideas from ecology and biology (such as ecosystems and niches, balance and harmony), as well as newer perspectives that bring information about physical, spiritual, cultural, and natural environments into social work, have helped in broadening and enriching practice knowledge (e.g., Coates, 2003; Dominelli, 2012; Erickson, 2018; Hart, 2002). Further, as social workers, we have a responsibility to protect species threatened with extinction. The impact of climate change and Canada's role in and commitment to sustainable development need to be seen as a responsibility for the social work profession.



Two geese living in nature shared with humans

Photo by Tuula Heinonen

The COVID-19 pandemic (and in the future, likely other pandemics) affected our lives in a multitude of ways, and we cannot yet know adequately the significance of those changes. We have experienced changes in personal, workplace, and institutional public health practices; physical distancing; and the need to protect ourselves from a contagious virus in our environment. These affect the way we work and participate in activities each day. In our practice settings, we learn how our clients (the people to whom we provide services and with whom we work), their families, networks, and communities are affected. There are and will be many stories to tell and lessons to be learned from this significant period in our history and in our lives (see Dominelli, 2021).

We also believe that much can be learned from Indigenous knowledges about the significance of land and place to people's survival, identity, and attachments, and how these shape well-being (see Hart, 2010). We would be wise to become familiar with the work of those who study and write about the natural world and human relations within it because we are an integral part of these ourselves (e.g., Erickson, 2018; Suzuki, 2007).



PERSPECTIVES

After considering the ideas presented above, how do you think that bringing together different ways of knowing and knowledge from authors who write about our relationships to the natural world (such as Suzuki) can be helpful in social work? Give an example or two to explain your ideas.

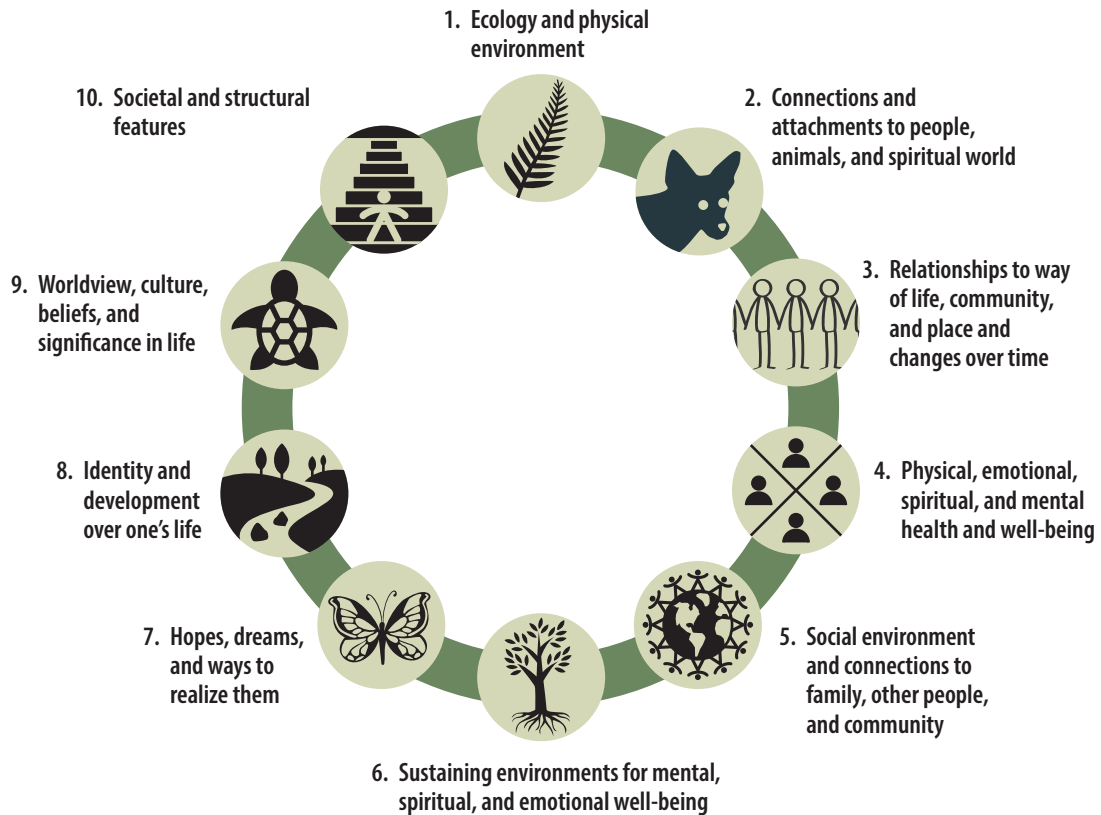
Ten Components: W/holistic Assessment and Practice

In this section, we discuss each of the 10 components in our w/holistic assessment and practice model and the description and meaning of these in relation to social work. This model shown in Figure 2.1, will be used as a guide in our discussions in this book and in relation to people's situations, issues, and challenges in life. Some of the components overlap, and some may be less relevant in certain situations or practice settings. They do, however, offer ideas to consider and to reflect upon in social work practice.

Ideas from ecology and biology have broadened and enriched practice knowledge.

Source: Photo by Dan on Unsplash



Figure 2.1 10 Components: A W/holistic Assessment and Practice Model

Throughout the book, we regularly refer to these 10 components. When we do, we include a visual cue to tie back to this model.



1. Ecology and physical environment

The term *ecology* refers to the web of life in which organisms interact with other organisms in their environment. Every organism experiences complex relationships in its environment with other organisms of its species and with organisms of other species (Malmstrom, 2010).

As mentioned in Chapter 1, ecosystems concepts in social work draw from biology to explain how people live and interact with their environments and one another. Concepts such as *habitat* and *niche* help us to understand the complex nature of relationships between people, ecology, and place. The habitat of a biological organism can be described as a place or places where resources exist that the organism needs to maintain itself; however, human complexity involves multiple needs for habitats and for resources in each, such as school, work, banks, and so on (Saleebey, 1997). A **social niche**, rather than an **ecological niche**, is used to describe places that are suitable and comfortable for people—for example, a place of one's own in a community (Saleebey, 1997).

We might also view a habitat or niche (Germain & Gitterman, 2008) as geography, access to land, air, and water, in the places where people live. If viewed from the

social niche In the strengths perspective (Saleebey, 1997), a social niche involves the human environment in which a person lives or interacts. A social niche can help people to meet their human needs for belonging, validation, social interaction, and support. However, a social niche may sometimes be a source of stress, conflict, or challenges.

ecological niche An ecological niche is easiest to understand if we liken it to a place that supports the life of an animal in a specific kind of ecology, such as in a rain forest. Animals and plants in the forest thrive on what their ecological niche offers, such as food, water, shelter, and protection. Some animals may migrate seasonally to survive better in extreme weather changes. People, however, are flexible and can adapt to a wide range of ecological niches. Further, they have developed ways to survive in many kinds of weather, and to some extent, when climate changes.

entrapping niche A setting or situation that is difficult to leave. It traps a person and hampers their growth and development, often adversely affecting self-esteem. For example, some women who experience abuse from intimate partners may be in an entrapping niche because they perceive leaving as impossible due to a loss of financial support for their children and themselves.



perspective of an animal, such as a mother bear and her cubs, they require a certain habitat to survive and thrive, one with suitable food, water, air, shelter, and, of course, other bears. If the environmental niche for the bears is satisfactory, it could be termed an *enabling niche* (Taylor, 1997). People, however, need much more if they are to survive and thrive. These concepts can be helpful when reflecting on people's needs in relation to the features of their habitats and niches.

Although humans have the same basic requirements too, the organization and complexity of their environments and lives result in additional needs. For example, those who live in rural lowland areas might farm land or raise animals to sell to earn a living. Their lives would be shaped by requirements related to the economy, climate, agricultural opportunities, and more. Also, their connections to people who live near them would be through formal and informal relationships, as well as being connected to the local and wider economy. In some parts of the world, living in a mountainous area shapes a different niche for people. Some might forage or grow suitable food when it is warmer and shelter in heated dwellings when the weather turns colder. In some other part of the world, they might operate a ski resort, for example, to earn income. A life there would depend on seasonal and economic factors, as well as others. An urban environment usually means living closer to amenities and having employment, transportation, and a network of institutions and services such as schools, hospitals, social services, police, and government. Unfortunately, dense concentrations of people can generate problems with waste disposal, pollution, and other adverse effects on environments. Such conditions could contribute to an **entrapping niche** (Taylor, 1997) that can be harmful and reduce the quality of air, water, and land for people, animals, and plants, which adversely affects the health and well-being of all.

In social work practice, we need to acknowledge how important it is to promote the well-being of the environment in concrete ways wherever we live because we rely on a healthy environment to survive. In our view, we must build into social work assessment practice an informed understanding of people within the contexts of niche, place, ecology, and environment.

2. Connections and attachments to people, animals, and spiritual world

The second component of our assessment model considers connections and attachments or relationships to the physical and social worlds that embody the environment that surrounds us. In this component, we consider people within our immediate, extended, and adoptive families; our close friends; our support and kinship networks; and mentors or Elders who are closest to us.

Social work's interest in social networks draws from the ecological perspective (Germain, 1979; Wilson, 2012), the bioecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), and ecological systems theory (Payne, 2020), which all focus on the interface between people and their environments (Tracy & Brown, 2017). The ecological environment is a nested arrangement of concentric circles each contained within the next, with the microsystem at the centre, expanding out to the mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem (Vélez-Agosto et al., 2017).

While Western (Eurocentric) social work generally views the microsystem or first circle as the nuclear family, Indigenous ways of thinking extend the concept of family much broader than parents and siblings to include a wide range of biologically and non-biologically close or adopted family, such as grandparents, aunts, uncles,

genogram a diagram that shows the relationships between family members (Tracy & Brown, 2017). Family members can construct a genogram with a practitioner if appropriate and suitable for the situation.

and cousins. In Indigenous families, it is not uncommon to see biologically connected family members fulfilling roles other than the formal ones assigned through familial linkages. For example, it is very common to see grandmothers, grandfathers, and even aunts and uncles fulfilling the role of mothers and fathers. Aunts and uncles can also at times fulfill the role of grandparents, with cousins fulfilling the role of siblings. It is also not uncommon to see people who are connected in other ways besides blood pulled into the family circle in various ways, including acting as siblings, parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. These connections can make creating a **genogram** with the currently accepted symbols and features an extremely difficult and sometimes impossible task.

In many Indigenous worldviews, children, sacred gifts from the Creator, are centred in this collaborative, nurturing environment. In the traditional ways of the Lakota people, for example, one of the three tribes of the Sioux Nation, children are raised by the *twai*, the family, and the community because a father and mother cannot correct that child. That is the responsibility of the aunts and uncles (Chief Orvel Looking Horse, 2015).

Also not uncommon is to see animals, birds, and even fish pulled into the family units and environment, living and treated as members of the family. Animals, in fact, are often centred in families; strong bonds or attachments are formed, with pets filling a central spot in daily activities. More and more, it is common for pets, such as cats, rabbits, birds, fish, and even some smaller dogs, to be centralized in the household, kept indoors at all times with no interaction with the outside and natural environment throughout their entire lives. Just like children and all of our loved ones, all are given names, their birthdays or dates of arrival into the family are celebrated, and they are mourned and deeply missed when they leave or pass away.

During the isolation imposed by COVID-19 and, particularly with the strict rules against hugging and kissing others, including family members and loved ones, pet adoptions were on the rise. In a time of social distancing between humans, you can still hug a pet, you can have them on your lap, and you can cuddle and play with them. “People are lonely. Animals bring that sense of comfort” (Zoratti, 2020, p. G1). If people are scared, anxious, or worried, but they have a pet they can stroke, snuggle, and possibly tell their troubles to, it can give them the sense of being needed and loved.

It is generally within this first concentric circle that the primary caregivers of the children within any family are found. In some cases, if the family is unable to provide that caretaking role, assistance may be sought within the broader community or in kinship networks. However, with the imposition of colonization and colonial legislation, policies, and practices, in contemporary times, we see record numbers of Indigenous children being removed from their family, extended family, community, and kinship networks, and placed in non-Indigenous homes and families for extensive periods of time, primarily because of the ongoing detrimental effects of poverty.

Among Indigenous groups across North America, there is a common understanding that everything that exists in the universe, including animals, plants, natural elements, spirits, planets, stars, the sun, the moon, even the Earth itself (also known as Mother Earth), is alive and animate (Cajete, 1994), sacred and connected (Cajete, 1994; Cordova, 2007; Deloria, 1995, 2006). In fact, a “sacred, mysterious, animate, creative substance or life force,” variously known as or called *usen*, *waken tanka*, *Gitchi-Manitou*, or Great Spirit is “widely understood to compose and animate all things. This substance-force is both matter and energy, form and spirit, stability and motion, reality and potentiality of all things” (Cordova, 2007, p. 107). This

interrelatedness of all things in the universe informs Indigenous conceptions that “humans (two-leggeds) share real relations of kinship with everything else” (Johnson, 2015, p. 34), not only with other humans, but also with everything within the more-than-human world (LaDuke, 1999).

Indigenous creation stories all describe how earth, water, wind, plants, and animals were created first, and human beings were formed last. However, unlike the story of Genesis, in which God instructs humans to subdue and rule the Earth, the Great Spirit of Indigenous creation stories instructed the “plants, animals, and elements, who are all animate and sentient, to take pity on their younger human siblings, and to teach them how to live successfully and ethically with the rest of Creation” (Johnson, 2015, p. 35). The emerging orientations of respect, humility, and openness to the more-than-human world and the lessons it offers extends to notions of relatedness, universal kinship, and its associated notion of interconnection. Similar to the ripples caused by a stone thrown into a pool of water, it is recognized that the actions of one entity or being within a system will have an effect, however small, on everything else within that system (Battiste & Youngblood Henderson, 2000; Cajete, 2004).

Intrinsically built into the idea among many Indigenous Peoples of North America that everything in the universe is alive and interrelated, and the importance of understanding and maintaining relations of reciprocity with the rest of the world or cosmos, is the use of circular models to describe the w/holistic relationships observed over millennia of deep engagement with natural ecologies (Rice, 2005). Medicine Wheels, Sacred Hoops, and the Circle of Life are prominent circular models that remain culturally significant among many First Nations throughout Canada and North America. Circular models are usually conceptualized as a circle with a centre; four sections representing cardinal directions (north, east, south, and west); and three additional multidimensional directions representing up (to the sky world), down (to Mother Earth), and forward (all those that will come after me) and backward (all those that came before me).

The four cardinal directions are also used to discuss the passing of the seasons (winter, spring, summer, and autumn), the four aspects of self (spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional), the four human races (white, red, yellow, and Black), and the four sacred medicines (tobacco, sweetgrass, cedar, and sage) (Brant Castellano, 2000; Dapice, 2006). A Medicine Wheel is an excellent conceptual tool for emphasizing the interconnected, metaphorical nature of the elements it represents (air, water, wind, and fire; minerals; animal nations, plant nations, bird nations, fish nations, human nations, etc.) as well as the need for maintaining balance among these elements. All are animate, have spirits, are sacred, and are interconnected.



3. Relationships to way of life, community, and place and changes over time

In the third component of our w/holistic assessment model sits relationships. In this circle, the focus is on community, way of life, culture and place.

Indigenous creation stories across Turtle Island, despite their differences, promote a widespread understanding that the Earth is our Mother, a living entity, usually identified as female, upon which we are utterly dependant for survival, and from which springs all the gifts of creation (Cordova, 2007). As Dr. Caroline Kenny, Indigenous music therapist, reminds us, we are all intricately connected, in fact, “we are an ecology ... Like the fields of daisies, we get conditions from the earth, from the

people around us, from our environment” (as quoted in Dicks & Halonen, 2019, p. 120). We are energy systems because we are “part of nature” (Dicks & Halonen, 2019, p. 120). We are not autonomous, self-sufficient beings as European traditions believe. Rather, “we are rooted just like the trees” (Forbes, 2001, p. 291).

For Indigenous Peoples, essentially there are no surroundings, separate and apart from us. As humans, we are rooted just like the trees, the lungs of Mother Earth, forever connected to the rest of the world and the ecology in which we live.

I can lose my hands and still live. I can lose my legs and still live. I can lose my eyes and still live ... But if I lose the air I breathe, I die. If I lose the sun, I die. If I lose the earth, I die. If I lose the water, I die. If I lose the plants and animals, I cannot survive. All these things are more a part of me, more essential to my every breath, than is my body. (Forbes, 2001, p. 291)

Indigenous Peoples see this living world as a fantastic and beautiful creation, engendering extremely powerful feelings of gratitude, humility, love, and thankfulness for the gifts of the Creator, and the earth and universe. In fact, an Indigenous code of ethics requires that

each morning upon rising, and each evening before sleeping, [we] give thanks for the life within you and for all life, for the good things the Creator has given you and others, and for the opportunity to grow a little more each day. Consider your thoughts and actions of the past day and seek for the courage and strength to be a better person. Seek for the things that will benefit everyone [today and for] the next seven generations to come. (Bopp et al., 1988, p. 77)

We need to be mindful of how actions taken today will affect the future.

Common across many Indigenous nations, tribes, and peoples around the world, the seventh-generation principle, an ancient Haudenasaunee (Iroquois) philosophy, is usually applied to decisions being made about energy, water, and natural resources and ensuring their sustainability for seven generations into the future. But just as importantly, this principle applies to relationships, maintaining a duty to their family, clan, and nation, and ensuring that decisions result in sustainable relationships across the next seven generations who are not yet born but who will inherit the world (Indigenous Corporate Training, 2020).

The basis of an Indigenous worldview referred to as “self-in-relation” (Graveline, 1998, p. 57) includes several key constructs—immanence or respect for all life forms, wholeness, interconnectedness, and balance. These constructs represent the inclusion of all aspects of a person’s inner and outer life and imply that we require a balanced attribution of energy, attention, and care between all four aspects of a human being—specifically, the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual—and between all related systems. From balance emerges justice, peace, and harmony (Hart, 2002); living in harmony is a necessity, because failure to do so puts people, communities, and the environment in positions of vulnerability and danger. Harmony is health whereas disharmony causes malfunctions in other parts of systems, be it at the individual, the community, or other levels of society (Loiselle & McKenzie, 2006).

This circular nature “ensures that the whole is addressed as it informs us that all its elements are related to each other” and that “action or work on one element leads to potential change in any other element” (Mehl-Madrona, 2003, p. 99). To reach their full potential, people must care equally for each facet, and this will, in turn, enhance the well-being of all created things. In this way, the Medicine Wheel

is a proactive and empowering approach meant to awaken individuals into acknowledging and accepting responsibility for their behaviour and relationships, becoming accountable to their family, community, and society, including both past and future seven generations. It can aid in the transformation of individuals' impulses to control others, situations, and the environment and steer us toward the acquisition of self-discipline or self-governance (Morrisseau, 1998).

In social work and w/holistic assessments, the Medicine Wheel paradigm challenges us to shift from “linear, mechanistic cause-effect models of thinking” (Graveline, 1998, p. 72), which currently dominate Eurocentric assessments and to “embrace the circular, ever evolving dynamic captured in the concept that all life is a circle” (p. 78). Social workers and social work assessments must respect the world in which we all live because we are borrowing it from future generations. Making decisions that support keeping cultural practices, languages, and ceremonies alive are essential if those to come are to continue to practise Indigenous cultures.



4. Physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental health and well-being

Health and well-being, in all their forms, are closely connected to satisfaction, happiness, and quality of life. Well-being is not just about having positive physical conditions and freedom from illness and disease, although these can be very helpful. The nature and perceived quality of the place where we live can contribute to good health and a better quality of life, providing the nourishment to grow and thrive as human beings and to experience happiness. A good quality of life is more achievable in such an environment rather than one that is unhealthy, dirty, or incapable of sustaining life well. Our view of what health means is bound up in a number of connected concepts. Physical health; mental, emotional, and spiritual well-being; and a sense of connection with a worldview or belief system are all necessary to wellness, to satisfaction, happiness, and life quality. Antonovsky (1979) stressed that health is much more complex than disease. He was interested in figuring out what constitutes health. Population health holds that social determinants, living conditions, and inequalities in health related to socioeconomic inequality influence everyone's health and well-being and that a range of factors and resources are required to attain health and well-being (e.g., Raphael, 2010). These include a range of factors, such as living conditions, particularly in childhood, food security, housing, work, and available supports for health and social services (Raphael, 2010). All of these and more shape individual, family, and community health and well-being. Mental and emotional health are also important as these are often linked to other determinants of health. So too are structural factors in society, such as oppression, marginalization, social isolation, and inequality whether because of age, gender, race, ethnicity, different ability, or others (see McGibbon, 2012; Mullaly & Dupré, 2019). In fact, most of these are interconnected. For example, we know that insufficient nourishing food and poor housing can affect the physical and mental health of people, not only at the time they are experienced but also later in life.

Also important to note is that we all have some degree of health, even if diagnosed with a serious illness, because people cannot be placed into two categories—ill or well (Antonovsky, 1979). We believe that health includes the body, spirit, mind, and emotions; depending on how these are experienced at different times in life, they can contribute to satisfaction, happiness, and life quality. There are ways that people can adapt and change to meet life's challenges for better health, and those who cannot may be able to find accommodations and other adaptations that help.



5. Social environment and connections to family, other people, and community

In the past, social workers and other professionals in human services held the view that people were influenced by their environments, but they did not influence these environments. The difficulties and troubles that a person experienced were treated as if the problems were in them; thus, the focus had to be on assessing and treating the person. The idea that people were in reciprocal relationships and actively engaging with others to affect their environments, was not recognized in social work until early social work theorists (e.g., Gordon, 1969; Hearn, 1958) drawing from biological systems concepts, began to view relationships between people and their environments differently. Simply stated, they observed that individuals who were engaged with close family members (micro level); within workplace, school, and social group settings (mezzo level); and in more distant relationships with public institutions, organizations, and government (macro level) were not only shaped by but were actively shaping environments across and within these levels. The different levels are usually represented in concentric circles with an individual (and often close family) at the centre. Interactions (or transactions) can occur between and among those in the inner circle and from micro, mezzo, or macro levels, where other people, groups, and institutions are located. Change can be experienced in both the individual and the environment.

In social work, ecological or ecosystems concepts have been useful in understanding the influence of social environments on people. Ecosystems theory has emphasized individual adaptation and fit of persons in their environment as key concepts (Kondrat, 2002). More recently, social work authors (e.g., Akesson et al., 2017; Zapf, 2010) noted the absence of discussion about the physical (including natural) environment in the social work literature, which limits the ecosystems approach in practice. Although we understand that much more than the social environment is influential in people's lives, we know that social relationships with other people, groups, and communities are significant and meaningful.

Connections to groups and communities are acknowledged by many Indigenous people who introduce themselves both by a spirit name given to them through ceremony and strong connections with the spirit world and by the clan into which they were born. A person's clan identifies how they are connected with others in a particular place and related to a family group of people. This practice helps others to know about a person's connections to family, community, and place. Their spirit name, which differs from the name used in public documents and records, identifies who they are in the spiritual realm and assists them in actualizing their purpose in this physical realm here on Mother Earth. "Names also embody a sense of belonging to a place, coexistence with the natural world and the longstanding relationship between a People and their place; they anchor the past to the present" (Indigenous Corporate Training, 2016).

Common also across Indigenous cultures are family structures based on clan systems. Long before Indigenous Peoples were placed on Mother Earth, the Creator told all of the animals that humans would be coming and that they would not be able to provide for themselves. The animals all agreed that they would take care of the people and show them how to live in harmony with all of Creation. The animals promised to sacrifice themselves as food so that the people wouldn't starve, offer their skins so that the people would be warm, and teach the people what medicines and ceremonies to use to heal themselves (KBIC Health System, n.d.). Indigenous Peoples arrived, and the animals kept their word and provided the people with all they needed to survive.

Reciprocally, the people were very thankful for the animals and their generosity. The animals were teachers, and the people watched carefully. They understood that each animal species has a significant role to play and that together the animals achieve an incredible balance. Indigenous Peoples organized their communities based on the relationships they saw with the animals around them. It is this social structure that forms Indigenous clan systems. Indigenous family groups were assigned the roles and responsibilities of a particular animal that lived in their region. This then became their clan. Within this clan system, communities established a balance of power and the specialization of skills and responsibilities.

Before European contact, Indigenous Peoples did not use family names; their clan identity served this purpose. People of your clan are considered to be your brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, and nieces and nephews, even when they are younger than you. Each person's responsibilities include looking after the relatives of their clan. When someone of your clan visits your community, you make sure that they are taken care of. Doing these things brings honour to your clan and to you.

Along with a spirit name, clan membership is an essential part of an Indigenous identity. Colonization brought severe disruptions to the clan systems, resulting in many Indigenous people not knowing their clan. Today, more and more people are learning about their clans and their ascribed responsibilities in ceremonies and within communities. Researching family, church, treaty, band, or school records sometimes reveals this kind of information. Additionally, offering tobacco to a spiritual person who can seek the information needed can result in being reconnected with a clan or being adopted into a clan.



6. Sustaining environments for mental, spiritual, and emotional well-being

Animals, plants, and human beings can thrive only in an environment that nourishes and sustains them. They all need the basic necessities of life: an optimal supply of clean water, suitable climate, food, and a healthy and a health-promoting environment. According to Suzuki (2007), “each of us is quite literally created by air, water, soil and sunlight, and what cleanses and renews these fundamental elements of life is the web of living things on the planet. Furthermore, as social and spiritual creatures, we need love and spirit if we are to lead rich, full lives” (p. 7). Like Suzuki, we agree on the need to protect the complex web of life on Earth and to recognize that human beings have not been living in harmony with nature for some time.

Social work writers are producing an increasing number of books and articles (e.g., Besthorn, 2002; Coates, 2003; Coates & Gray, 2012; Dominelli, 2012) that call upon us to pay attention, take action to heal the Earth, and treat nature with the kindness and respect that she requires and deserves. Serious evidence of damage to our Earth is apparent, from climate change that melts polar ice, affecting animals and the lives of Inuit (Skura, 2016), to increased pollution that blocks the skies over overpopulated cities and creates illness (World Health Organization, 2018) and pollution of waterways and oceans by garbage and other material (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, 2020). Economic activity and unbridled growth in manufacturing and consumerism have created an untenable situation in which ecosystems have become unhealthy and are suffering.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had some interesting effects on reducing the levels of air pollution in places where it is usually very high (e.g., New Delhi and Beijing);

however, as lockdowns and regulations to stay at home are relaxed, the skies will likely again become clogged with pollution unless measures are implemented to change the situation (Gardiner, 2020).

Indigenous Peoples understand that all things in the universe (also called Creation) have spirit. All the plants, trees, water, wind, rocks, and mountains, as part of Creation, are sacred and interconnected. Healing is understood in terms of the spiritual basis of all things and their connections. When Indigenous Peoples put tobacco down as an offering to these things called Creation, their spirit is making that connection so that they will be able to get that life source from them. This way of healing is w/holistic, based on an understanding of the interconnectedness of all life and the importance of balance and harmony in all of Creation (KBIC Health System, n.d.).

Indigenous Healers and Elders say that the Great Spirit works through everyone, so that everyone and everything that was put here is healing—the trees, the earth, the animals, the water. In the past, knowledge of the medicines was a natural part of everyone's learning. Just like the animals, people knew what plant medicines were for and how to prepare offerings for them. The familiarity with the healing properties of the plants that grew around us was empowering. It was something that belonged to the community. When we needed special help beyond what was common knowledge, we looked to the Medicine People and the Healers. We believe that there is value in learning about Indigenous beliefs as it adds to readers' understanding.

Traditional Indigenous healing is the restoring of balance in all aspects of life, physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. There needs to be harmony and balance within and between families, communities, and nations, just as there is in all of Creation. When that harmony and balance is lacking, sickness ensues (KBIC Health System, n.d.).

Great respect must be shown for the plants, sacred items and ceremonies used in healing. Although traditions and ceremonies differ from across Indigenous nations, they all take care of the spirit and the connections with all Creation. The seven sacred or grandfather teachings of the Anishabek (Ojibway) peoples, for example, remind us that all of Creation gives us teachings, teaching us about love, kindness, caring, sharing, truth, honesty, and respect. They remind us that we have to take care of Aki (Mother Earth) and each other, and make sure that everything the Creator gave Aki will always be here for future generations. Each of these seven sacred laws or grandfather teachings has an animal chosen to represent it and remind us how to treat one another, our children, and all of creation. See the video entitled *Our 7 Ojibway Teachings* (Sagkeeng CFS, 2014).

In one planet inhabited by billions of people and trillions of organisms, each individual or thing has an essential role to play—to protect and respect Mother Earth and all of creation is the innate right of all of us. There is a serious synergy of togetherness required for peaceful communities surrounded by living organisms and non-living things; we all need and rely on each other. In social work and social work assessments, we must rethink our relationship with the environment. Changes that we think may be beneficial to the environment can turn out to be disastrous. Environmental technologies must be given priority in order for more positive changes in the environment. We must also recognize how technology affects natural changes, often to a problematic extent. Mutations, for example, that are not matched by natural checks and balances produce changes in the evolution of species in all nations—humans, animals, birds, fish, insects, trees, plants for food, plants for medicines, even viruses.



Animals, plants and human beings can only thrive in an environment that nourishes and sustains them.

Photo by Tuula Heinonen



7. Hopes, dreams, and ways to realize them

Indigenous Peoples have developed a variety of ways to affirm and uphold their reciprocal responsibilities. Ceremonies, for example, are a concrete means of reciprocity considered necessary in maintaining balance and sacred relationships with everyone and everything (Rice, 2005). Indigenous rituals are frequently based on “the reaffirmation of the relationship of humans to the Creation ... our gratitude for our part in Creation and for the gifts given to us by the Creator is continuously reinforced in Midewiwin lodges [of Anishinabek or Ojibway peoples], Sun dance ceremonies, world renewal ceremonies, and many others” (LaDuke, 2005, p. 12). Among Indigenous groups across North America is the notion that life, consciousness, agency, and spirituality are not restricted to human beings. There exists a common understanding that everything in the universe, including animals, plants, natural elements, spirits, planets, stars, the sun, the moon, wind, water, and fire, all possess energy, are alive, and are animate. Our Elders, parents, grandparents, and mentors all have things to teach us about how to live well and maintain balance and harmony with all of our relations. These teachings can come to us in a wide variety of ways.

Spiritual forces and entities are understood to permeate all things in the world, and through exploration of both inner and outer landscapes via dreams, visions, and ceremonies, it is possible to commune with these entities. Through communion with these spirits, human beings can gain knowledge (Cajete, 1994; Deloria, 1995). Often in dreams (both daydreams and nighttime dreams), birds, animals, trees, rocks, or other Creation spirits will speak to us, offering friendship and advice, revealing the future, or sharing information that we could not possibly derive from even the most intense observations of the physical world. It is for this reason that dreams and visions are considered so important among spiritually-grounded communities and ceremonies such as vision quests, fasts, sun dances, and sweat lodges are conducted and attended.

Hope for the future is essential in life as it holds for us the promise of better things to come and of realizing dreams that may feel impossible to reach. People of all ages have the imagination to dream. Ideas and plans for change come from dreams. Hope can help give us strength to look ahead and visualize dreams that become real.

For many who have experienced serious illness, hope for recovery and a return to life with family and friends again can help the healing process. Those who have been ill with the COVID-19 virus in intensive care units spoke on television news-casts about how important hope was for them. They dreamed of returning to their homes and families, on their most difficult days in hospital. For some, their hopes and dreams were realized when, with much clapping and well wishes from hospital staff, they finally left through the hospital doors.

We must also hold hope for better health of our Earth and all of life on it. “The process of building a society that is based on compassion and care for the Earth and all its beings, human and otherwise, is not something that can happen only in the future” (Weller & Wilson, 2018, p. ix). It must start now.



8. Identity and development over one's life

Everyone, as they grow toward adolescence, begins to experience themselves as individual persons and develops their own identities. The identity of a person may not be perceived in the same way by others in the person's life. We may even be surprised by the way others see us.

Identity may change over time, especially as one reaches adulthood. The need to complete an education, find a job, and enter into intimate relationships further develops one's identity. A person's identity can be expressed in the way they dress, behave, and speak. Attributes such as personality, culture or ethnicity, spiritual beliefs, sexual orientation, vocation, leisure pursuits, talents, and other features also compose a person's identity. A group or a community of people can have an identity as well, such as an Inuit family group; an Indigenous community in Ivalo, Finland; or an animal rights group in a large North American city. Sometimes others might view all members of a group as having a common identity, but this assumption is often incorrect because each person is unique and has many other facets to their identity.

Caring and supportive relationships with parents, grandparents, other family members, friends, teachers, social workers, or Elders or spiritual leaders can help a person to experience values and principles to live by and behaviour that will lead to changes in an individual's identity.

It is important to note that gang membership does not always ruin the future of a young person. In fact, there tends to be movement out of gangs as a person begins to take on adult roles and, with that, different views of their identity (Decker et al., 2014). As the strengths approach teaches us, we must always view all people as having skills and talents and being capable of using their resources to change their situations and live better lives. For example, a young man who has committed property crimes, and is labelled as a thief and a criminal, can make changes in his life that will eventually reflect a different identity. Labelling and its effects on a person can damage their self-identity and lower self-esteem, increasing the potential for problems to occur. Alternatively, a street gang member, as he reaches adulthood, may decide to leave the gang and turn his life around. He finds the courage to return to school, start a job, and develop new relationships with people who support and encourage him. His self-identity and the way others perceive him changes as he moves into new roles in life.



PERSPECTIVES

Consider how you self-locate within both your social and your physical environment today. In doing this, you might consider such aspects of your worldview as gender, age and age cohort, life experiences, physical and mental health status, place and role in family of origin, experience of disability, spirituality or religion, marital or partner status, parental status, education, profession or occupation, socioeconomic status, employment status, primary ethnic or racial identity, other ethnic or racial identities, community or region or country where socialized, country of birth, immigration status, and so on.

Finally, consider how your self-location might impact you in your social work practice with settlers (non-Indigenous peoples), newcomers, and Indigenous Peoples.

Indigenous perspectives on identity or personhood tend to situate actions in time and explain that, for Indigenous Peoples, the concept of *peoplehood* is complicated and complex as it ties people to a larger collective of people. TEDx (2016) reminds us that for Indigenous Peoples and youth, in particular, identity has four essential components: (1) acknowledgement that language shapes worldview, (2) ceremonial cycles, (3) territory, and (4) sacred history (Marshall, 2013). Two-eyed seeing helps us to go between Indigenous and non-Indigenous worlds, where understandings of who we are in relation to everyone and everything around us can be quite different. This is the reality for Indigenous persons who live in two worlds—for example, one



Worldview is broader than a cultural perspective, but culture is one component of a worldview. Others might be spirituality, values, a belief system, or the result of living in one's family or community.

Culture refers to a group of common features, such as language, customs, diet, rituals, and dress, that distinguishes one group of people from another. It is often an important part of a worldview because it includes ideals in values, beliefs, and expectations for behaviour to live by. Usually, these develop and are adapted to changing conditions over time but are still identifiable to those who belong to the same cultural group.

world is their clan and Indigenous community home and in another different values and practices prevail (e.g., a large urban workplace).

9. Worldview, culture, beliefs, and significance in life

The term **worldview** is the way “an individual or group thinks about and interprets the world around them” (Open Sociology Dictionary, n.d.). It is a complex and multifaceted concept. We might use it to explain why we see things as we do or behave in certain ways or what is important to us in life. It can be difficult to understand a worldview that differs from our own because it is unfamiliar.

Culture is not static and changes over time as circumstances change. The culture of people who live in rural Mongolia reflects not only these features but also their natural environment, geography, forms of livelihood, and kinship. Those who live in urban areas will have adapted, at least to some degree, to a more complex environment that is differently organized and dependent on resources, such as food, from outside their cities.

It may be difficult to describe your own culture because it was socially engrained from childhood and is part of your being. It is only by comparing across features such as practices of childrearing, traditional medicines, gender ideals, unacceptable behaviour, and views on aging with a different cultural group that your own culture becomes clearer.

In Canada, Indigenous groups across the country are in the process of reclaiming cultures that have been eroded by colonization and the effects of European domination and settlement in Canada, as well as the ongoing assimilative policies and practices used in relations with Indigenous Peoples. Resurgence efforts are in motion to regain cultural knowledge, practices, and artefacts that appeared to have been lost. Some of the masks and other sacred artefacts and ceremonial items that had been removed and placed in museums far away during the ban on Indigenous ceremonies are now being returned to their rightful places.

People's values and belief systems are often woven into spiritual beliefs that guide their expectations of behaviour for themselves and others. They may be unique to a particular cultural group, community, or region, where they are promoted and maintained. Members of the cultural group who resist or ignore local beliefs and values may be reprimanded or corrected in some way. Worldview and culture are often deeply held, and their significance to people needs to be understood by social workers as they can offer resources to clients that need to be explored. However, not everyone is strongly attached to a worldview or culture in which they grew up or that they have experienced. Care needs to be taken not to make assumptions in order to avoid misunderstandings.



10. Societal and structural features

In the early years of social work (starting in the mid-1800s), practice was based on moral guidelines from Christian religious values and ideas about helping others and who was deserving of help (Jennissen & Lundy, 2008). The people providing social services were primarily women referred to as *friendly visitors* who assessed whether an individual or a family was eligible for help. The prevailing belief at the time was that people's faults and shortcomings were generally to blame for them being poor or in difficulty. Those who were viewed as blameless for their circumstances, for example, because of illness or some other hardship that had occurred, were seen as deserving of help.

From the late 1800s, in England and North America, some service providers developed a greater understanding of how social factors and effects of industrialization in cities were connected with adversity, discrimination, exploitation, and ill-health in people's lives. They were part of the settlement house movement, worked primarily in poorer urban areas, provided services in communities, initiated programs, and took action to meet the needs of people in cities (Irving et al., 1995).

The legacy of the settlement house movement shaped community work, a field that receives less attention today as services focus on specific populations and issues and social workers are stratified into distinct fields of practice. Social workers on the front lines of practice know that injustice and inequality exist and that there is acceptance of some degree of inequality in North America.

It is well known that social and structural factors create and cause harm and hurt many groups of people. They can exacerbate problems in people's lives—for example, physical violence because of racism, sexism, ageism, heterosexism, or poverty. Poor wages for work done by newcomers, lack of mental health services for those who need them, substandard housing without regulation, and much more cannot be the fault of those adversely affected. Injustice, inequality, oppression, and marginalization are real. Numerous books by social work scholars (e.g., Bailey & Brake, 1980; Bishop, 2015; Fook, 1993; Kennedy-Kish (Bell) et al., 2017; Mullaly & West, 2018) have addressed such issues and call for social workers to take action at all levels of need for social change. The Canadian Social Work *Code of Ethics* (CASW, 2005) regarding “Value 2: Pursuit of Social Justice,” states,

Social workers believe in the obligation of people, individually and collectively, to provide resources, services and opportunities for the overall benefit of humanity and to afford them protection from harm. Social workers promote social fairness and the equitable distribution of resources, and act to reduce barriers and expand choice for all persons, with special regard for those who are marginalized, disadvantaged, vulnerable, and/or have exceptional needs. Social workers oppose prejudice and discrimination against any person or group of persons, on any grounds, and specifically challenge views and actions that stereotype particular persons or groups. (Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) Code of Ethics © 2005. <http://www.casw-acts.ca/en/Code-of-Ethics>, p. 5)

This quotation, although not as strongly worded as it could be, points to how we must practise in the face of social injustice. We need to know how to work with those who face social injustice and reflect thoughtfully and deeply on what we can and must do to eradicate oppression, marginalization, and social exclusion in our society. It should not be the sole responsibility of those who endure the worst of social injustice to speak and act against it; we need to act as allies, advocates, and supports in the work for social change.

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Reflection and Discussion Questions

1. How do you see your relationship to the Earth? Give an example.
2. What do you think are some important ways that a person's social and physical environment affect health and well-being? Draw a diagram to show your understanding of the connections.
3. Many traditional Indigenous teachings, such as the seven grandfather teachings, are represented by an animal often because of one or more of their attributes. To which of the attributes of the animals described above in this chapter do you feel a strong association? Say what it is that makes you feel that way.
4. In reflecting on your identity and how it shapes you as a social worker, how do you think it poses challenges and opportunities for you in working across the differences between you and your clients?
5. How do you view social work's role in integrating environmental issues and knowledge into everyday practice? How do you think social work education could respond?

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