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# Conceptualizations of Wisdom in the Native American Community

Lamar Smith

*Antioch University - Santa Barbara*

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Conceptualizations of Wisdom in the Native American Community

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of  
Antioch University, Santa Barbara in  
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
Degree of Doctorate of Psychology in  
Clinical Psychology

By

LAMAR SMITH, M.A.

Dissertation Committee

---

Juliet Rohde-Brown, Ph.D.  
Chair

---

Steve Kadin, Ph.D., ABPP  
Second Faculty

---

Dustin Weissman, M.A.  
Student Reader

---

Arieahn Matamonasa-Bennett, Ph.D.  
External Expert

## **Abstract**

This qualitative study examined implicit theories of wisdom in a sample of adult individuals who identified as Native American. The research question focused on definitions of wisdom as they exist in the Native American Community. A total of eight participants were asked to answer the question “What is wisdom and how does one become wise?”. Interviews approximately 60 minutes in length revealed several themes in participant’s conceptualizations of wisdom. The study revealed that participants believed wisdom to be based on fundamental building blocks of a worldview of interconnectedness, a collectivist social structure, and an individual value system promoting of personal development.

Participants outline the worldview of interconnectedness as involving components of caretaking, both of others and of nature, and connections through a higher power, which reportedly lead to understandings of the consequences of being out of balance with their connection to nature and others and a desire to use knowledge for the greatest good possible.

Participants pointed to a collectivist social structure comprised of family, elders, and the larger community as providing a sense of context for understanding one’s place in life, facilitating the sharing of knowledge from one generation to the next, often through the medium of storytelling, and community structures and roles that promote the growth of wisdom.

Participants reported an individual value system promoting personal development as a central component to the development of wisdom including learning from mistakes, life experience, and learning patience.

Discussions of the findings include recommendations for therapist and educators in fostering wisdom in their students and their clients.

The electronic version of this dissertation is available free at Ohiolink ETD Center, [www.ohiolink.edu/etd](http://www.ohiolink.edu/etd)

Keywords: Wisdom, Native American

## **Dedication**

To my family and friends, who have been constant sources of encouragement in my life. With special thanks to my mother for her unconditional love, unwavering support and continual sacrifice to provide for my education.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank every teacher, lecturer, and professor who has contributed to my education. Your hard work and dedication to passing on your knowledge has impacted my life in ways that I may never fully comprehend. Know that your efforts are never in vain and that you have a lasting and profound impact on every student that enters your classroom.

I want to give special thanks to my dissertation committee who so graciously agreed to volunteer their time to assist me in completing this dissertation. Your assistance has been invaluable and I greatly appreciate it.

I would also like to thank the participants in this study who agreed to speak with me, without incentive, and share their culture, personal experiences, deeply held beliefs, and traditional stories. I recognize the amount of trust and responsibility that comes with this level of disclosure and I am deeply grateful for your trust in me. Each of you are wonderful individuals and I enjoyed speaking with each and every one of you and I truly feel wiser for the experience.

## Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
What Is Wisdom: Review of the Literature.....	5
<i>Positive Psychology</i> .....	5
<i>Wisdom as Mature Personality Development</i> .....	7
<i>Wisdom as Relativistic and Dialectical Thinking</i> .....	8
<i>Wisdom as Pragmatic Intelligence</i> .....	11
<i>The Berlin Model</i> .....	11
<i>The Balance Theory of Wisdom</i> .....	12
Common Conceptualizations of Wisdom.....	16
What does Wisdom do for us?.....	17
Teaching People to be Wise.....	19
Native American Traditions and Ways of Knowing.....	21
Special Considerations When Working in the Native American Community...	24
Statement of the Problem.....	26
Methods.....	27
Results.....	30
Discussion.....	56

Appendix A – Information Document.....	73
Appendix B – Informed Consent Document.....	74
Appendix C – Demographic Questionnaire.....	78

## Conceptualizations of Wisdom in the Native American Community

### Introduction

Our world is clearly well into the information age. There are 24 hour news networks, satellite communication networks that allow us to speak to anyone regardless of distance, and the internet which has become a repository of all human knowledge both profound and mundane. Surely there is access to unprecedented amounts of knowledge but knowledge can be dangerous when used incorrectly. Knowledge is common, but wisdom seems to be a much rarer commodity.

Wisdom has been examined as a philosophical and religious construct (Vaughan, 2002) but very little research has been done looking at wisdom as a psychological construct. So what is wisdom and what does it do for us? Many of the most prominent opinions on these matters are reviewed here. Popular definitions of wisdom are differentiated from psychological conceptualizations and the reliability of public judgments of wise behavior are addressed. Also included are some practical tips for teaching clients to be wise based on existing research. The aim of this paper is to inform the reader of the different constructs of wisdom and provide practical advice for implementing wisdom-based teaching programs.

Psychology has attempted to define wisdom in many ways. Erikson defined it in developmental terms (Shedlock & Cornelius, 2003), cognitive

theories paint it as a specialized knowledge with advanced capacity for decision making (Ruisel, 2005), and most recently positive psychology has included aspects of moral judgment into our conceptualizations of wisdom (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). This debate has raged on in the psychological literature, but has the debate become so scientific that the concept has actually strayed from the public's implicit theories of wisdom?

Psychology contains many underlying assumptions that affect the way that mental health services are approached, (LaFromboise, 1988; Lewis-Fernandez & Kleinman, 1994; McCabe, 2008) but in some ways, psychotherapy could be described as the art of transmitting wisdom from the therapist to the client. The client comes to the therapist with the assumption that the therapist has unique insight into the best methods of leading a successful life, and the therapist seeks to impart this knowledge on the client. By examining what wisdom is, perhaps one day an effective way of transmitting it in therapy to our clients can be found.

To begin to work towards this goal let us first examine the question, what do people think wisdom is? To do this, I wanted to focus my study on one specific culture. Wisdom would seem to be a culturally bound concept, so for the sake of being able to draw any useful conclusion regarding the nature of wisdom, I thought it best to focus my view. I also wanted to examine a culture that has a history of valuing wisdom. Cultures that value wisdom are likely to have clearer

conceptualizations of what wisdom is versus cultures who do not value wisdom. My choice to study the Native American cultures is based on the fact that they are a set of cultures that seems to have a strong set of values pertaining to wisdom and have a strong history of transmitting wisdom from generation to generation (Morris, 1996; Schneider, 2003). In addition to this strong set of wisdom related values, the Native American community has a strong history of enduring wisdom and cultural traditions that have survived despite numerous historical attempts to eradicate these cultural markers. This speaks to the importance and enduring nature of these traditions within Native American communities and their possible utility to non-Native American communities as well. (A. Matamonasa-Bennett, personal communication, November 6, 2012)

Wisdom has long been a powerful concept in collective human consciousness. It has been personified in everything from fairy tales, books, films, and even embodied in our most honored religious parables. It is a much sought after trait but it tends to be extremely elusive.

In many ancient societies wisdom was often associated with education, as only those who were of noble birth and who were being groomed for political leadership were educated (Clayton & Birren, 1980). Today, however, wisdom's connection to education is far more tenuous. As Sternberg (2008a) argued, American society today uses education more as a means of credentialing and less as a means of learning. Students move from one grade to the next, learning

information with little instruction on how that knowledge is best put to use. Our education system focuses on the memorization of facts and performance on standardized tests, producing students who are more concerned with their grades and test scores than the comprehensiveness of their overall education.

This concern on the part of the student is not without justification. If one wants to get into a good college, one needs a combination of good grades and good test scores. Consider, for example, two high school students. One student spends time learning only the material that is known to be on a standardized test. The other studies any number of subjects that catch his interest. His knowledge is more varied but not necessarily as in depth on the subjects that are found on the standardized test. In this scenario the first student is more likely to have a better performance on the test despite that fact that the second student has a more comprehensive education.

This educational incentive to focus only on material found on standardized tests goes beyond the classroom and the admissions office. It has manifested itself much more generally in our society as a whole. The world is in an information age in which knowledge is viewed as a commodity. Like any other commodity it is often bought and sold. Knowledge is used for the advancement of the individual, be it in obtaining degrees or in climbing the corporate ladder, but knowledge is rarely used explicitly for the betterment of society as a whole. Generally speaking people's main concerns involve the betterment of themselves

and their families by procuring as many of society's resources and privileges as they can with their available knowledge.

While our society is much more educated and knowledgeable now than it has been at any other time in human history, it continues to suffer from the same societal ills that have always plagued it. What is keeping us from using our knowledge towards the betterment of our society? Perhaps it is an absence of wisdom. The presence of more knowledge does not necessarily mean that knowledge is being used to the betterment of mankind. It is the contention of this research study that through the study of wisdom tangible ways for educators and therapists to nurture wisdom can be developed, thus enabling people to make better judgments in their own lives, to understand the problems facing society and, perhaps more importantly, be motivated to help fix them.

#### What is Wisdom?: A Review of the Literature

So what exactly is wisdom? The question is actually quite complex. Much of philosophy and religion revolves around this question, but here the main focus will be the examination of wisdom as a psychological framework.

#### *Positive Psychology*

The first framework of wisdom examined is one proposed by positive psychology. Positive psychology is the study of the strengths and virtues that allow people to function optimally as individuals, groups and institutions. Whereas traditional psychology has focused on the deficits that impair

individuals, positive psychology focuses on the strengths that allow individuals to lead productive and fulfilling lives.

Two researchers in the field of positive psychology, Peterson and Seligman (2004), believe that wisdom represents a superior level of intelligence, judgment, and capacity to give advice. It also allows the individual to address difficult questions about the conduct and meaning of life and is used for the good of oneself and the good of others. It is also important to note that in Peterson and Seligman's view of wisdom it is a distinct form of intelligence that is separate from other kinds of knowledge. They write, "Knowledge involves the accumulation of facts, whereas wisdom involves the organization and interpretation of those facts" (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p.183 ).

What the conceptualization of Peterson and Seligman seems to remain silent on is the reason that wise people are motivated to seek out the greatest good for others. This is a crucial question in that it helps us understand why some people who might have the knowledge necessary for wisdom, and even the mental resources to organize and interpret those facts, do not seem to have the motivation to seek out good outcomes for others. With the positive psychology conceptualization of wisdom as a distinct form of intelligence proposed by Peterson and Seligman in 2004 apparently missing a key component of our understanding of wisdom, let us turn our attention to the theory of wisdom as mature personality development.

### *Wisdom as Mature Personality Development*

Another theory conceptualizes wisdom as mature personality development. This conceptualization is found in a variety of theories, most notably in Erikson's well known developmental stages. Kunzmann and Stange (2007) along with Shedlock and Cornelius (2003) both identify Erikson's as one of the three leading theories of wisdom currently in psychological research.. Wisdom as mature personality development operates on the premise that wisdom, as a maturational process, occurs sometime during middle or old age. Wise people are seen as having very mature and integrated personalities which enable them to cognitively allow for contradictions.

The ability to allow for contradiction is important in the application of wisdom to life situations. If one is to make a wise decision one must weigh various needs with one another and decide which need is more pressing in the given situation.

There is some evidence against this view of wisdom, however. A study by Smith and Baltes (1990) showed that wisdom does not necessarily increase with age. The researchers selected three groups of participants, one group aged 25-35 years old, another group 40-50 years old, and a third group 60-81 years old. The participants were asked to examine four scenarios regarding life-planning and were asked to respond to each and explain their thinking about the relevant

information. The participant's responses were judged by raters. Several of the responses that were rated high on wisdom came from the young and middle aged groups. In fact the distribution of wise responses were largely balanced between all three age groups, indicating that age and wisdom are not necessarily correlated as is assumed in the personality-based model of wisdom.

Erikson seems to be somewhat nebulous on the particulars of how one develops wisdom or if its development can be encouraged or facilitated. Erikson does note several prerequisite psychosocial markers; among them are trust, autonomy, initiative, industry, identity, intimacy and generativity, which precede wisdom in his developmental theories, without achieving which, wisdom is presumably beyond the reach of the individual. If, as Erikson postulates, wisdom is simply the result of a set of prerequisites being met and reaching a predetermined age or stage in life, then how does one account for people who are wise despite being quite young or people who reach the older stages of life and seem to have mastered the prerequisite stages as well and yet do not seem to employ wisdom.

#### *Wisdom as Relativistic and Dialectical Thinking*

In addition to the positive psychology and the wisdom as mature personality development views, there is also a more cognitive view of wisdom. This conceptualization is outlined in Ruise's (2005) article which states that wisdom is largely a cognitive process. This theory divides the cognitive aspects of

wisdom into two parts, the first of which is relativistic thinking.

Relativistic thinking is having an understanding that the way a person thinks depends on their subjective perspective. It is an understanding that even within a single person there will be conflicting needs, goals, and desires, all of which make sense when looking from the perspective from which they emerged. In short, relativistic thinking is knowledge of one's own biases and the ability to examine a situation both objectively and from the perspective of another person. It allows for contradictions in thought that are necessary to be able to simultaneously held in mind while reflecting on complex problems.

The second cognitive process which is thought to influence wisdom is dialectical thinking. Dialectical thinking is thinking which helps to draw conceptual links between diverse problems and helps to look for solutions to issues as opposed to specific problems. It represents a need to integrate cognition (Ruisel, 2005).

Relativistic and dialectical thinking often work in opposing directions to generate a more complete assessment of a situation. Relativistic thinking will allow for the examination of multiple perspectives and conflicting goals while dialectical thinking will function to find commonalities between those goals that will hopefully produce solutions that address all needs or at least the most important needs in the situation.

Consider this example to help illustrate relativistic and dialectical

thinking. Imagine a mother and her children who are living with a physically abusive husband. The mother has been a home maker since the birth of her children seven years ago and has not been employed outside of the home since that time. The mother is faced with the decision of whether or not she should leave her husband. Relativist thinking would allow her to consider the various important aspects of the situation. She might examine her own ambiguous thoughts. She may hold a belief that marriage is a life-long commitment and should not be broken and yet feel that her relationship with her husband is destructive and should be ended. She would also consider the needs of her children and their right to have both a father and a mother in the home which she might in turn balance against the effect that having an abusive father might have on her children. She would also use dialectical thinking to examine the links between the various problems she is facing. She might take into consideration her husband's escalating alcohol abuse as a possible cause for the abuse and she may reason that if her husband would agree to an alcohol treatment program, the family situation might improve.

Relativistic and Dialectical thinking appear to be very central concepts in understanding wisdom, but it would seem that the conceptualization of wisdom based solely on a cognitive framework once again leaves us without many answers in terms of how one develops the relativistic and dialectical thinking skills to have wisdom. Without some indication of this illusive source, there is an

insufficient conceptualization.

*Wisdom as Pragmatic Intelligence*

Thus far wisdom has been examined from the perspective of positive psychology, personality theory, and cognitive theories but there is yet another conceptualization of wisdom which views wisdom as a form of pragmatic intelligence. This perspective is outlined in Baltes and Staudinger's (1993) work which defines wisdom as "an expert knowledge system in the fundamental pragmatics of life permitting exceptional insight, judgment and advice involving complex and uncertain matters of the human condition" (p.76). This conceptualization of wisdom focuses on how people use their knowledge (Baltes & Straudinger, 2000).

*The berlin model.* One theory that views wisdom as pragmatic intelligence is the Berlin model of wisdom. The Berlin model breaks wisdom into five components of thought (Baltes & Straudinger, 2000). The five components are: 1) factual knowledge in the fundamental pragmatics of life; 2) strategic knowledge in the fundamental pragmatics of life; 3) knowledge which considers the uncertainties of life; 4) knowledge which considers contexts of life and societal change; and 5) knowledge which considers the relativism of values and life goals. Baltes and Staudinger (2000) define the fundamental pragmatics of life as knowledge of the various pathways of life, knowledge of the effects on the lifespan that occur as a result of generational and historical influences, knowledge

about the self, knowledge of other people and society, and skills of managing interpersonal relations.

The Berlin model of wisdom has not gone without its share of critiques. Kunzmann (2007) argued that the Berlin model is purely cognitive and does not focus at all on emotional and motivational aspects of wisdom. Kunzmann asserts that the emotional aspect of wisdom is vital because emotional balance is necessary to objectively evaluate alternatives and empathy is required to effectively take on another's perspective. Motivational aspects of wisdom are key because motivation causes wise people to act on their knowledge of the how-to's of life as opposed to simply knowing how, without applying their knowledge to their own lives.

However, the Berlin model, like many others, relies heavily on a cognitive framework which neglects motivationally based and emotionally based correlates of wisdom (Kunzmann, 2007). A model that focuses solely on knowledge fails to note why people would be motivated to create the greatest good for others.

*The balance theory of wisdom.* Another theory that looks at wisdom as a form of pragmatic intelligence is the balance theory. Sternberg's (2008b) balance theory of wisdom states that wisdom is the use of one's intelligence and experience as mediated by values toward the achievement of a common good. This functions through a balance among intrapersonal, interpersonal, and extrapersonal interests, over the short and long terms, to achieve a balance among

adaptation to existing environments, shaping of existing environments, and selection of new environments.

The balance theory of wisdom also discusses wisdom as a tool used for the benefit of others. This is not to say that wisdom cannot be applied for the benefit of the self, in fact Sternberg (2008b) argues that it should be, but he identifies the concern for the well-being of others as a salient aspect of wisdom. Furthermore the theory qualifies this desire to help others as a desire to help all others, not simply maximizing benefits to a select group while minimizing benefits towards others. Essentially wisdom implies a desire to advance the common good. Sometimes the common good will be better for some than it will for others, but it should not be intentionally designed toward inequality.

The balance theory of wisdom identifies several individual differences that affect the balance process. These factors, and the weight given to them by the individual, introduce a great deal of variety in wise decisions. The unique balance between these factors is what allows two strikingly different approaches to a problem to both be considered wise.

In regard to the individual differences, the first factor has to do with goals. People differ in how much they seek to promote the common good. Thus acquiring wisdom is a goal for some and not for others. People also differ greatly on what they consider to be in the interest of the common good.

Another factor is the balancing of responses to environmental contexts.

This is the ability to negotiate appropriate balances between one's own goals and the demands of the environment. In some situations it would be wise to adapt your goals to the environment. In other situations it would be wise to shape your environment to match your goals. In yet other situations, the wisest course of action might be to select a new environment that is more conducive to your goals.

The next factor the balance theory identifies is the balancing of interests. One type of interest is intrapersonal interests. These are one's own personal interests such as a desire to get a promotion, desire to be well liked or the desire to get an education. Another type of interest is in the area of interpersonal interests. These are the interests of others. The interests of one's family might be an example of an interpersonal interest. Finally there are the extrapersonal interests. These are the interests in regard to institutions and other larger frameworks. This category might be represented by a desire to see one's community strengthened, justice upheld, or a desire to serve God.

Another factor that influences the balance process is the balance of short and long term objectives (Sternberg, 2008b). This is a key aspect of wisdom because a wise action must be more than just a good thing to do in general, but a good thing to do at the present time. For example, if a friend comes to you and admits that they feel worthless and are contemplating suicide, it would not be a good time to mention moments where you felt he was not being a good friend. Timing must influence the prioritization of goals for wise decisions to be made.

In Sternberg's conceptualization the acquisition of tacit knowledge is also an important aspect of the balance process (Sternberg, 2008b). This is the knowledge that someone has available to them to aid and inform their decision-making process. In order to make a truly wise decision one must have relevant and practical information regarding the issue at hand.

Hand in hand with the acquisition of tacit knowledge comes yet another crucial factor, which is the utilization of tacit knowledge. According to Sternberg (2008b), this is how one uses the information he has. Two people may be presented with the same set of facts, yet interpret them completely differently, which will in turn have effects on the conclusions that they make based on that information.

The final factor that produces individual differences in the balance process is that of values. Values such as honesty, compassion, justice, and mercy all play a role in decision-making and what value a person finds most important to be upheld in a given situation will alter their actions (Sternberg, 2008b).

The Balance theory of wisdom seems to provide the most satisfactory examination of wisdom, defining wisdom as a balance between intrapersonal, interpersonal, and extrapersonal interests and a balance between adaptation to existing environments, shaping of existing environments, and selection of new environments. Choosing the most effective response to a given situation is defined as wisdom. (Sternberg, 2008b).

### Common Conceptualizations of Wisdom

Thus far empirical or explicit theories of wisdom have been discussed. These theories have been developed by researchers, with the intent of providing a theoretical framework and an operational definition of wisdom, but wisdom was a human concept long before modern science attempted to theorize about it. To what degree, then, do researcher's explicit theories of wisdom match with the generally held public conceptualizations or implicit theories of wisdom?

Sternberg (1985) conducted an important study that examined whether people could differentiate between the related concepts of intelligence, creativity and wisdom. Participants were asked to list what characteristics would make a person intelligent, creative, or wise. Participant's lists showed that intelligence, creativity and wisdom are each distinct concepts in people's minds, with intelligence and wisdom being more closely tied to one another than to creativity.

Kunzmann and Stange (2007) speak of lay people's conceptualization of wisdom as being the peak of human excellence. Lay people tend to view wisdom as having cognitive, social, emotional and motivational components. These components seem to be reflected best in the balance theory of wisdom. The balance theory of wisdom accounts for cognitive components of wisdom because there is a focus on the acquisition and utilization of tacit knowledge. Social components are acknowledged with the balancing of interests and the balancing of responses to environmental contexts, which includes social environments as

well as physical environments. Emotional components are addressed as well in the balancing of interests, balancing of responses to environmental contexts, and the application of values, especially values such as empathy, compassion, and mercy which are likely to have strong emotions tied to them. Motivational aspects are examined in the focus on goals, where some people are seen as being more motivated to pursue the common good than others.

#### What Does Wisdom Do For Us?

The nature of wisdom has been examined so now let us turn to the function that wisdom serves in our lives. Ruisel (2005) outlined a set of specific functions for wisdom for both the individual and for society. Ruisel argues that wisdom should enable an individual to overcome barriers resulting from his age, historical experience or unusual challenges. This function of wisdom speaks to the capacity for objectivity that is inherent in wisdom. A wise person would be expected to be able to overlook subjective viewpoints that arise from his own life experiences and to be able to take the perspective of others, thus making decisions that serve the objective good.

Wisdom also functions to allow someone to examine his feelings, needs, and expectations, while at the same time distinguishing his needs from other people's expectations. This factor taps into the large amount of self-knowledge and the ability to reflect that are necessary aspects of wisdom. A wise person will be able to understand his own desires and be able to distinguish them from the

desires of others. Many people take the desires of others, be they specific figures in their life such as parents or friends, or simply societal norms in general, as their own, thus losing contact with their own true desires. A wise person however, will have a true understanding of his own desires (Ruisel, 2005).

According to Ruisel (2005) another of wisdom's functions is to establish appropriate relationships, including socially adequate forms of solving conflicts, a willingness to accept counsel from others and cope with the difficult process of change and development. Wise people will solve conflict effectively and are willing to listen to the advice of others. With wisdom comes the understanding that one does not know everything and that the perspectives of other can be valuable in making good choices.

In Ruisel's (2005) view, an important social function of wisdom is the ability to counsel others. Wisdom allows people to effectively conceptualize problems and act on them appropriately. This is a quality that people tend to recognize and they will often seek out advice from a wise person.

Another social function of wisdom is to help manage society (Ruisel, 2005). Historically wisdom has been connected with management of the practical problems in the society. In ancient times people attempted to appoint the wisest members of their society to rule. That practice may have fallen out of favor in recent times, but wise people do have superior skills in decision-making and a focus on improving the greater good that can make them great leaders.

Wisdom also allows people to obtain an overview of life (Ruisel, 2005). Wise people seek out meaning and coherence in life, striving for a sense of authenticity in everything that they do. Their actions are consistent with their values and they experience life as a meaningful venture to be enjoyed.

Finally, wisdom also functions to aid people in the search for the meaning of life. Wisdom, with its focus on differing perspectives, application of values, and pursuit of the greater good, often helps people achieve greater spiritual understandings.

#### Teaching People to be Wise

Clinical psychologists bridge the gap between theory and practice in psychology. They study theories of the human mind but are also responsible for putting that knowledge into practice by helping people move toward mental health. One of the best ways to address any problem, including mental health issues, is to prevent such problems before they begin. So how can therapists, and society as a whole, be proactive in promoting mental health?

Sternberg (2004) writes about several recommendations for schools in regard to teaching students to be wise. However, the education system is already overburdened, and with pressures such as increased class size, the growing importance of standardized testing, and decreased funding it is unlikely that most schools would be quick to adopt a wisdom-based curriculum. While it may seem that encouraging schools to teach from a more wisdom-based framework is an

important goal, there are practical barriers surrounding the current feasibility of such reform. One thing that therapist can do, even now, is to begin to teach our clients to use wisdom to make wise decisions.

Sternberg (2004) suggests that students reflect on the wisdom of sages represented in literature and philosophy. This is also a good suggestion for clients seeking to increase their decision making skills and dealing with existential issues. Clients could be encouraged to read literature and be prepared to discuss their reflections on the material in therapy, and how the wisdom shared in the book could apply to their own life.

Sternberg (2004) further suggests that engaging in discussions with others is essential to the development of wisdom. In therapy clients could discuss with the therapist or in a psychotherapy group, ways to view life situations from various perspectives. This will teach the client to develop more holistic conceptualizations of reality, and provide an opportunity for them to learn vicariously from the experience of others.

The next suggestion is that people reflectively develop their own values. Many people do not take the time to contemplate their values and thus are less clear about them when attempting to use them to make decisions (Sternberg, 2004). The therapist can help codify values by prompting clients to think of ways to promote their values in their own life and challenge instances where their behaviors and values seem to contradict each other.

Clients also need to gain an understanding that knowledge can be used for good or for ill and can benefit from learning that it is how knowledge is used that makes the difference. Therapist can help clients examine aspects of their lives that do not promote the greater good as well as to help guide them in changes that they wish to make toward a more selfless usage of their knowledge and skills.

#### Native American Traditions and Ways of Knowing

When speaking of research and knowledge there are different ways of knowing that color and distort our understanding based on our cultural framework. Modern day research draws on an academic paradigm of global knowledge, knowledge that can be applied in any place at any time, but has the drawback of being so general as to miss cultural differences in how a given individual or group sees the world. This etic understanding is seen through the eyes of an observer who does not participate in the culture being studied. Native American knowledge, however, often rests of local knowledge which is often misunderstood by Western researchers. Local knowledge includes the collective knowledge of a community, including oral traditions, collective memory of past events and detailed and intimate knowledge of the environment (Kidwell & Velie, 2005). This more emic knowledge, is extremely valuable as it examines the world from within the culture, to give the information context. At times the two methods of knowing may provide different information, such as when a western historical narrative differs from the oral narrative provided by a Native American

community, but each holds a different perspective on events that may provide unique insights into the events depicted.

In addition to the emphasis on local rather than global knowledge, Native American ways of knowing also involve integration of knowledge in a way that is rarely seen in western culture. For example, a Native American oral narrative might contain aspects of what could be characterized in a number of different western fields as religion, philosophy, psychology and history. In the Native American viewpoint, these are not separate disciplines but simple various facets of how people interact and know the universe. These oral narratives represent more than simply stories told for entertainment but also represent a sense of shared history, spirituality and understanding of the nature of reality.

Another important aspect of understanding Native American ways of knowing is having respect for the sacred (Kidwell & Alan, 2005). Many Native American communities accept dreams, visions and spiritual experiences to be valid ways of knowing when in western paradigms these methods of knowing would be considered far too subjective to represent a way of knowing. In terms of sacred knowledge, researchers often find that Native American communities may be hesitant to share certain information as it may be reserved for specific individuals or only members of the community (Brandt, 1980).

Native American communities have created many ceremonies to facilitate these types of knowing. While enumerating all of these ceremonies here would be

beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to understand in brief overview how these ceremonies are designed to create experiences for the individuals that help connect them in some way to a deeper wisdom. Two widespread ceremonies that exemplify these ways of knowing are the shaking tent and the sweat lodge ceremonies.

The shaking tent ceremony is present in the Ojibwa, Innu (Montagnais-Naskapi), Cree, Penobscot and Abenaki and other Algonquian groups (Waldram, Herring, & Young, 2007). The ceremony involves the traditional healer's use of a cylindrical lodge or tent. The traditional healer constructs his or her tent and enters it at dark. Singing and drumming summons the traditional healer's spirit helpers, whose arrival is signified by animal cries and the shaking tent. These spirit helpers are used in healing, divining, and prophesying. Preparations for the ceremony often include fasting, praying, offerings and ritual purification (Waldram, Herring, & Young, 2007).

The sweat lodge is a ceremony that was designed to be a source of healing for the mind and the body as well as providing a conduit for communication with spiritual beings, totem helpers, or the Creator as a source of wisdom or power. Some traditions encourage a day of fasting prior to entering the sweat lodge as a method of purification while others utilize the burning of sage, sweet grass or cedar smoke. There are many variations in sweat lodge traditions but many involve a firekeeper, whose job it is to maintain the fires that heat the stones

providing the heat. This is seen as a very spiritual position, as the fire is seen as a channel for burnt offerings or as a manifestation of divine power. In some traditions, the ceremony takes place in complete silence while in others there is singing and drumming. The construction and physical orientation of the lodge often holds traditional meaning as well (Waldram, Herring, & Young, 2007).

Both of these ceremonies are examples of how Native American traditional practices are used to facilitate the acquisition of knowledge in ways that are not common in Eurocentric society. These diverse ways of knowing have a definite impact on Native American worldview and will come into play when viewing Native American conceptualizations of wisdom.

#### Special Considerations When Working in the Native American Community

The literature abounds with theories about the nature of wisdom, postulations as to what its prerequisites are, and even ideas about how wisdom is likely to be developed. However, as is often the case, that research is largely garnered using a dominant culture paradigm which may easily overlook the conceptualizations offered by minority groups. In particular, the Native American community is often poorly represented in these studies, if they are represented at all (Baltes & Smith, 1990; Baltes & Straudinger, 1993; Clayton & Birren, 1980; Greene & Brown, 2009; Kunzmann, 2007; Kunzmann & Stange, 2007; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). It is possible then, if not likely, that our conceptualizations of wisdom are likely to be culturally biased and not representative of the views and

experiences of the Native American community. Known psychological literature on conceptualizations of wisdom in the Native American community appears to be virtually non-existent, which leaves a huge gap in our understanding of wisdom and in our ability to serve indigenous communities in a culturally competent manner (Duran, 2006; McCormick, 1996; Moodley & West, 2005; Price and McNeill, 1992; Stewart, 2007; Vicary and Bishop, 2005).

To further complicate matters the Native American community represents a diverse group of unique cultures and traditions rather than being a homogeneous group, such that there will likely be within group differences of conceptualizations of wisdom. This means that not only are Native Americans in general extremely underrepresented in the literature, but that the small representations that do exist are likely leaving out many Native American cultural groups altogether.

These cultural issues are perhaps particularly salient in the Native American Community in light of the historical usage of indigenous identity as a justification for social discrimination during the colonization of European settlers. Indigenous identity and culture was seen as uncivilized and a barrier to success in the European dominated social structure (Waldram Herring, & Young, 2007). Native communities have worked tirelessly to preserve and maintain ties to their cultural identities in an attempt to reverse some of the damage done to Native identity in the past. By not showing proper respect for these cultures, well

meaning researchers only serve to reinforce the historical trauma and the devaluation of indigenous worldviews.

Native American cultural practices have been studied in psychology before, with researchers examining the use of the sweat lodge, vision quests and several dancing and drumming ceremonies (Francis, 2004; Goudreau, Weber-Pillwax, Cote-Meek, Madill, & Wilson, 2008; Jilek, 2004; Smith, 2005). Some studies have even measured the therapeutic efficacy of these ceremonies (Goudreau, Weber-Pillwax, Cote-Meek, Madill, & Wilson, 2008; Heilbron & Guttman, 2000; Wagemakers Schiff & Moore, 2006). It is important for researchers working in the Native American community to remember to treat such sacred ceremonies with the respect due them and to avoid imposing western paradigms when attempting to understand Native American traditions in cultural context.

### Statement of the Problem

#### *Main Research Question*

The main question explored in this study is “What is wisdom and how does one become wise?”

#### *Objectives*

This study sought to create a model of the conceptualization of wisdom in the Native American community, which may lend insight to clinicians looking to foster wisdom in their clients.

## Methods

The study engaged 8 participants in interviews of approximately 1 hour in length. Criteria for participation in the study included the ability to understand, speak and read English. Participants identified themselves as Native American and were also required to be at least twenty one years of age. The reasons for the age criteria were to ensure that participation in the study was truly voluntary and that participants had lived long enough to gain a solid conceptualization of what they believe wisdom to be and were able to articulate that conceptualization to the researcher. All genders were sought for participation in the study and participation was completely voluntary.

A diverse sample was intentionally sought in terms of age, level of education, religious affiliation, tribal affiliation and other demographic variables. The goal of this study is to examine Native American conceptualizations of wisdom in the aggregate, not only those related to one Native American group. This sort of diverse sample also serves to illustrate that cultural values surrounding wisdom are so widespread and resilient in Native American communities that they hold significance across demographic variables. Common themes hold true across individual Native American communities and those themes are what is examined in this study.

Participants were also allowed to self-identify as Native American rather than using some other standard of identification with the community. This allows

for individuals to define their own cultural identity, which is particularly important given the history of denying native peoples their cultural identity. This also creates a possible issue of people who are bi-cultural and as such may gather some of their outlook from traditions other than Native American traditions. This was accepted as an inevitability in the study as the argument can be made that ethnic minority individuals are often forced to take on bi-cultural identities to function in a society predominated by a culture other than their own.

Participants were recruited mainly through their connections with organizations that serve the Native American community in Los Angeles or Santa Barbara counties. Participants were also recruited through word of mouth and interpersonal contacts.

An information document (Appendix A) was given to each participant to give them information regarding the purpose of the study and the goals that the research hopes to accomplish. It also provided information on the researcher, criteria for participation in the study and what participation in the research would entail. Finally the information document provided the participant with the contact information of the researcher if the potential participants had any questions or wished to participate in the research. Once a participant expressed interest in participating in the research they were given an informed consent document (Appendix B) to sign. Participants were also able to obtain copies of the information document (Appendix A) to give to other individuals they may have

known who might have been interested in participating in the study as well. There was no financial remuneration for participation in this study.

After reviewing the information document (Appendix A) and showing interest in the study, participants were given an appointment time, set up at a time and place that was convenient to both participant and researcher. This meeting was approximately 60 minutes in length. The researcher began by going over the informed consent document (Appendix B) and having the participant sign it. Following the signing of the informed consent document, the background questionnaire (Appendix C) was completed and the interview itself took place.

The interview question was, “What is wisdom and how does one become wise?” This question was designed to be as open-ended as possible, with special attention being paid to the fact that Native American populations have historically been forced into fitting Eurocentric theories and paradigms that have not necessarily represented their true culture or beliefs. By using an open-ended and qualitative approach, this researcher hopes to have reduced the likelihood of imposing any theory on the participants and to have increased the possibility of obtaining an unbiased opinion on the topic.

The interview itself was audio-taped. After the interview was over the data was compiled and analyzed by the researcher according to common themes that immerge from the participant’s narratives, again allowing the participant’s voice to drive the formation of the themes, rather than preconceived theoretical

constructs. Taped interviews were played back and transcribed, then reviewed to find salient themes. These themes were compared across participants to find common shared themes that were included in the study's results. Participants were free to request to be contacted with the results of the study, so that they can be sure that their views are being accurately represented in the study. After the study was completed, the audio-tapes of the interviews were destroyed to help insure the privacy of the participants.

The interviews were transcribed and the resulting narratives were read in order to uncover emerging themes and commonalities seen across participants. Discussions presented in this study revolved around the question, to what degree the ideas held by the participants are or are not consistent with existing theories of wisdom. Also of interest is the question of which therapeutic techniques would promote wisdom, while being culturally sensitive to Native American conceptualizations of wisdom.

## Results

### *Participant Profiles*

*Eli.* Eli is a 65 year old retired male living in Goleta, CA. He has achieved an AA degree and considers himself to be pagan in terms of religious affiliation. He is divorced/separated. He identifies as a member of the Chumash tribe.

*Blandine.* Blandine is a 27 year old single female living in Santa Fe, New Mexico. She has a high school education and identifies as Hopi/Pueblo in terms of

her religious affiliation. She considers herself to be a member of the Laguna, Hopi and Akimel O'odham Native American communities. She works as an office coordinator.

*David.* David is a 28 year old single male living in Santa Fe, New Mexico. He holds a bachelors degree and identifies as Catholic in terms of his religious affiliation. He considers himself a member of the Santo Domingo Pueblo (Kewa Tribe). He is employed as the Vice President of Creative and Marketing at an educational institution.

*Laurence.* Laurence is a 37 year old male, currently in a committed relationship, living in Los Angeles, CA. He holds a Master of Sciences degree and has no religious affiliation. He has an ethnic background both in the Native American and European American communities. He considers himself a member of the Comanche tribe and is currently working as a receptionist.

*Christopher.* Christopher is a 51 year old single male living in Los Angeles, CA. He holds a BA degree and proclaims no religious affiliation. He considers himself a part of the Navajo/ Dine Nation and makes a living as an art educator and artist.

*Novalis.* Novalis is a 36 year old single female living in Long Beach, CA. She holds a doctorate degree and considers herself to be Baptist in terms of her religious affiliation. She considers herself a member of the Santa Clara Pueblo and Jicarilla Apache communities and makes her living as a psychologist.

*Jordi.* Jordi is a 38 year old married female living in Long Beach, CA. She holds a Masters degree and considers herself to be catholic in terms of her religious affiliation. She identifies as a member of the Oneida (Wi) people and makes her living as a psychotherapist.

*Gabriel.* Gabriel is a 51 year old female currently in a domestic partnership, living in Inglewood, CA. She holds a masters degree and considers herself Christian in terms of religious affiliation. She is a social worker who identifies as a member of the Taos/ Santana Pueblo people.

#### *Native American Model of Wisdom*

This study was designed to address the questions, “What is wisdom and how is it acquired or passed on?” The answer to the first question can often be described though a simple definition but the answer to the second tends to be much more complicated. Eli described wisdom as “learning to live in a humane way for the greatest good of all.”

Still more participants described wisdom as a direct result of age and experience. Blandine describes wisdom most directly when she says, “I think wisdom comes from age or having lived through something extraordinary to be able to teach about it or to make a difference in one person’s life and them being able to articulate that to others”. Laurence explained wisdom when he said:

To me wisdom is experience and a lot of mistakes too. A lot of mistakes come with that. I think wisdom being really effective is when someone

who has experienced a lot of things and had a long...not necessarily a long life, because you can experience a lot of things within a short period of time and gain the wisdom to know the difference between right and wrong. Even if it's not right or wrong but just like which path is going to be best for you, which outcome will be best for you or the less harm you will incur on other people or yourself. I think wisdom has a great effect whenever one person can transmit that knowledge, because once you have wisdom and you pass it on to someone it's in the form of knowledge, because you're giving that knowledge. Whether they choose to use it or not is up to them. So wisdom comes in accepting that knowledge that you've just been given, transmitted to you from someone who's experienced all this stuff, and making a decision based on it that has a positive outcome. So you took the knowledge from wisdom and you applied it in your life and then it was beneficial to you.

Jordi also strongly associated wisdom with age when she spoke about her grandmother as the archetype of wisdom in her life and stated that her grandmother had lived long enough to have true wisdom.

As a result of the interviews conducted during this study three general categories have emerged to address the question of how wisdom can best be acquired or passed on. To answer this question, participants offered up examples of how wisdom is already ingrained in Native American culture. Wisdom appears

to be connected to Native American society on three levels; worldview, social structure, and individual.

### **Category I. Worldview: Interconnectedness**

Native American worldview, as described by the participants of this study, seems to be centered on interconnectedness. The worldview of interconnectedness seems to function as a value-set that outlines how one is related to the world around oneself and the manner in which we are connected to each other. Eli perhaps said it best when he said, “So indigenous understanding begins with the idea that we’re not separate from anything. That who we are is everything that has happened before, is happening now, and will happen in the future.” Interconnectedness is further divided into several paths through which a sense of interconnectedness can be achieved or is reflected. These paths are caretaking, connection through a deity/spirit, understanding the consequences of being out of balance, and using knowledge for the greatest good.

#### **I.1. Caretaking**

Caretaking was described with two focuses, one on the caretaking of the land or the natural environment and another with the caretaking of others. Eli outlines the importance of the environment in the interconnected worldview when he says:

So in the beginning, human beings were given responsibility for taking care of this place. All indigenous people, all over the world, believe they

are caretakers of where they are. For you and me it's where we stand and if you take that to a village or you take that to a tribe, they feel responsible for all that they have been given to them so they have to be careful. So understanding that I am the sun inside, a heat generating, light emitting energy source, my heart. I inhale the wind, I am the wind. I cannot exist without the wind. My movement is only possible because I am fluid. The water. My structure, everything that is material is because the mother provides for us all. So being in awareness of the elements and how important it is for our wellbeing and the wellbeing of all that is, to acknowledge and give gratitude to the elements.

David also highlighted this idea when he said:

A lot of indigenous communities rely on understanding the environment. That's what we could say is the foundation. A lot of native communities will talk about things being a cycle and so that encompasses a lot. Just the idea of what that represents is advanced for someone to understand but they understand the idea through everything in their life, so they apply it to everything. That's a lot of what is taught in our communities so as you start to get older you start to piece in your own perspective of what this idea is and so you start to build your own personal wisdom that you can share because you understand your role.

The concept of the caretaking of others is also greatly represented among the

comments participants made. Eli pointed out this concept when he said:

That's another big responsibility. To understand that I'm not here alone. To take care of my parents, my grandparents. To take care of my family and my extended family. To use whatever I've been given for the benefit of everyone, would be conducting myself in a good way.

Blandine points out the importance of both the environment and the caretaking of others in her statement:

Mostly my idea of it [wisdom] comes from being able to relate to everything else in the world. So being knowledgeable isn't just like knowing history or historical facts but being able to relate it to now and to figure out that you are a part of something, like a part of the environment, and that whatever you do effects another part of it. I think the elders are so knowledgeable in that realm because they have lived it and they have firsthand accounts of being related to the environment and I think you learn that as you get older. You tend to focus on you when you're younger and then you start figuring out that you want to make contributions to your community and how that's going to effect the community in a positive way.

Laurence seems to agree with his simple yet poignant statement, "There is a difference between individuality and what is good for the community." He further expands on his comment when he says:

I think wisdom also requires that you be a little open minded throughout your life. I try to be compassionate, you know. Like I said earlier you have to think of it from the other person's experience. I deal with a lot of people who are upset and they need help. They're having a hard time. I know. I've been there. And sometimes I forget and I'm like, oh wait, you have to understand. And then the interaction becomes so much...well when you listen to people it helps.

Christopher seems to be alluding to these same concepts when he speaks about his childhood and learning at an early age that he has a responsibility to others, especially the younger children he grew up with on his reservation. He exercised this truth again in adulthood when he chose to stay on his reservation to take care of his ailing grandmother, putting his own plans of exploring the world on hold for several years. Novalis highlights the importance of caring for others when she gives an example of how she encouraged her coworkers:

It comes from people pulling each other up. I tell my coworkers. I'm like, go back to school! California pays. You can go to school for free almost. What's wrong with that? Look at my grandma. She went back. Education is something that people take for granted here. We need to really appreciate that. If we're not helping pull each other up, then what are we doing?

She also highlights an important issue in the Native American community

surrounding the state of poverty seen on many reservations. She points to the heart of the issue being people forgetting the importance of giving back to others. She says, “The few who are successful and do make it, a lot of them don’t give back. If they don’t give back then who’s going to move forward? You succeed and disappear. You’re gone.”

## **I.2. Connection through a higher power**

Many participants also reported gaining a sense of connectedness through connection with a higher power. Eli shares his understanding when he says:

So when you start talking about how we create our reality, beginning with the understanding that everything is sacred, everything is a gift from The One Above Us All. The one that is Nameless. I like The Great Mystery. That’s part of most traditions is the Creator, the Maker, The One Above Us All. We don’t know. We can sometimes have an inspiration, an insight, become profoundly aware through... what’s the word... rapture, epiphany. Those moments when as a human being you have an understanding that you are a part of that One. So from the beginning we understand that life is so important because we have the opportunity to experience everything for the one above us all, who literally, I believe, made it possible for human beings, so that it can be experienced through us what life is all about.

Laurence talked about the importance of ritual peyote meetings as a method of connecting to a higher power. He says, “Usually a peyote meeting is about

someone or something that's going on. It's a journey to try and connect with the Great Spirit because you're trying to get wisdom by being together and connecting with the great spirit." Gabriel speaks about her personal journey toward wisdom which is expressed for her, in large part through her spiritual journey. She shares the struggles many in the Native American community have had with balancing traditional Native American spiritual practices such as drumming and dancing, with Christian principles which are largely accepted within the community as well. Gabriel answers these questions for herself by realizing that both traditions are worshipping the same creator and finding a spiritual community that accepts both traditions into their practice. Gabriel shares a specific incident in which she had a dream where she communicated with her ex-husband's deceased father. Her Pueblo beliefs tell her that when a spirit comes to you, it is hungry for something and it is your job to feed it. To "feed" the spirit in this case, Gabriel felt the need to tell her ex husband of her vision, which actually lead to a healing conversation for both her and her ex-husband regarding their shared willingness to remain supportive figures in each other's lives despite the dissolution of their relationship.

### **I.3. Understanding of the consequences of being out of balance with nature or their connection with others**

In addition to understanding interconnectedness through caretaking and connection through a higher power, interconnectedness is also understood through

an understanding of the consequences of being out of balance with nature or their connection to others. Eli declares this when he says:

So when human beings forgot to be in gratitude, started taking more than they needed, or disrespected or distanced themselves from the other whether it's a family member or another person they began the process of being out of balance. Their heart, their mind, wasn't connected and they weren't acting or speaking the truth and they weren't walking that. So for thousands of years now, at least two thousand years anyway, agricultural, agrarian societies where wealth was created and disparity and inequality and all that kind of stuff, which gives rise to jealousy, greed and all these other things. Well we've been living with that for quite awhile so we're out of balance. The collective is out of balance. So we are not at ease, we're not at peace, which brings forth disease, disharmony, misunderstanding, confusion, anxieties and fear. It all comes from not being in balance.

Christopher articulates the challenges he saw develop in the Navajo community when balance was abandoned. He spoke of criminal activity, high dropout rates among the youth and drug and alcohol abuse. He attributes these difficulties to acculturation, which has led to a loss of cultural identity and the dismantling of institutional structures that facilitate the passage of wisdom from one generation to the next. Novalis describes similar community level struggles when she speaks

about leaders in the Native American community who have gotten an education, been successful but seemingly abandoned their communities. She expresses her frustration when she says:

All that greed, and all them making it and getting that money and figuring it out and not wanting to share is a sad thing, so even when they do make it it's just me, me, me. I'm sure a generation or two back their family said "let's do this for everybody" then one or two petty people don't want to think about the future and just want to hoard it all to themselves.

Jordi echoes these concerns when she identifies the cause of many of the issues in the Native American community as a widespread loss of connection to community and to one another, especially the issues with drug and alcohol use that she has witnessed.

#### **I.4. Using knowledge for the greatest good**

The worldview of interconnectedness is also represented by a desire to use one's knowledge for the greatest good. Eli articulates the folly of failing to hold this value when he says:

So we can continue to argue amongst ourselves about whose perspective is correct and we can continue to annihilate those folks who don't think like us. It's been done in the past and it's never a resolution. Why would we continue to do it today? That's not using our knowledge wisely. The wisdom that can be had from the folks who are still connected to it all, to

what's happened before and how it can be used to our benefit now to increase the possibility of this beautiful world tomorrow.

He expands on this idea and gives examples of its application later when he says:

It might take different forms. You might help someone chop some wood but my intention is to help create warmth, to provide service to someone. So whatever you do, whether it's developing your skills to assist in the counseling of people or writing a book that will provide an insight, a direction, guidance, for people to overcome hardship, adversity. Whatever we do, we could be buying and selling stocks for that matter, you can be playing whatever game you want to participate in. You're going to use it to the best advantage for the greatest good.

### **Category II. Social Structure: Collectivist**

Another important facet of the Native American conceptualization of wisdom is found in their social structure. Native American society tends to be collectivist, meaning that it places emphasis on the group as opposed to the individual. Social structures like the family and the community are seen as paramount, even if attending to their needs requires individual sacrifice. Based on the responses of the interviewees, wisdom appears to be demonstrated and encouraged in Native American social structure through giving context for your place in life, facilitating the sharing of knowledge with the next generation, storytelling, and through the use of community structures or social roles.

## **II.1. Context for your place in life**

Eli shares the collectivist perspective and its ability to provide context for your life when he says, “We’re only here because our parents were born and gave birth to us, so we must connect to the ancestors to have an understanding of who we are, where we are, and why we’re here.” Christopher also spoke of the importance of providing social context when he spoke about weaving as an important tradition in Navajo culture. He describes weaving as an art which binds the community because each region had its own style of weaving, utilizing local plant materials and often depicting local terrain in the design. In this way the weaving style reflected the community and the land from whence it came. Christopher also recounted the way that weaving was used as a conduit for the sharing of wisdom by way of the stories that were told during the weaving process, many of which reinforced the Navajo matrilineal values. An example of such was the metaphor associated with the weaving, in which men were seen as the vertical threads of the garment which were there to add additional strength but were ultimately less important than the horizontal, female, threads which held the garment together. Novalis reveals how the stories her grandparents told her about their lives helped her understand how she fit into the larger story of the Native American community. She says:

Then we have the stories from our grandparents about how hard they worked and down here there was a lot of segregation where I’m from in

Wisconsin and anti-Native American things when I was growing up. Now people are really embracing the Native American community but when I was growing up and when my father was, it wasn't like that, so a lot of stuff just gets cycled down as warnings. I've lived this and this has happened to me so this is what you want to watch out for. These are the relationships that you want to be careful of. This is how you tell a genuine person from a fake person.

Novalis shares an example of wisdom that she was given but she did not fully appreciate until much later in life. She shares:

Same thing my mother said, "just wait till you have your own". You think you know everything now, just wait. It's like wow! Yeah! You're right. When you're little you're close to your family, and when you're older you go away, and when you have your own family you come back. Now I call so much more and we have such a better relationship now. We're almost friends now. At first it was like I'm going to fight and bump heads and not listen to you. Now I'm like oh what do you think? What should I do now? Where do I go? Now I'm coming back.

## **II.2. Sharing knowledge with the next generation**

Sharing knowledge with the next generation seemed to be another popular theme. Sharing wisdom seemed to be a cultural value, with older people taking on the responsibility of sharing their wisdom with the younger members of the

community. Eli speaks of this directly when he says:

So one of the reasons I'm here speaking to you because you asked for some wisdom. I don't necessarily take the role of a wisdom keeper but I'm giving you information that hopefully will help you to make your decisions and if anyone reads it, to help them make their decisions about using our knowledge wisely.

Eli also speaks of the importance of speaking mindfully when sharing your wisdom and the great responsibility teaching has, including the potential risks of imposing a limiting worldview on the next generation that will serve only to guide others to see as we see. He says:

When we keep teaching them that what they see is really all there is, they'll be just blind. So we have to unlearn, you and I, when we speak to them, when we share our ideas or our thoughts. Be careful that you don't create another cloud, another veil, another shadow that will prevent people from seeing the truth. So seeing it all at the same time, to be awake, to be aware, to be mindful is really hard.

David talks about the role his mother plays in sharing knowledge with his son when he speaks:

I think just for us having a Pueblo background, like raising our son and having my mom help us in that area. She watches him but one of the stipulations is that she has to speak to him in our language, so he's being

raised in the traditional upbringing where the parents aren't raising him, or at least the knowledge part of it. It's the grandparents that instill this idea of language and culture. I mean we can do that too but it's the structure that we come from, that it doesn't come from your blood parents. It comes from your uncles, your grandparents. It's more a responsibility on their end than it is on the parents. So my brother and my uncles are responsible for certain parts of his upbringing, his understanding of his role in society and our reservation, our community. I'll have my role as he grows up but that's first line, the uncles, the relatives. So family gives more of a foundation first, then it's my job to explain certain things more.

David recognizes his role in sharing knowledge as well when he says:

Like for myself I have nephews and nieces that I will be responsible for and what I'm doing now plays a direct role in how I'm going to advise them if they have questions or if I'm seeing them going through something that I've gone through personally. Then I know my role as far as redistributing the knowledge.

Novalis recounts the role that sharing of knowledge from one generation to the next played in her family:

So we always listened to the elders. If you had a decision about your house or decision about your family....A lot of that came too, when we saw aunts and uncles and grandparents come together to repair someone's

house or to construct someone's house or when someone lost their job.

There was a lot of that. So when people hit any kind of barrier in their life or anything like that, we always looked for someone older, like almost a head of the family. In our family, it was our great grandmother because our great grandfather died young, so we looked to her for a lot of help, guidance and her rule was law. If someone was making a mistake she would tell you.

Jordi seems to have a similar relationship with her grandmother when she speaks about her grandmother's uncanny ability to predict the outcomes of her family member's choices and advise them toward the best course of action. She notes this as an ability that she associates with being wise.

### **II.3. Storytelling**

Another important factor that emerged as an important social structural component in wisdom was storytelling. David talks about the importance of showing interest in cultural stories when he says:

There are people that hold the knowledge but I think they are looking for people who want to know it, rather than giving it as a regular thing. For example, my uncle has told me before that he knows a lot of old stories that have been passed down but he doesn't share them because he feels that we're not interested in them. So for me to ask questions about certain things, he's more willing to share then, so he wants to know that you're

interested in knowing them.

Christopher shares about how he listened to stories his grandmother told, which were traditionally reserved for the females to hear during the weaving process. Christopher, however, took on the job of tending the dyeing pots so he was able to be close enough to hear the stories as well, stories which chronicled the history and traditions of the Navajo people. Christopher shares a story from Navajo tradition in which the coyote acts as a character representing men and their role in society. Coyote is a sexually promiscuous trickster who represents the male tendency to believe yourself to be clever in seeking sexual conquests while missing the greater meaning of life. Novalis echoes the importance of storytelling when she says:

That's where the storytelling comes in again too. You just have to tell it to this generation. This is what happens and how you can get good morals and good values. You take these same situations, just different times. They're not getting that from their parents.

#### **II.4. Community Structure and Roles**

Collectivist social structure provides context for one's place in life, a vehicle for the sharing of knowledge with the next generation, a social value on the importance of storytelling and the community structure and roles are also designed to facilitate the promotion of wisdom. David gives an example of this when he talks about how proximity of homes in Navajo communities helps

maintain a collectivist mentality:

I think what's different with our communities is we're very close knit. If you look at...say the difference between the Navajo community, their homes are very spread out. An example could be that a home and its neighbors could be separated by a mile, where in a Pueblo community your neighbors are right next door. So the community is a lot more close knit than other Native communities so there's a lot more sense of...I guess the tradition is more intact because of it, because you have a constant reminder of it. It's run like a very tight operation.

David gives an example of the impact of social roles on the community's ability to share wisdom in times of grief:

I think that's a really good example of seeing how wisdom is shared because in those times it's a lot of...A person dealing with grief is trying to balance themselves again so most of the time the elders, or people who understand that cycle, share with that person to be a part of that group now. To know that this is something that happens naturally. It's nothing to be afraid of. It's just really helping them understand, to cope with their feelings and to, of course, express how they feel if they're angry or sad about it, it's ok but by the end of this whole period it's a lot easier to go back into your daily routine because you've set up a system in which you're counseling this person back into society so at the end they should

still be dealing with some internal issues maybe but they are not as alienated with how they might be feeling because everyone knows what they've been going through.

Laurence also pointed out a difference in Native American social structure that he believes contributes to the use of wisdom:

But I think a lot of it is that native culture is slower in a sense. I don't think our ancestors ever rushed into things. They thought about what their actions are going to be very deeply and they took a long time and they got opinions from other people. The thing is that most tribes didn't have one chief. Everyone made the decision or someone who was knowledgeable in that area, like hunting or someone who knew plants or someone who knew warfare. Those people would make the decisions that concerned what needed to be taken care of in that. No one person decided everything. So I think in a sense the way the United States and American culture is very aggressive, very fast paced, we want to get there fast. Time is a big thing, like I've got to do this by this certain time or if I can, do it sooner. Like if I can graduate high school by 14...we value that instant gratification. These pop stars are 11, he's a millionaire. Our value structure. Native American culture doesn't value that. To them it's like yeah, but what does it really serve? It doesn't serve the community. I think that's another thing.

Christopher gave examples of his childhood in which wisdom was shared in the

form of traditional stories shared by way of the community activity of weaving. He even points out that he continues to volunteer his time caring for the elderly because he learned to value the stories they tell as a child. Novalis points out the importance of family gatherings as a time when wisdom was able to be shared and the important social role of elders when she says:

So a lot of it comes from when we get together for holidays or family meals, there would be a lot of storytelling. They all had a good moral value, almost like when you go to church and hear a sermon; it all has a good moral value. So we always listened to the elders. If you had a decision about your house or decision about your family, and a lot of that came too when we saw aunts and uncles and grandparents come together to repair someone's house or to construct someone's house or when someone lost their job. There was a lot of that. So when people hit any kind of barrier in their life or anything like that we always looked for someone older, like almost a head of the family. In our family it was our great grandmother because our great grandfather died young, so we looked to her for a lot of help, guidance and her rule was law. If someone was making a mistake she would tell you. If she didn't approve of some stuff, like some people got divorced, she didn't approve of that because that was not the catholic thing. Then some people started marrying outside of the race, that was really hard for her to take but she accepted it and she loves

her kids and grandkids. With all that she wasn't too happy but she embraced it. The main thing she wanted to do was make sure we stuck together. Make sure it was always family. You should always call your family and you always look to your parents. No one would even talk back to her.

Novalis also shared about the importance of elders as role models, specifically her grandmother when she said:

And she really pushed education. She didn't get her high school diploma until she was like 68. She wanted to go back because she noticed the grandkids not following through and falling off the path, and she was like let me do this so I can show you that if I'm this old and I can get it, you can get it.

She offers another example of the importance of elders guiding the family when she says:

We look to my mother, my sister and I now because we're the oldest. The grandkids, nieces and nephews, cousins... Like they see us, like, we're professionals. We have families. We're doing the right things. We made the right choices. So their like, what do I do now? So I tell them come to us before you make any decisions.

### **Category III. Individual: Personal Development**

Wisdom is engrained in Native American culture not only at the level of

the worldview and the level of the social structure but also on the level of the individual. There is a focus on personal development that participants noted as an important facet of wisdom. Individuals must learn from their own mistakes and life experiences and learn to exercise patience if they ever hope to gain wisdom.

### **III.1. Learning from mistakes and life experiences**

Blandine points to the importance of life experience in the formation of wisdom when she says, “I think wisdom definitely comes from age or having lived through something extraordinary to be able to teach about it or to make a difference in one person’s life and them being able to articulate that to others”.

Blandine goes on to connect this need for life experience to herself when she says:

Like my grandmother lives hundreds of miles away in Arizona and so I have to seek out that knowledge and I know that if I’m going to stick with it... because I know it’s a cycle then I have to commit years of my whole life to acquire that wisdom, if I wanted to. I know I physically have to move there because of how it’s tied into the planting seasons as what the whole life cycle is tied to and everything having to do with Hopi culture is all like, well you have to participate in it to more or less understand it. I mean you could understand it from the outside but it’s not the same as living there and participating in it.

David echoes this differentiation between learning about wisdom secondhand and having an experience to teach it to you:

So the idea of her saying that if you really want to understand and receive the wisdom, you have to be a part of the community and participate and not just be a spectator, because if you're just a spectator, then you're not really understanding what's really going on. I think that's key. Like for our son, he's being raised with this idea but the next step for him would be to start participating in dances and start to be immersed in that culture to see how it's related to what he's been raised with.

Laurence expands on the concept when he talks about the power of vicarious learning as a road to acquiring wisdom:

You grow up and see people in your family go through really hard times, you know, really messing up their lives and you watch that and go I'm not going to do that! So I kind of think that wisdom comes from making a lot of mistakes or seeing a lot of mistakes. Sometimes that's the best way we learn.

Laurence adds to our understanding when he explains about his efforts to share the wisdom of his experiences with his daughter when he says:

I think that was the point I was trying to make. My daughter has seen me make a lot of mistakes and seen me do a lot of great things so she already has some wisdom and people notice it. Their like, "she's so smart, she's so intelligent". It's because I didn't hide anything from her. A lot of parents will hide their mistakes. Keep secrets from their kids.

Laurence again gave a detailed explanation of the connection between wisdom and experience when he states:

Wisdom comes into play when people slow down a bit and encourage your child to make their way in life but you can go too far. Your knowledge is great, but use it appropriately. Take all the information, the things that you've been taught, take other people's experience. Do your research. Look at what people have done. Look at their mistakes, and they tell you in the end, we shouldn't have done that, so you modify your study in such a way that you don't make the same mistakes. Sometimes it's a field that's so wide open that you are going to make a lot of mistakes, but you gain a lot of wisdom.

Gabriel spoke about meditating on her own life during a prayer and coming to the realization that her past relationships were unhealthy and the pain of them had caused her to harden her heart even to those whom she loved. She was able to learn from the mistakes of her past to create wisdom she could use in the present.

### **III.2. Patience**

Patience also appeared to hold a place of importance in the participant's conceptualization of wisdom. Laurence spoke of patience when he said:

I heard someone say if you're upset about something, just give it 72 hours. Don't make a decision now cause it's just a haze, you're emotional. They used to tell parents count to ten. You're upset with your child, wait.

Part of wisdom is having patience. Really sorting out the facts, what the evidence is and taking the time to analyze the situation fully and then make the decision.

Novalis saw patience in her exemplar of wisdom, her grandmother. She explains:

We all tried our own way, then we came back and did it the way our parents and grandparents told us to do it. Like ok you might have been a little right. Maybe I need to finish school. That's why when we all go back, the door is always open, and everybody makes mistakes. Now you know. Yeah, you were right so let's do it your way. My grandmother had patience. She would just wait.

Based on the interviews conducted in this study, the concept of wisdom in the Native American community appears to be grounded in a worldview of interconnectedness, a collectivist social structure, and a value system encouraging the individual towards personal development.

## Discussion

### *Comparison of Existing Literature and Theoretical Formulations*

During the literature review section, several theories of wisdom were introduced that are present in the psychological literature. They present a wide variety of theories on the nature of wisdom as a psychological construct and each comes with underlying assumptions about how wisdom is likely to be acquired (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Shedlock & Cornelius, 2003; Ruisel, 2005; Baltes &

Straudinger, 2000; Sternberg, 2008b). To what degree are these varying theories consistent with the constructs of wisdom reported by the participants representing the Native American community and their conceptualization of wisdom?

*Positive Psychology.* Positive Psychology suggests a theory of wisdom as a distinct form of intelligence, representing a superior level of intelligence, judgment and the capacity to give advice (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). This theory of wisdom highlights wisdom's ability to allow an individual to address important and difficult questions about the conduct and meaning of life while also being used for the good and well being of others. Peterson and Seligman (2004) differentiate wisdom from knowledge by defining knowledge simply as accumulated facts where as wisdom would be the organization and interpretation of those facts.

The domains of wisdom put forth by participants in this study seem to overlap with the idea of wisdom as a type of intelligence in some respects but leaves gaps in the understanding that this study's participants illuminate. Specifically in terms of the associations made between wisdom and the ability to learn from one's life experiences and mistakes. The assertion that wisdom enables one to use superior judgment and give advice also seems to be supported by the reports of the participants in this study when they describe the importance of sharing knowledge with the next generation and in describing the social role of elders in giving advice to the younger generation. Peterson and Seligman's

positive psychology conceptualization of wisdom is also congruent with the findings of this study in that positive psychology asserts that wisdom helps people answer questions about the meaning of life. This same idea was described by the participant's discussion of wisdom as providing context for your place in life. It also appears congruent on the subject of wisdom being based on the goal of creating well-being for one's self and others, as demonstrated by the participant's discussions of the wisdom-related value of the caretaking of others and the importance of using knowledge for the greatest good.

*Mature Personality Development.* In Kunzmann and Stange (2007) and Shedlock and Cornelius (2003) wisdom is cited as a form of mature personality development, closely linked to age and postulated to develop in midlife to old age. This is based upon the work of Erikson in which he described wisdom as, "informed and detached concern with life itself in the face of death." (1982:61)

The participants in this study repeatedly draw attention to the role of elders as a source of wisdom for the community, which would seem consistent with the age-based developmental aspects of wisdom as proposed by Erikson (1982). The argument can be made that some of these prerequisites to wisdom are enumerated by the participants in this study. For instance, generativity is closely related to the construct of social structure and the individual's place within the community but missing is a structure for the development of a worldview of interconnectedness as proposed by the participants in this study. Even at the stage

of generativity, focus seems to be on creating good outcomes for oneself or those in one's social group without provisions for nature or humanity in general.

Another issue which presents itself is the discrepancy between the stage-like nature of Erikson's theory and the conceptualization of wisdom reported by the participants of this study. As you will remember from the literature review section, I posed the argument that if, as Erikson postulates, wisdom is simply the result of a set of prerequisites being met and reaching a predetermined age or stage in life, then what accounts for people who are wise despite being quite young or people who reach the older stages of life and seem to have mastered the prerequisite stages as well and yet do not seem to employ wisdom. The Native American participants in this study seemed to speak of a social structure that was designed to transmit wisdom from one person to another, which would be a pointless venture if wisdom was a naturally occurring phenomenon that occurs at a certain age with certain prerequisites made. Again it would seem that motivational factors are poorly accounted for in this conceptualization of wisdom.

*Wisdom as Relativistic and Dialectical Thinking.* Ruisel's 2005 article outlines wisdom as a cognitive process using relativistic and dialectical thinking. Ruisel defines relativistic thinking as the ability to understand that one's own thoughts and beliefs are subjective and that others may have different thoughts and beliefs which are equally valid and make sense given the situations from which they arise. Relativistic thinking allows for contradictions in thought that

naturally arise as one attempts to reconcile conflicting goals, needs, and desires while having an understanding of inherent biases given our perspective.

Dialectical thinking represents the need to integrate cognition. Using dialectical thinking allows for the drawing of conceptual links between various problems to the underlying issues common between them.

The concept of dialectical thinking was well represented in the participant's responses in the study during discussions of the interconnectedness worldview. When presented with a worldview which assumes all things to be connected, one is automatically primed to seek out those connections more so than someone whose worldview assumes discrete and unrelated events. The concept of relativistic thinking is represented in the focus on individual, personal development goals, specifically the idea of learning from one's own mistakes and life experiences. Relativistic thinking allows an individual to judge which life experiences were the right decisions for oneself and which were not beneficial, so that one does not repeat old mistakes, but learns from them. Relativistic thinking also appears to be a reoccurring theme in the value of elders as the holders of wisdom. Participants repeatedly pointed out that younger members of the community were likely to make poor decisions and act impulsively. Elders demonstrated an understanding of the desires and needs of youth while also demonstrating a greater perspective of long term goals than the younger generation generally possessed.

*Pragmatic Intelligence.* Pragmatic intelligence is defined, by and Staudinger (1993) as a way that people use their knowledge. Two prominent theories of wisdom emerge that portray wisdom as a form a pragmatic intelligence, the Berlin model of wisdom and the balance theory of wisdom.

The Berlin model breaks wisdom into five components of thought. The five components are factual knowledge in the fundamental pragmatics of life, strategic knowledge in the fundamental pragmatics of life, knowledge which considers the uncertainties of life, knowledge which considers contexts of life and societal change, and knowledge which considers the relativism of values and life goals. Baltes and Staudinger define the fundamental pragmatics of life as knowledge of the various pathways of life, knowledge of the effects on the lifespan that occur as a result of generational and historical influences, knowledge about the self, knowledge of other people and society, and skills of managing interpersonal relations.

The balance theory of wisdom also includes in its model the variables of goals and values. The goals variable acknowledges that people differ in terms of their motivation to seek the common good of others. The values variable addresses the fact that an individual's values come into play when determining what actions are wise. The other variables in the theory have discrete possibilities one must choose from but the goals and values variables seem to be the equivalent to a black box in the equation. They are involved but in some poorly defined

manner. I believe this research can potentially shed some light on the development of one's motivation to seek the common good and to hold values that are conducive to wise decision making.

According to the constructs created in this study, wisdom, at least as it is conceptualized in the Native American community, seems to be based on a worldview of interconnectedness, a collectivist social structure, and the facilitation of personal development on the individual level. If wisdom requires someone to be highly motivated to seek the greatest good for others as the balance theory proposes, then perhaps viewing everyone and everything as interconnected acts as a motivator to seek out the common good as opposed to the individual good. In fact, from the perspective of interconnectedness, there is no individual good without the common good being appealed to. Without the separation of the individual from the all, it is illogical to presume that one can prosper while others continue to suffer. Similar motivational rationales can be attributed to having a collectivist social structure. If one were raised in a social context in which it was socially expected that one would freely give help to others, and in turn receive help when needed, one would perhaps be more primed to thinking about ways to, not only help oneself, but to help the community prosper as a whole.

The variable of values within the balance theory of wisdom can be similarly impacted by the worldview of interconnectedness, a collectivist social structure, and the facilitation of personal development on the individual level. A

worldview of interconnectedness and a collectivist social structure both tend to encourage values of sharing, cooperation and thinking of the needs of others as well as one's self. Valuing personal development encourages reflection on one's actions so as to learn from mistakes and make better choices in the future.

### *Implications of findings*

The conceptualization of wisdom provided in this study, as informed by a sample of Native American individuals, stands to increase our theoretical attempts to understand the contributing factors influencing the development of wisdom as well as our practical attempts to foster the development of wisdom in our society. The three part conceptualization of wisdom that emerged from this study consists of an interconnected worldview, a collectivist social structure, and the facilitation of personal development on the individual level. This represents a more holistic view of the factors contributing to wisdom than the general body of psychological research has provided thus far. This study suggests that psychological researchers interested in wisdom would be well advised to integrate philosophical, sociological, and anthropological knowledge into future theories of wisdom so as to encompass the wide variety of factors contributing to wisdom's development.

In terms of practical implications of the findings, each domain of wisdom can be fostered through teaching or by providing the situations outlined in the examples provided by the participants. To promote an interconnected worldview, one should teach about the importance of caring for nature and for others as an

extended part of the self. In addition, a psychotherapist may encourage a client to make use of any belief in a higher power to draw connections between the self and others, explicitly explore the consequences of being out of balance with one's connection to nature and others, and teach the importance of using knowledge for the greater good.

A collectivist social structure can be fostered by providing a social context for people's lives by drawing connections between the present and the past into a seamless whole. This gives a narrative history to a community, provides a social structure for the routine sharing of knowledge from one generation to the next (Storytelling being an example that facilitates both of these goals simultaneously), and creates a social structure and social roles that promote a strong sense of shared community goals.

A strong value towards personal development in the individual can be fostered through teaching people to be observant of the experiences of others, that they may learn from them and be equally observant and reflective of their own experiences. Fostering a value of patience is equally valuable, in that one learns to delay individual gratification, such that hasty decisions are not made and the feelings and needs of others can be considered before acting on impulse.

These domains of wisdom are beneficial aspects to understand for any clinician working with the Native American community as worldview, social structure and individual values are important aspects of cultural identity, and as

such, aid clinicians in cultural competence. Even when working outside of the Native American community, therapist could benefit from understanding their client's worldview, social structure and individual values as clues to why a person may not be making wise decisions and establish in what domain or domains the client is lacking.

#### *Limitations of the study*

No study is without limitations and this study is no different. This study was a qualitative, in depth interview study, which by the nature of the time and resources available limited the amount of participants who could be interviewed. Eight participants is not a particularly large sample size. Therefore the generalizability of the findings may be somewhat limited. Generalizability is also an issue in that the Native American community is extremely diverse, with distinct cultural groups with many separate and unique traditions, outlooks, and ways of life. The findings presented represent an amalgamation of the responses provided by the participants in this particular study, but they may not encompass the totality of Native American thought in terms of wisdom.

#### *Suggestions for future research*

Researcher wishing to continue investigating wisdom can look at conceptualizations of wisdom in other communities and compare these conceptualizations with those discovered in this study. Also of interest would be a study in which educators could create an educational environment emphasizing

the three domains of wisdom to see if it fostered increased wise decision making in the students. Researchers could also focus on attempts to effect the three domains of wisdom in psychotherapy to see to what degree they can be changed using various therapeutic techniques and which is best applied for this specific goal.

### Conclusion

Wisdom is a very complex mental construct and that there are a wide variety of theories regarding the factors that go into wise decision making. What is clear, regardless of what model of wisdom one prefers to use, is that wisdom provides some very tangible benefits to the individual and to society. Furthermore, our current education system is not adequately teaching students to be wise, and thus society is suffering the consequences of a populace armed with ever more dangerous technologies and knowledge without access to the wisdom necessary to use these tools for the promotion of the greater good. There are two main domains in which I imagine the study of wisdom can have profound societal effects, the fields of education and psychotherapy.

Educators are charged with providing our children with the information and skills that they will need to be successful adults. This is a goal that is impossible to achieve without equipping them with the wisdom necessary to use the information and skills they gain effectively to ensure successful outcomes for themselves and society as a whole. In this way, educators can learn a great deal

from the Native American conceptualization of wisdom presented in this study. If educators commit themselves to finding ways to integrate the concepts provided by the participants in this study, they will be able to foster wisdom in their students and therefore create more responsible citizens for society.

Psychologists are in a unique position to be able to directly counsel people towards making wise decisions and to cultivate a wise thought process even outside of therapy. One of a therapist's many goals is to equip clients with the skills necessary to function in everyday life. Wisdom is a helpful framework toward the promotion of that therapeutic goal. The construction of wisdom, however, likely extends beyond the realm of the purely psychological into social and cultural arenas as well.

The good news is that this research provides a guide to what wisdom is and how to promote its development. Using Native American traditions and ways of knowing, insight can be gained into a more holistic concept of wisdom that includes not just vague cognitive models, but tangible constructs which hold true clinical utility for therapists in practice. By adopting a worldview of interconnectedness, seeking out collectivist social structures, and embracing the value of personal development, we can promote wisdom in ourselves and our communities.

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## APPENDIX A

### Information Document

#### *Native American Conceptualizations of Wisdom*

Hello,

Would you like to participate in an interview about your feelings and perceptions of Wisdom and how a person becomes wise? If you are a Native American individual and you are over the age of twenty-one, you are someone who would be a valuable member of this study. This study is being conducted to better create cultural awareness and understanding as well as respect toward and sensitivity to diversity.

My name is Lamar Smith and I am a psychology student at Antioch University in Santa Barbara. If you are interested in participating in the study I will be interviewing you.

Participation in this research will involve a 60 to 90 minute interview in which you will be asked to reflect on your thoughts and feelings regarding what wisdom is and how one becomes wise. The interviews we do together will be recorded, transcribed, and given a code number to protect your privacy and make sure that the information that you share is kept confidential. The tapes will be destroyed upon completion of the study. If you would like a copy of the tapes you can let me know when we meet for the interview. You can also request to be informed via telephone of any quotations from our interview that end up in the

final study, so that you can verify that I have quoted you correctly and understood the meaning of your comments.

Your entire participation in this study should only take between 60-90 minutes. The purpose of this research is to increase the understanding of psychologist and researchers regarding the nature and cultivation of wisdom so that our interventions can be more culturally sensitive. I will not be using anyone's real name in the study and there is no way that you will be recognizable based on what I write. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

If you would like to participate in this study you can reach me at (626) 991-3135 or by sending me an e-mail at [AMorph25@aol.com](mailto:AMorph25@aol.com). Thank you for your interest and your time. I look forward to speaking with you.

Sincerely,

Lamar Smith M.A.  
Clinical Psychology  
Antioch University Santa Barbara

## **APPENDIX B**

### Informed Consent

#### *Native American Conceptualizations of Wisdom*

You are invited to participate in a study conducted by Lamar Smith, a doctoral student at Antioch University in Santa Barbara. This study is going to ask you about what you believe wisdom is and how do you think a person becomes wise. You are eligible for participation if you identify as Native American are at least 21 years of age. This study will help expand the understanding of Native American conceptualizations of wisdom, and help psychologist and other mental health professionals expand their cultural sensitivity.

Participation in this research will involve a 60 to 90 minute interview in which you will be asked to reflect on your thoughts and feelings regarding what wisdom is and how one becomes wise. The interviews we do together will be recorded, transcribed, and given a code number in place of your name to protect your privacy and make sure that the information that you share is kept confidential. The tapes will be destroyed upon completion of the study. If you would like a copy of the tapes you can let me know when we meet for the interview. You can also request to be informed via telephone of any quotations from our interview that end up in the final study, so that you can verify that I have quoted you correctly and understood the meaning of your comments.

The Institutional Review Board of Antioch University will have access to

all signed informed consent forms but the actual information you share for the study will be kept confidential. Code numbers will be put on forms and paperwork in place of your name to insure that you will not be identifiable. Informed consent forms and other documents will be kept in a locked file cabinet and destroyed after five years. The audio recordings will only be listened to by the researcher and any research assistants and the recordings will be destroyed after the study is completed. If you request a copy of your taped interview, it will be made available to you before it is destroyed. You will also have the opportunity to choose a false name to be used for any quotes that may be used in the study. This study may be published in a journal or book for professionals in the social sciences.

The benefits you may gain from this study are a greater understanding of your own conceptualizations of wisdom and positive feelings knowing you have contributed to the understanding of Native American culture and the training of multiculturally competent therapists. This risks to you are minimal but in the unlikely event that you express any emotional discomfort as a result of this study, the names of a therapist in the Santa Barbara area will be provided at your request.

Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time and if you decide that you do not want to participate, there is no penalty. If you withdraw from the study your data will be destroyed. If

you have any questions of concerns, please address them with the researcher at  
(626) 991-3135.

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Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

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Name of Researcher

Signature of Researcher

Date

## APPENDIX C

### Questionnaire to Collect Demographic Information

1. What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What is your gender?
  - Male
  - Female
  - Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
3. What is your marital status?
  - Single
  - Married
  - Domestic partnership
  - Committed nonmarried
  - Divorced or separated
  - Widowed
4. What is the highest professional degree that you currently hold?
  - Doctorate
  - MA
  - BA
  - High School
5. Which of the following best describes your religious affiliation?
  - Catholic
  - Jewish
  - Protestant
  - Muslim
  - None
  - Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
6. Which of the following best describes the ethnicity with which you most identify?
  - African American
  - Asian American
  - European American
  - Mexican American

- Native American
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

7. What city do you live in ?

\_\_\_\_\_

8. To which Native American tribe/community do you identify yourself?

\_\_\_\_\_

8. What is your occupation? \_\_\_\_\_