A Phenomenological Study of the Therapeutic Benefits of Woodcarving

by

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B.Ed., University of British Columbia, 1996

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

in the
Counselling Psychology Program
Faculty of Education

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or

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Abstract

The pace of life in modern society can be hectic and unrelenting. It is therefore not surprising that people often feel emotionally and physically depleted and seek out ways to relax and rejuvenate mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

There are many forms of recreational and therapeutic activities that people engage in during their day to day lives in order to relax and recuperate from the grind of modern life. Some activities are physical in nature, such as yoga, baseball, jogging or hiking in the woods. Some are more creative, such as painting, writing or singing. While other therapeutic hobbies are closer to being chores, like baking or gardening. There are a myriad of activities that people find relaxing; however, an activity that one person finds relaxing another person may find onerous or frustrating.

Woodcarving is a creative and often cultural activity that is sought by many as a means of recreation and relaxation. Nevertheless, there is a paucity of research that has explored the potentially therapeutic benefits of working with crafts, especially woodcarving. The goal of this study was to use qualitative phenomenological methods to ascertain the common therapeutic benefits participants derived from engaging in woodcarving and to ascertain the shared benefits of the woodcarving experience.

The findings of this research established that there were six common therapeutic benefits of woodcarving that were shared by all the participants to some degree. For some participants woodcarving can be a very spiritual and meditative practice, for others it is simply a way to relax and create something aesthetically pleasing with their own two hands. To our knowledge, this study is the first to highlight the therapeutic and life-enhancing benefits of woodcarving. It is my hope that this paper may generate interest in this field of study so that in the future more research may be focused upon the therapeutic benefits of woodcarving and other crafts.

**Keywords:** Craft; Indigenous; hermeneutic; phenomenology; therapeutic; woodcarving
I dedicate this work to my daughter, Clara Joy Hamilton, who was born during this academic journey and has brought so much meaning and happiness to my life. May I always remember how fortunate I am to have both you and your mother in my life.
Acknowledgements

My journey to this point could not have been possible without the loving support of my dear wife Mandy, to whom I owe so much. Without your belief and encouragement I would have never started on this path. I would also like to offer my thanks to Dr. annie ross, who has been a most supportive and insightful supervisor. Your experience as a weaver and professor of First Nations Studies enabled this to be a truly interdisciplinary effort and a more robust and meaningful study. Without your academic courage and advocacy the data for this research would have been much less rich. Thank you also to Dr. Sharalyn Jordan, your support and guidance throughout this whole process has been greatly appreciated, you believed in my academic potential when I was unsure. Thank you also to Dr. Stillman Juacard for your inspiration when I first started taking prerequisite courses for this degree, you helped me think outside the box and follow a research path I was passionate about.

I would also like to offer my deepest thanks all of the participants of this study. Your time and experience were invaluable to me. Lastly I would like to acknowledge all Indigenous people present and past who have kept their cultural and craft practices alive and have endeavoured to pass them on to the next generation. These crafts are a link to our ancestors and can ground us in times of turmoil and in the face of adversity. It is my hope that the experience of the Coast Salish peoples and other Indigenous peoples of North America can attest to the therapeutic benefits of such craft practices in the face of such adversity. My deepest appreciation goes out to the Coast Salish participants who shared their experience and strength pertaining to the therapeutic and healing power of woodcarving.
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### Glossary

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<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Craft</td>
<td>To make or construct something by hand in a manner suggesting great care or ingenuity using natural materials and applying traditional knowledge and skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flow</td>
<td>A unified flowing from one moment to the next, in which we feel in control of our actions, and in which there is little distinction between self and environment. (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975. P. 43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hermeneutic Phenomenology</td>
<td>The study and interpretation of an individuals' lived experience (of a phenomenon).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>People who self-identify as being First Nations, aboriginal, Inuit or Metis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindfulness</td>
<td>A psychological state of maintaining focus on the present moment in which one accepts their emotions, thoughts and bodily sensations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Industrial Society</td>
<td>The social and cultural structure that developed after the industrial revolution and became what is generally known as modern western society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological Integration</td>
<td>The organization of traits, behaviours, feelings, attitudes etc. into a harmonious sense of self in which the individual can perceive themselves in relation to others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirituality</td>
<td>A way of being and experiencing that which comes about through awareness of a transcendent dimension and that is characterized by certain identifiable values in regard to self, others, nature, life, and whatever one considers to be the Ultimate.” (Elkins et al., 1988.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>Technology comes from the Greek word <em>teknik</em>. According to the Oxford Dictionary (Simpson &amp; Weiner, 1989) teknik means “Pertaining to art and craft”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Therapeutic</td>
<td>Therapeutic in this paper is defined as “Having good effect on the body or mind; contributing to a sense of well-being” (Simpson &amp; Weiner, 1989).</td>
</tr>
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Chapter 1.

Introduction

Woodcarving offers many therapeutic and life-enhancing benefits, however, these benefits are poorly defined and understood within the academic community. I undertook this research to fill that knowledge gap and explore these benefits. Since first contemplating researching the therapeutic benefits of woodcarving, I have been encouraged by how well received the topic is. Another defining feature of this research is that it utilizes the experience of First Nations woodcarvers to help inform us of the benefits of woodcarving; a traditional cultural practice that is actively used in many Indigenous communities to promote wellness and healing. It is my hope that this research provides a starting point for future study of the therapeutic benefits of woodcarving and other craft practices that improve quality of life or help people heal.

As an introduction to this work, I will give a brief personal history pertaining to my interest in woodworking. As well, I will provide a description of my experience as a woodwork teacher and use an actual experience to illustrate how a past student flourished in a class that I taught. By providing a personal narrative I offer a starting point from which to approach this study of the psychological benefits of woodworking.

This research has been conducted according hermeneutic phenomenological research methodology as outlined by the highly regarded education and social science researcher Max van Manen (1990). In a hermeneutic phenomenological study, the researcher takes an active interpretive approach to the qualitative data in order to explain the phenomenon. In this study I conduct and interpret interviews with carvers, in order to create a rich understanding of the therapeutic benefits of woodcarving. Using this particular research approach, we will be examining what van Manen calls the \textit{lived experience} of a phenomenon: How does each participant experience the therapeutic
benefits woodcarving? Hermeneutic investigation examines the essence of a subject by articulating how an individual experiences the *lived time, lived body, lived relations and lived space* of an event or phenomenon. A more in depth description to this approach is provided in the Chapter 3.

In order to provide a more robust understanding of these benefits, I expanded the scope of research to the therapeutic *and* life-enhancing benefits of woodcarving. For the purposes of this research we will be using the following definition of therapeutic: Having a good effect on the body or mind; contributing to a sense of well-being (Simpson & Weiner, 1989). The term *life-enhancing benefit* is defined as being either a life lesson or practical skill that can be applied outside of the activity of woodcarving. For example, learning patience through woodcarving is considered to be life-enhancing rather than therapeutic.

My engagement in interviews and transcriptions, research of the literature, conversations with other carvers and academics and data analysis using phenomenological methods produced six themes:

1) Woodcarving is conducive to flow and mindfulness. 2) Carving reduces stress and promotes positive emotionality. 3) Woodcarving helps with emotional processing 4) 5) Woodcarving fosters a connection to nature. 6) It provides social engagement and cultural meaning in one’s life.

The diagram provided in Figure 1 is a visual representation of how each of these themes is situated within the lived experience of the phenomenon of woodcarving, using the phenomenological framework. They are categorized into Carving Time, Carving Body, Carving Space and Carving Relations.
Figure 1.1. Six therapeutic and life-enhancing benefits of woodcarving conceptualized across the four existential realms of lived time, lived body, lived space and lived relation.

Note: According to hermeneutic phenomenological research methodology, as outlined by Max van Manen (1990)

In the Chapter 2, I will situate these core themes by introducing pertinent literature to better illuminate this thesis. As far as I have been able to ascertain, there has been no academic research pertaining to the therapeutic benefits of woodcarving in particular and very little pertaining to the psychological benefits of traditional crafts in general. For the purpose of this paper craft is defined as: To make or construct something by hand in a manner suggesting great care or ingenuity using natural materials and applying traditional knowledge and skills. I propose that this area of study is both pertinent and deserving of more academic attention in the field of counselling psychology in particular, and the study of health sciences in general. In Chapter 5, I will provide suggestions for future research.
It should be noted that there is another unique and very important aspect to this research. Four of the eight participants of this study were of indigenous descent. Within this thesis the definition of Indigenous is meant to include people who self-identify as being First Nations, aboriginal, Inuit or Metis. For the purpose of future research pertaining to the therapeutic benefits of traditional crafts, the term Indigenous might include a wider population of peoples from around the world, but as a study conducted in Canada, we will be using this definition.

Their unique and very powerful lived experience of woodcarving has helped to inform this research in a meaningful way which deepened my understanding of all six themes and drew my attention to how woodcarving can be a spiritual practice. Their perspective of the lived experience of woodcarving has enabled this research to gain insight into how the practice of a traditional craft can be a healing and life changing practice for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. In particular their experience helped me to understand and appreciate where art, craft and technology are no longer separate and how woodcarving can be a spiritual practice. Because of their unique perspective, we are better able to envision how woodcarving might be used as a therapeutic medium within the realm of counselling psychology for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

The interactions I had with the Indigenous participants raised my awareness of how woodcarving can be a spiritual practice that provides therapeutic benefits. Given the importance of spirituality to the Indigenous carving experience, I will provide a working definition of spirituality. This definition of spirituality, drawn from the psychological literature, is broad and encompassing and is applicable to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people from any cultural background.

Spirituality, which comes from the Latin, spiritus, meaning “breathe of life,” is a way of being and experiencing that which comes about through awareness of a transcendent dimension and that is characterized by certain identifiable values in regard to self, others, nature, life, and whatever one considers to be the Ultimate. (Elkins et al., 1988.)

I found this definition appropriate in that it acknowledges values and relationships between individuals, society the natural world. We will expand upon the concept of
spirituality more in section 2.4 of the Literature Review. Let us now explore how I, as a researcher, began to be interested in woodworking and how I have seen woodworking benefit my own and other peoples’ lives.

1.1. A knife Cuts Both Ways – Personal Lessons in Woodwork

One of my fondest memories from childhood is when I spent time with my grandfather making toy wooden boats out of scrap wood in his workshop. He introduced me to using a handsaw, hammer and other basic hand tools. The boats were not elaborate affairs, they were rarely more than three pieces of wood nailed together to look like a ship of some sort. Sometimes there were holes drilled to look like cabin windows, but more often than not they were extremely basic profiles and representations of boats. After making these boats in the morning, he would drive me to a slow moving river that was close to his home. We would launch the boats and follow them down the riverbank till they made their way to open water. Although we never saw the boats again, the experience left lasting impressions in my mind. What a gift it was to spend this time with my grandfather. Woodworking provided an opportunity for us to bond and gave my grandfather an opportunity to mentor me in how to properly and safely use tools. It was also an opportunity to become familiar with wood as an artistic medium and building material; I discovered how it smelled when it was cut, became aware of its textures and learned about the grain of wood. Looking back on this experience, I wonder if it was then that I became aware that different types of woods had different personalities and qualities.

Another memory from early childhood involved an important lesson that I learned one day while chopping wood for the stove at our family cabin. I can't recall exactly how young I was, but my father had shown me how to chop kindling with a hatchet one summer. A few days later, I thought it would be fun to go split some wood. What I neglected to do was to wear appropriate shoes. After chopping wood for some time I got a little carried away and reckless and ended up cutting the big toe on my left foot quite badly. After this humbling and painful experience I gained an appreciation and respect
for the axe and how it needed to be handled with care and an awareness of how the tool is being used.

Since then I have found chopping wood to be therapeutic exercise, and an excellent way to cope with stress or release tensions. Chopping wood effectively requires physical exertion balanced with mental focus and a keen awareness of one’s own body and the wood being split. The axe becomes an extension of one’s own body as it splits the wood. As well, a person adept at chopping wood becomes more attuned to the individual pieces. Are there knots in the wood? How dry is the wood? Is it dense Maple or straight grained Fir? These questions all directly relate to how splitting the wood is accomplished most effectively. Aaron, one of the participants of this study stated that, “There are people who only cut firewood, and they still have a deep level of engagement.”

1.2. Early Impressions: West Coast Indigenous Art

As a young man I was fortunate to have some exposure to traditional woodcarvings of West Coast Indigenous peoples. When in elementary school, I went on several field trips to the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia. On one of these field trips, we were fortunate enough to have elders from the local Musqueam band speak to us and talk about some of their cultural traditions. This event made a deep and lasting impression on me as a young man. Growing up in Vancouver, I came to know of the Haida artist Bill Reid and became familiar with some of his work. He became something of a hero to me. Later when I was attending college, I went to an art exhibit opening of another Haida artist, Robert Davidson. I introduced myself and he took a few minutes to talk to me about his work. This encounter with a master carver and artist also had a lasting impression on me. His humility and passion for the art form was inspiring. Although I am not fluent with the lore and cultural traditions of the Indigenous people’s of the West Coast, I have always found that their art and carvings deeply move me and somehow connect me to the essence of this place in which I grew up. When I see a carving of a bear, frog or eagle I cannot help but think of the environment in which these animals live and care about this shared environment. By having exposure to and an appreciation of the art and woodcarving traditions of the
Indigenous peoples of the West Coast of Canada, I feel as though I have a deeper affinity to the nature of this place in which I grew up.

1.3. Developing Skills in Craft: A Journey not a Destination

I am by no means a master wood worker. Often when I am working on a project I am faced with my shortcomings as a woodworker. As with most crafts, learning woodworking and carving can be a humbling and ego smashing experience. After teaching woodworking for fifteen years I can still fall victim to not double checking a measurement and cutting a piece of wood too short. However, I have learned basic skills and consider myself competent when doing small projects around the house. I am able to read plans to make projects and have been able to communicate these steps to students I have taught in the past so that they can have some measure of success creating their own projects. But these skills are all relative when you consider that an apprentice learning traditional Japanese woodworking can spend over a year just learning how to sharpen tools before they are actually allowed to cut a piece of wood. Toshio Odate is a renown Japanese woodworker who has written extensively about his craft. He tells us that in Japan, the craftsperosn inevitably develops a modesty and humility in their work while displaying a deep reverence for their craft (1984). The more one learns about a craft, the more one realizes how little they know and how limited their skill actually is; until perhaps they become a master-craftsperosn.

At this point I would like to quote Rory Brown, an accomplished Technology Studies teacher who helped me in the initial stages of this research. In 2003 he conducted narrative research that involved him making a cedar strip prospector canoe and reported on how this creative process changed him as an individual. In his thesis he states:

The creative process: craft, art, etc. is change. My creative process of constantly rebuilding myself as an emotionally grounded person living the ‘good life’ is an artistic and a creative process – a process of rounding my character. It is a process of taking that which already exists and pulling pieces to (re)create a new whole. It is not unlike the process of building a canoe and a process that happens again and again. It is just the same
for the craftsman. This emotional relationship that binds my craft to change feels like an unassailable and absolute truth. (p. 31)

From personal experience, I have discovered that when I am focused on the craft practice and not the end result, the experience is far more rewarding. Through woodworking I have developed some degree of humility, realizing there will always be much room for growth and skill development for me as a craftsman. I have become much more deliberate and thoughtful when I engage in using hand tools to create or repair something. As well, I have developed more appreciation and respect for the use and care of the tools that I own. Finally, I have developed an appreciation for the work of other crafts-people and feel that I am part of a larger tradition of woodworking.

1.4. Billy’s Pine Box

As a high school woodwork teacher, I have witnessed the positive effects of people creating an object from wood.

Figure 1.2. Billy’s Pine Box
Note: Photo taken by Graeme Hamilton (2011).

Billy (not his real name), was a student that I taught in a woodwork class for one year. He was a grade eleven student who had not taken a shop class since grade eight. Billy was not a very engaged student in school and tended to miss classes fairly regularly. Although he did not have any specific learning challenges, he did not excel at school and was considered a below average student.
In our woodwork class Billy had to make a wooden box. I had determined the joinery techniques and how the box would be made beforehand. The students were able to determine the dimensions of the box and from what type of wood it was made. Before actually measuring and cutting the wood, I had all the students draw a full-sized drawing of the box to help them visualize and plan the production process. We discussed what the box might be used for and how they would like it to look aesthetically. When we chose wood for him to use, Billy came across a 2"X6" piece of wood with bark and rough edges from the outside of the tree. I pointed out that the rough and gnarly looking piece of the wood might make a nice natural looking lid for his box. He agreed and liked this idea very much; he was hooked. At this point I recall that his relationship with the wood and this project changed. He started to take ownership of the work he was doing and took care with how he treated the pieces of wood.

Many boys his age tend to rush what they are doing in the wood shop, perhaps from a belief that they want to finish first. I started to notice that Billy was taking his time and being very deliberate with the work he was doing, he became more engaged. At the beginning of each class he would get his box and determine what work was to be done that day. He paid more attention to what others were doing, seeing if someone was using a technique he might take advantage of or what mistakes others had made. When sanding and finishing his box he was deliberate and careful. As the finished project began to take shape, Billy became more absorbed with the process and focused on the tasks at hand. I remember seeing him sanding his box with care making sure that his finish was smooth and consistent. He made sure to ask me how to apply the polyurethane properly and how many coats should be applied. It was obvious how proud he was of the final piece. When I asked him if I could take a photograph of him and his finished project he beamed with pride.

I am not sure what Billy is doing in his life now, but I would like to think that he still has his box and is still proud of his efforts. Even if he does not engage in woodworking as a hobby or career, this student learned valuable practical skills and gained an appreciation for how something is produced and manufactured. I witnessed that the experience of creating a beautiful and functional object had a positive transformative effect on this young man as well as a positive effect on me as the
teacher. His box became a shared source of pride and a connection between the two of us. He was proud of his final product and I was proud of my success as a teacher and as a mentor. The success that we both had with this project is the type of experience that makes teaching fulfilling and rewarding. I feel as though I was able to transmit some of my respect and appreciation for woodworking to this young man and that he now has a deeper respect and appreciation for objects crafted from wood and how they are made.

I have been a high school woodwork and metalwork teacher for sixteen years. Although not all students have a natural proclivity to engaging in these areas of study, many find this type of hands-on class a welcome reprieve from a typical course based upon reading, memorizing and exams. I have often noticed how students undergo a significant positive transformation after creating an object out of wood using tools and their own hands. Herein, significant is defined as having lasting change that is worthy of attention. Whether the final product is a simple toy gumball machine or an oak side table, students who have put time and effort into a project invariably demonstrate pride in their achieving a skill level in craft, something not obtainable by any other means. I have occasionally witnessed that by developing confidence in using hand tools such as a hand plane or wood chisel, students will sometimes gain a bit more confidence in general.

Learning how to craft something out of wood and developing the skills necessary to do so can build confidence and a sense of pride in individuals. A similar process can occur with other crafts, whether it is baking, pottery, sewing or any other such endeavour. Engaging in meaningful craft can foster a positive connection to community, society and the natural world.

1.5. The Transformative Effects of Woodcarving

Woodcarving can be a positive experience for those who engage in it as a pastime, hobby or vocation. As mentioned earlier, the goal of this phenomenological research is to identify the therapeutic and life-enhancing benefits of woodcarving. There were eight participants in this study, each having their own unique relationship with the
woodcarving experience. For some it is a therapeutic hobby, for others it is more akin to a spiritual practice. What is common to all participants is that woodcarving has become a life-enhancing practice that has benefited their lives in enduring ways.

In the following chapter, I will review literature that pertains to the eight themes presented in Figure 1 in order to develop a robust foundation with which to approach this area of study. This research will demonstrate that becoming proficient in woodcarving has therapeutic and life-enhancing benefits for individuals. I propose that becoming proficient in a craft, in this case, woodcarving, can have a positive effect on how a person conducts their life and interacts in their world. For some people this change in attitude and perspective may be more profound than it is in others, and with different people these changes may manifest in varied ways. This paper will illuminate how certain positive changes in character and behaviour can be achieved by becoming proficient in woodcarving, and therefore demonstrate some of the therapeutic benefits of this craft.
Chapter 2.

Literature Review

In this chapter I make far-reaching connections across various disciplines in order to situate this research within the field of counselling psychology and within a socio-cultural context as well. In particular, I demonstrate why an ancient craft practice such as woodcarving has therapeutic and life-enhancing value in modern times.

This chapter has four sections. The first section examines literature pertaining to the role of crafts in modern society and an epistemological examination of the meaning of technology. The second section will summarize the literature pertaining to Art Therapy and the therapeutic benefits of creative expression. Third, we will address literature that pertains to psychological theories of flow and mindfulness. Finally we will examine how an Indigenous perspective on woodcarving can inform our research and how cultural practices such as woodcarving have played an important role in helping Indigenous peoples heal from the trauma of colonization.

The aim of this literature review is to provide the reader with context and a starting point from which to approach the study of the phenomenon of woodcarving. The literature will help us make sense of this activity as a life-enhancing endeavour. We will be exploring aspects of a craft that has existed since the dawn of humankind and that hopefully will give us insight into the human condition in the modern world; specifically how engaging in woodcarving can help to remediate a disconnect between art, technology and the natural world.
2.1. An Epistemological Examination of Technology & Crafts

I have already provided a working definition of craft for this paper: To make or construct something by hand in a manner suggesting great care or ingenuity using natural materials and applying traditional knowledge and skills. Using this definition of craft, we could be describing any number of ancient or traditional creative practices such as woodcarving, pottery, or weaving. This is not an exclusive list however, and we could include other art forms. It is my contention that many of the therapeutic benefits of woodcarving identified in this research could be transferable into other craft practices, and that is why I have identified woodcarving as a craft, akin to other artistic endeavours. There will be more discussion about the meaning of the word craft within section 2.2 of this chapter.

Providing a working definition for the word technology will allow for a deeper appreciation and understanding of woodcarving as a craft practice. Technology is a term that is bandied about extensively in society today, often with connotations pertinent to digital technology or ‘high tech’ usage. However, turning to the origins of this word reveals a different sense. Technology comes from the Greek word teknik. According to the Oxford Dictionary (Simpson & Weiner, 1989) teknik means “Pertaining to art and craft”. When we are examining the roots of the word technology, we can see that there is a fusion of meaning between art, craft and technology.

It is my hope that by approaching the phenomenon of woodcarving from this perspective, the reader can appreciate some elements of the practice more deeply. The following four points highlight some technical aspects of woodcarving that relate to therapeutic benefits derived from this practice that were identified by participants. I provide them here so that the reader can appreciate why I have taken the time to situate the study of therapeutic benefits of woodcarving within the context of being a traditional craft practice.

1) How carving tools are used and cared for is very a important aspect of woodcarving that translates into other areas of a persons’ life. 2) As a person becomes more proficient in woodcarving, they gain a deeper appreciation and understanding of
the materials being used and their properties. 3) There are specific skills and esoteric knowledge that are only obtained through practice and experience. 4) By crafting an object by hand, the individual creates a bond or connection to that piece and to the natural materials being used and the environment from which it came. It has become apparent that learning and practicing woodcarving skills has inherent therapeutic benefits.

From my personal experience as a shop teacher, I can attest to the fact that in general, young people have less experience using basic hand tools than in previous generations. It is becoming more common to have students that have never used a hammer before or used a handsaw to cut a piece of wood. Therefore, next I would like to provide an examination of how this came to be in modern society.

Within this paper I use the term post-industrial society throughout. Herein post-industrial society refers to the social and cultural structure that developed after the industrial revolution and became what is generally known as modern western society. Specifically, I will demonstrate the concept that arts, crafts and technology became separate from each other during the historical periods of the Renaissance and the Industrial Revolution.

Post-industrial society is a broad term, but is used in this paper to illustrate important epistemological differences between modern Western culture and ‘Indigenous’ culture pertaining to the practice of woodcarving and traditional crafts. It is not within the scope of this paper to fully examine these sociological and cultural differences, but my goal is to provide a working socio-cultural construct for this paper with which to study the ancient practice of woodcarving.

This divorce of art from technology is completely unnatural. It's just that you have to be an archaeologist to find out where the two separated. (Pirsig p.161)

When I read Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance for the first time as a young man in my early 20s, this book had a deep impact on how I perceived the world, how I viewed rational scientific dogma, and my epistemological values. So I believe it is important to include this and other personally formative texts in the first section of the
Literature Review in order to further inform the reader and situate this research. While some of the literature relates to my pedagogical worldviews as a technology education teacher, some literature pertains to my own personal philosophical views.

Let us now examine what the literature has to tell us about the separation between art, craft and technology in post-industrial society. Engaging in meaningful craft is no longer an everyday activity for most people in modern society. Art Therapy scholars argue that in the process we have lost the benefits of practicing craft (McNiff, 1992; Warren, 1984). Art Therapy doyenne Shaun McNiff states that people have an innate desire to create using their hands. He is an academic, researcher and professor at Lesley University as well as a practicing artist. His work has had a major influence in the field of Art Therapy and how research is conducted in this field. During the formative stages of this research his work was very helpful and enlightening.

I believe it is not only important, but crucial that we explore the phenomenon of woodcarving within the socio-cultural context of modern life. According to Pirsig, art and technology used to be indistinguishable in everyday life in Western society. We must acknowledge this split between art and technology if we are to appreciate some of the benefits of woodcarving as a life-enhancing and therapeutic experience in post-industrial society. By situating this research within a broad scope of literature, my intention is that the reader will better appreciate the therapeutic and life-enhancing benefits of woodcarving reported in Chapter 4. For example, this paper will demonstrate how engaging in craft practices can help connect people to the natural world, and how becoming proficient in woodcarving can help individuals become more organized and responsible in their daily lives.

So let us now contrast the post-industrial craft experience with that of the indigenous craft experience. Xwa-Lack-Tun, one of the Coast Salish participants stated that, “Back in that time we only took what we needed, it’s spread everywhere all over the world. Where that wood was, now it’s gone.” Here he is talking about the trees from the old-growth rainforest. Within an Indigenous epistemological worldview of only ‘taking what we needed’ the old-growth rainforest would still be predominant on the West Coast of Canada. However, since colonization occurred and forestry practices have been
conducted within a post-industrial economic ethic, the old-growth rainforest has been mostly logged. As a young man growing up near the mouth of the Fraser River, I remember seeing many large logs floating in the water waiting to be processed into lumber. Many where four, five and perhaps six feet in diameter, today the larger logs are only three feet in diameter.

There is a specific rationale behind making this differentiation between post-industrial and Indigenous culture. Within this research we will be examining two different epistemological views of the lived experience of woodcarving; that of the Indigenous participants and that of the non-Indigenous. While we are looking for common benefits shared by all participants, an examination of the Indigenous lived experience of woodcarving offers a unique perspective from which to inform this research in a more broad context, giving us valuable insight into how woodcarving can provide therapeutic and life-enhancing benefits to a wider population and can be utilized within a more therapeutic setting. This is not to say that the Indigenous participants do not live within post-modern society, but rather their cultural traditions and practices are based on an epistemological framework in which art, craft and technology are not separate.

On the Southwest Coast of Canada, where this research was conducted, there is a rich cultural tradition of woodcarving and other art, craft and technological practices with the Coastal Salish people. Since experts in the field state woodcarving is a tradition that has existed in most cultures (Durst, 1939; Oughton, 1976), we will benefit from seeking insight outside of the predominant western culture and academic realm. It is my hope that the reader is able to appreciate how traditional Indigenous craft practices, such as woodcarving, can help provide meaning and therapeutic value to individuals living in post-industrial society and inform this research in a deeper more meaningful way. We will discuss this topic further in section 2.5.

2.1.1. Wisdom of the Hands

“Humans became intelligent creatures because of their hands.”
Anaxagoras 500-428 BC
It is remarkable how pertinent this quote from antiquity is in relation to our study of woodcarving. Scientific research has been illuminating just how dependent human brain development has been on the development of our hands. Early hominid species, such as *Australopithecus aferensis*, have been estimated to exist between 3.85 and 2.95 million years ago. Dr. Frank Wilson is a leader in neuroscience and has written about how the physiological development of the human hand impacted brain development. In his seminal text *The Hand: How Its Use Shapes the Brain, Language and Human Culture*, he states that evolutionary changes to the hand and wrist of *Australopithecus aferensis* are responsible for the development of the human brain as we know it today (1998). The development of opposable thumbs in the hands allowed hominids to hold tools such as an axe. These changes in the hands caused a reorganization of the brain, which eventually led to the development of distinctive human motor and cognitive skills (*ibid*). These include humankind's ability to use tools, design, build and to formulate and understand language. According to Wilson, human beings neurologically developed to use their hands for creating things through the manipulation of tools and materials since the beginning of human existence. It is in our genetic make up to create things. It is the contention of this research that woodcarving provides an opportunity for individuals to satisfy this innate need use their hands to create objects

Wilson also talks about a higher order of thinking that can take place when someone is fully engaged with an activity that requires the use of the hands. In this particular instance he is referring to someone who is a juggler, but it can apply to other tasks requiring complex hand skills. When people are fully engaged in an activity requiring great skill and concentration they become emotionally connected and invested in the exercise; they start to care about it more.

When personal discovery and desire prompt anyone to learn to do something well with the hands, an extremely complicated process is initiated that endows work with a powerful emotional charge. People are changed, significantly and irreversibly it seems, when movement, thought and feeling fuse during the active, long term pursuit of personal goals. (1999, P. 5-6)

Dr. Wilson goes on to explain that this sort of cognitive engagement can lead to the type of autonomous thought and cognitive experimentation that leads to
improvisation and brainstorming. Ideas are, “…intimately related in development with the interaction of the body with the world…” (p. 37). He states that engaging in a skilled activity (such as woodcarving) can allow for the human brain to work through unresolved psychic tensions or problems by allowing the mind to free up and experiment. It seems incongruous that when someone is fully engaged in an activity that they are able to sort through other life problems, but when a person becomes skilled at an activity and it becomes intuitive, the mind is free to process emotional and intellectual content. Participants in the study disclosed that the time spent woodcarving allowed for them to work through some of the problems of the day. However, it seems that this is only possible when a higher level of skill is achieved and one does not have to fully concentrate on the task at hand.

Wilson also cautions us about the possible side effects of children being raised and immersed in a digital world that does not require the development of finger dexterity and hand eye acuity. Conversely, it can be argued that children playing videos games do indeed develop precise motor skills and quick reflexes. It is not within the scope of this paper to argue this debate at this time. Suffice to say that the development of motor skills and cognitive development are inextricably linked. I would propose that more research into this area of study would be worthwhile in order to more fully enhance the literature on this topic. I do not anticipate that our immediate research will be able to gain much insight into the effects of not developing articulated hand skills. However, it is hoped that we may learn how woodcarving can satisfy a persons’ innate need to use and develop articulated hand skills.

The next quote gives us further insight into how working with the hands broadens the human experience and understanding.

Without the opportunity to learn through the hands, the world remains abstract and distant, and the passions for learning will not be engaged.

(Stowe, 2006)

Here Mr. Stowe, a well-known woodworking educator, is impressing on us how important it is that we learn through our hands, that they are a conduit to learning and wisdom. People are having less opportunity to use their hands to make things in
modern society and we do not yet know what sort of psychological impact this could have on individuals. Again let us examine what Dr. Wilson has to say.

Now, the advent of TV, cell phones, computer games and typing on a keyboard is causing young people to forego the mastery of the physical art of writing. As a result, they’re losing the opposable thumb and the skills that go with it. (1999 p. 59-60)

In the introduction to his book, Over-schooled and Under Educated (2009), John Abbot describes his experience living with a nomadic tribe in Africa called the Hadza. He states, “The children of the nomads are more deeply connected to the reality of how life works… They accept life as it is, while we forever try to change and mould it to suit our convenience.” (p.138) The pressures of modern life and what he calls high tech saturation, “steal away the time needed to be kind and considerate.” (p. 64) I would propose that as modern life becomes more and more hectic, it becomes increasingly important that individuals are able to make time to engage in creative crafts that connect them to cultural traditions, involvement in mentorship, creative expression, the natural world and to the rudimentary life tasks of pre-industrialized human experience. In his book Abbot calls for a better understanding of human learning, which includes a better understanding of the type of kinaesthetic learning that we are dealing with in a craft such as woodcarving. As William Pirsig (1974) said,

…to see if in (exploring) that strange separation of what man is and what man does we may have some clues as to what the hell has gone wrong with the 20th century. (p.27)

If we are not connected and involved with the technology that surrounds us in everyday modern life, we are unable to care about it’s implementation, use, and what effect it has on our everyday lives. We are at risk of becoming slaves to the very technology that emancipated us from being cowering cave dwellers in the first place (Pirsig, 1974). As will be demonstrated in Chapter 4, becoming proficient in woodcarving helps individuals become more engaged in their lives and develop a sense of technological autonomy.

Historians and woodcarving experts inform us this craft has a long tradition in most human cultures. (Durst, 1939; Oughton, 1979; Sentence, 2009) Being adept with
using a knife has been a fundamental skill for human beings for millennia (Wilson, 1998). Only in recent generations have people lost the need to know how to use and properly care for a knife as an everyday tool. Outdoor enthusiast and survival expert Ray Mears states that the knife is the most important tool for survival in the wilderness (Mears, 1993). Woodcarving is an opportunity to hone skills in the use and care of the most fundamental of tools. Refining skills implicated in our development as human beings draws attention to ways that handwork, and specifically proficiency with a knife may be beneficial or life-enhancing. As with the concept of craft and teknik that William Pirsig was studying in *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, learning how to properly use, care for and maintain a tool is a life-enhancing experience.

At the root of this disconnect between what humankind *is* and what humankind *does* is what Pirsig calls a sense of caring or lack thereof in peoples interactions with technology. Mark Crawford also talks about this lack of caring and pride in today's manufactured products and in the skilled trades in his book, *Shop Class as Soulcraft: An Inquiry Into the Value of Work* (2009). He states, “A decline in tool use would seem to betoken a shift in our relationship to our own stuff: more passive and more dependent” (p.2). He echoes Dr. Wilsons’ sentiments when he asks if the use of tools fulfills a “permanent requirement of our nature” (p.4). The core tenets of his book address this same issue I have been discussing, so I will let his words encapsulate this notion:

Arguing for a renewed cultivation of manual competence puts me at odds with certain nostrums surrounding work and consumption, so this book is in part a cultural polemic. I mean to clarify the origins of, and thereby interrogate, those assumptions that lull us into accepting as inevitable, or even desirable, our increasing manual disengagement. (p.4)

As Pirsig, Crawford and Wilson’s work elaborate, people in modern societies have removed themselves from having a relationship with the natural world and have lost a relationship with technology. Manual re-engagement through crafts such as woodcarving provide therapeutic benefits to help remediate this disconnect.

According to social and art historians, this modern lament has been happening for more than a century; the Arts & Crafts movement evolved as a response to the industrialization of society. (Livingston, 2005; Cumming & Kaplan, 1991; Cumming,
The Arts & Crafts movement was an international phenomenon that took place during the turn of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century and was philosophically anti-industrial and promoted economic and social reform \textit{(ibid)}. Leaders of the movement urged people to appreciate the use of natural materials and traditional hand crafting techniques in the production of homes, furniture and everyday household objects.

At the turn of the century people involved in the Arts & Crafts movement recognized that the products being mass-produced in factories lacked ‘spirit’ and ‘humanity’. A call was raised for a return to methods of production and manufacturing that were based on traditional arts and crafts technologies \textit{(ibid)}. These mass-produced articles from factories lacked the personality, love, and caring that went into handcrafted articles. Handcrafted objects have variation; they are not all the same. Each object is given care and attention when it is created. Take for example when a potter creates a set of coffee mugs to be sold as a set. All the mugs share the same design, yet each one varies slightly and was created and cared for individually.

\textbf{The Erosion of Creative Arts in Everyday Life}

We must ask ourselves: If creating art is such a fundamental drive for human beings and is so beneficial to our wellbeing, why do many people not engage artistic endeavours in the everyday lives? Shaun McNiff tells us that the separation between art and everyday living started to occur in the renaissance, when some artists following a specific canon and set of expectations, were hired by patrons to create what became looked upon as ‘high-art’ (1992). These works of art were beyond the capabilities of most people and were relegated to the realm of professional artists.

Others have described a shift towards the ‘high-arts’ that occurred in the eighteenth century. Among those who described this shift was Larry Shiner, a professor emeritus of Visual Arts, History and Philosophy at the University of Illinois. In his book, \textit{The Invention of Art: A Cultural History} (2001), he describes how craftsmen and artisans previous to the eighteenth century produced works that were functional and integrated into everyday life. His sentiments echo those of Pirsig and Crawford; that the arts, crafts and technologies were integrated with each other and that most people had some sort of artistic or crafts engagement in their lives.
What is important to emphasize at this time is that these social changes in the role of art in everyday life, have made a lasting effect on how people engage with art in modern times. The development of ‘high-art’ contributed to the separation of art, craft and technology that we discussed earlier, and engaging in traditional craft practices like woodcarving can help to remediate this disconnect.

The next major cultural shift that lessened the predominance of art in the average persons’ life was the industrial revolution (McNiff, 1992; Shiner, 2001). Many adults had to work long hours and therefore could no longer afford the time needed to engage in many artistic and creative endeavours. As we have seen, mass-production made everyday articles much more accessible to the common people, but these products were from the factories, not crafted in cottages (Shiner, 2001; Abbott, 2009). As well, at this time a new and standardized education system was implemented. Although vocational and art curriculum were included in the schools, the traditional apprenticeship models for crafts were being phased out and lost due to economic pressures and realities (Abbott, 2009).

It is hoped that I have adequately illustrated through the literature how art and crafts have become less predominant in the lives of average people in Western post-industrial society. I recognize that this is a rather broad generalization, but for the sake of economy of text and keeping our research focus I will leave this argument for now. Now let us consider the difference between artistic activity having inherent therapeutic benefits and how art is used in clinical practice.

2.2. Art as Therapy – The Literature

This section will provide the reader with an overview of the literature pertaining to Art Therapy field and literature examining the therapeutic benefits of creative arts practices. In section 2.2.1, Meaning and Motivation in Art, we will examine why humans create art. In section 2.2.2, Art Therapy vs. art as therapy, we will then examine the difference between Art Therapy and art as therapy and relate the literature from these two fields of research to our study of the therapeutic benefits of woodcarving. Section 2.2.3, Art Therapy Research, will review literature that pertains to research in this
general field of study. I have not been able to locate literature pertaining to how woodcarving can be used within clinical counselling practice or as a form of creative arts therapy, so I have included literature as closely related to the therapeutic and life-enhancing benefits of woodcarving as possible. Finally, in section 2.2.4, we will examine how art making can help with psychological processing and meaning making in an individuals’ life.

To begin this section, I would like to provide a quote that offers a vital description of the woodcarving experience. In his book, *The History and Practice of Wood Carving* (1969), Frederick Oughton provides an excellent history of the origins of this craft in addition to a practical guide. He quotes Dr. Paul Jaeger, an authority on woodcarving, who provides a compelling quote on why people find woodcarving and engaging in traditional crafts so rewarding and why it is a practice that should be cherished and appreciated. The quote is as follows:

If you have ever made anything with your own hands (*poiein* the Greeks called it, and they knew it to be closely connected with the divine in us) – even if it was only a toy for your child, or in war time, when nothing was to be had for a present, perhaps a mere wooden spoon for your wife – you will recall a sense of achievement and the pleasure of those moments and your deep satisfaction over the object you made. It was something of yourself, the fruit of your ingenuity and affection, shaped by your own hands; something made in the image of your own soul – even so trifling a thing as a wooden spoon. And be sure of this: when stricken by grief for some lost paradise – an experience we surely all have at times – you would do well to take a piece of wood or a lump of clay and fashion something with your hands or with a knife. Then distress may turn to satisfaction.  

(as cited in Oughton p.19 and Hils, 1960. p. viii)

### 2.2.1. Meaning and Motivation in Art

Why do humans engage in the creative process? For the purposes of this research I will present three fundamental motivations for creating art in this section: 1) human beings have an innate desire to create, 2) art-making brings meaning in ones’ life and 3) art provides a means for communication.

John Rood was a prolific American sculptor who worked in wood, stone and metal and wrote several books on the subject. He provides a comprehensive
explanation to why humans have a desire to create art, in his text *Sculpture in Wood* (1968) he makes the following statements that help illustrate our three motivations outlined above.

**Human beings have an innate desire to create**

Rood explains that the presence of art is an essential ingredient to being human. Art like religion, faith, love, understanding is a necessity for the human being; without these we would quickly destroy ourselves...[The] necessity to create is and always was one of civilizations’ greatest assets. (p.5)

Although many people in modern society have art present in their everyday lives, whether it be music or visual art displayed in their home, I would suggest that fewer people actively engage in creating art themselves.

Anthony Storr, the British psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, wrote the controversial and groundbreaking book *The Dynamics of Creation* (1972) in which he very thoroughly explores the human desire and need to create. It is an academic treatise that broaches the subject of creativity in a manner that explores why humans create rather than how. He states that the fundamental human psychological forces, our awareness and emotions, compel us to create. He also asserts that humans have an innate need to create.

**Art-making brings meaning to ones’ life**

Creating art is so important to the human experience; it validates who we are and that we do indeed exist.

Art is functional on a spiritual level. On the spiritual level we must be human beings, and for some strange reason it is necessary to iterate and reiterate that we are human beings and prove it again and again. (Rood, 1968. p.5)

This sentiment has been echoed by many scholars but most notably the philosopher and psychologist John Dewey whose book, *Art as Experience* provided the first modern academic treatise about the psychology of aesthetic experience (1934).
Allan Durst, a distinguished British carver further tells us that, “...the need for order, or harmony, as expressed through carving, is fundamental to human nature” (1938, p.14).

We are told that since the dawn of humankind, the creation of art has helped individuals find meaning out of the perceived chaos of the universe and their environments. (McNiff, 1992, 2004; Storr, 1972; Durst, 1938; Dewey, 1934.).

**Art provides a means for communication**

Finally, art functions as a form of communication of thoughts, ideas and emotions.

The value of art to us should be that it is the greatest key that we have to the understanding of one another. (p.6)

There is an inborn human desire to create and communicate with other humans through artistic mediums. He goes on to say, “Art is a language that can be understood by anyone in any time (p.11). Leading figures in the Art Therapy field inform us that being able to communicate emotional content through art has immense and lasting therapeutic value (McNiff, 1992, 2004; Malchiodi, 2003; Malzoomian & Brooke, 2006)

2.2.2. **Art as Therapy vs. Art Therapy**

There are two differing approaches to Art Therapy. One approach emphasizes that the act of creating art is a therapeutic process in and of itself. The other views art making as a way to articulate and connect with one's unconsciousness, and as a means for the therapist to interpret and decipher the cause of a clients psychological distress or develop a diagnosis (Mazloomian & Brooke, 2006; Rubin, 2005; McNiff, 1992, 2004; Ullman, 1975). For the purpose of this research, we are primarily interested with the former approach, art as therapy.

It is understandable how these two approaches could be confused. Therefore, in recent years the nomenclature of these areas of counselling psychology practice has evolved. *Expressive Arts Therapy* and *Creative Arts Therapy* are terms now used interchangeably to describe counselling that focuses on the therapeutic benefits derived
from creative process (McNiff, 1992, 2004; Malchiodi, 2003; Malzoomian & Brooke, 2006). Expressive Arts Therapy includes such areas of practice as: Dance Therapy, Art Therapy, Music Therapy, and even Recreation Therapy (Malzoomian & Brooke, 2006). We can therefore conclude, that if woodcarving were to become a recognized therapeutic technique, it would be categorized under the Creative or Expressive Arts Therapies field. For the sake of simplicity, in this paper I will use Art Therapy as an all-encompassing term to cover the fields of Art Therapy, Expressive Arts Therapy and Creative Arts Therapy.

**The therapeutic benefits of the engaging in art: Claims of practitioners and scholars in the field.**

For the purposes of this research we are primarily concerned with the fact that creative expression is inherently therapeutic; *art as therapy*. Woodcarving provides therapeutic and life-enhancing benefits for the participants of this study. Up to this point, our definition of therapeutic has been: Having a good effect on the body or mind; contributing to a sense of wellbeing (Simpson, 1989).

Let us now look to how Elinor Ullman, an early pioneer in the Art Therapy field, defines therapeutic procedure, which illuminates a more robust picture of how woodcarving might have a role in the field of counselling psychology: “A therapeutic procedure is one designed to assist favourable changes in personality or in living that will outlast the session itself” (1975, p.12). According to this definition, we should be looking for benefits that go beyond the activity of woodcarving and that enhance the individual’s life in more lasting ways. Our research demonstrates this to be the case.

Many experts from the Art Therapy field state making art and engaging in creative pursuits enhances how people feel and can help people to heal emotionally (Mazloomian & Brooke, 2006; Guttman, 2004; Warren 1984; Gerity 2001; McNiff 1992). Judith Rubin, an Art Therapist with fifty years experience, informs us that creating art can also help relieve tensions and stress as well as help people become more talkative (2005). In addition to these therapeutic benefits, Ms. Ullman also states that the creative process itself has a healing quality that is difficult to articulate yet undeniably exists (1975). It is anticipated that these are all benefits that can be gained from woodcarving.
In addition to these therapeutic benefits described by the Art Therapy literature, it is anticipated that other therapeutic benefits may become evident through further research. We will now relate and review the relevant Art Therapy research to our study of the therapeutic benefits of woodcarving.

2.2.3. Art Therapy Research: Accumulated Research Evidence

There has been sparse research pertaining to the benefits of engaging in craft practices, although this seems to be changing in recent years. Adams-Price and Steinman are two psychologists interested in the benefits of craft practices for geriatric populations. They engaged in a qualitative research study focusing on how jewelry making provided what they called ‘generative expression’ for middle aged women (2007). The term generative expression was used to describe “a desire to aid and to leave a legacy for future generations” (p.317). This was also a theme that arose out of our study of the therapeutic benefits of woodcarving. Adams-Price and Steinman were also interested in how engaging in this craft helped provide meaning in the participants’ lives, social connection, validation from others and spiritual sustenance. All of these themes were pertinent to our study of the therapeutic benefits of woodcarving. This research helped to strengthen my belief that the therapeutic benefits of woodcarving are also shared by other craft practices.

Reynolds, Vivat and Prior conducted a study in 2007 exploring how creative craft practices, such as pottery and embroidery, helped women increase subjective wellbeing. This research was conducted by the School of Health Sciences and Social Care at Brunel University in the England (2008) and, like our research, used interpretive phenomenological methodology. The participants of this study suffered from Chronic Fatigue Syndrome/Myalgic Encephalomyelitis. Participants were found to have more life satisfaction, positive self-image, hope and social contact. The following is a summative description of their research results, which I found could be equally descriptive of the results of our research.

Art provided new sources of satisfaction in daily life, improved self-image, hope for the future, and positive contact with the outside world. For a few, it also provided cathartic self-expression. (p.1288)
In the *Journal of Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity and the Arts* (2013), Glaveanu engaged in a study called Creativity and Folk Art: A Study of Creative Action in Traditional Craft. In this study he explores the roles of creativity in Romanian Easter Egg painting. It is primarily concerned with the relationship between tradition and creativity; the differentiation between ‘folk-art’ and ‘fine-art’. He also points out that traditional crafts are often a neglected topic in academic research. Although this research is not concerned with the therapeutic value of crafts per se, it is pertinent to our research because the Indigenous participants in our study are engaged in a similar practice, carving traditional Coast Salish designs. In particular he outlines a detailed explanation of how using traditional designs and methods, that could be perceived as mere copying of previous work, is indeed a very creative exercise. This is also applicable to the non-indigenous participants of our study. Many of the carvings done by these participants are designs taken out of books or from other carvers, and although they may not be completely unique by design, they are no less artistic and creative by nature.

Lastly, Glaveanu makes a compelling statement that is relevant to our work, that woodcarving can be a holistic exercise. He states, “Creative action is the acting of the ‘whole’ person (involving cognition, affect and volition) in the context of material constraints and social relations” (p.141). He goes on to say that this is a “fruitful perspective” with which to study craft practice (*ibid*). These three areas of holistic engagement in crafts; cognition, affect and volition are important themes in our study of the therapeutic benefits of woodcarving. Our research demonstrates that woodcarving produces positive changes to participants cognition and how they think and behave in their daily lives. It also helps to produce positive emotionality and motivation in participants’ lives.

Advances in neuroscience technology and scientific research methods are starting to produce a more comprehensive understanding of how Art Therapy can be utilized as a mind-body intervention and how creating art provides therapeutic benefits. Cathy Malchiodi is a leading author and practitioner in the field of Art Therapy and has written numerous texts on the subject. In her 2004 book, *The Handbook of Art Therapy*, she provides us with an extensive overview of the state of current research in this field.
She states, “The relationship between neuroscience and Art Therapy is an important one that influences every area of practice” (Malchiodi, Riley, & Haas-Cohen, 2001).

She offers the example of DeLue (1999), who demonstrates the physiological effects of school children drawing mandalas using biofeedback equipment. In Delue’s study skin temperature and blood pressure were recorded to demonstrate physiological changes that indicate the activity reduces stress levels. This physiological research supports our participants accounts that woodcarving reduces stress and promotes relaxation.

According to Karkou and Sanderson in their text, *Art Therapies: A Research Based Map of the Field* (2006), most of the research conducted in the field of Art Therapy has been qualitative research, but they state that this is changing. They give numerous examples in their text of more quantitative-based research concerning the benefits of arts based therapies. Malchiodi states researchers have been turning to neuropsychology in order to more fully explain how creative activities and art making are benefiting individuals (2004). Until recently, it had been widely stated that the field of Art Therapy lacks concrete research to verify the claims that art making is inherently therapeutic (Ullman, 1975; McNiff, 1992, 1998). With this acknowledgement of a dearth in evidence-based research validating the therapeutic benefits of the creative arts, there seems to be a movement towards changing this situation (Chilton, 2013; Ganim, 1999).

For example, there is a growing body of literature to support the claims that Art Therapy helps to mitigate some of the negative physical and psychological effects of cancer treatment (Svensk, 2009; Thyme *et al.*, 2009; Bar-Sela *et al.*, 2007.) These studies utilized various inventories and checklists, such as the Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS), to quantify the effects of arts making on personal well-being while undergoing cancer treatments. These studies also included control groups to help verify the data collected. Initial findings suggest Art Therapy can help patients that suffer from fatigue and depression while undergoing chemotherapy and helped to improve the general quality of life of participants.

According to creativity research, in order to create art and engage in craft activities, individuals must utilize extremely complex neurological processing in particular
areas of the brain (Chavez-Eakle, 2007). Recent studies using functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) have also verified the efficacy of art making in helping with the development of neural pathways with people suffering from brain damage. Findings show that making art produces favourable change and helps to develop neural integration within the brain (Fletcher et al., 2005). Also, art making is believed to stimulate and strengthen pathways within the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex which is attributed with the executive control of the brain (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, 1997; Wilkinson & Chilton, 2013; Chilton, 2013; Compton & Hoffman, 2013). These functions include working memory, sustained and directed attention and temporal integration. What the literature here informs us is that we are just beginning to ascertain and scientifically determine the range of benefits that creative activities, such as woodcarving, can offer individuals.

In this paper we are considering the common shared benefits of woodcarving to all participants, not all the other benefits that may exist for individuals. A study of the shared benefits of woodcarving is itself a daunting task considering that, “Given the dynamic nature of the field, pinpointing the overall foundations of arts therapies can be elusive. Furthermore, describing therapeutic principles and conceptual frameworks that go beyond one discipline to the arts therapies field as a whole can be even more challenging.” (Karkou & Sanderson 2006)

2.2.4. Art, Psychological Integration and Meaning Making

Leaders in the field of Art Therapy propose that art-making helps individuals resolve emotional and psychological conflict and can also help create meaning in ones life. Rita Simon was an Art Therapist that worked in psychiatric hospitals in Britain from the mid 1940’s into the 1980’s. She posited that making art helps to promote psychological integration and mental health with individuals (1992). Psychological integration is the organization of traits, behaviours, feelings, attitudes etc. into a harmonious sense of self in which the individual can perceive themselves in relation to others.
Carl Jung was the first psychologist to propose the concept of psychological integration, which involved what he called individuation (Mazloomian & Brooke, 2006; McNiff, 1992; Furth, 1988; Ullman, 1975). Individuation is the psychological process in which a person is able to perceive themselves separate from, but related to the rest of humankind and society (Mazloomian & Brooke, 2006). Jung developed the notion of archetypes within the discipline of psychology. Archetypes are unconscious symbolic representations that were commonly shared by the members of a cultural group or the human race (Mazloomian & Brooke, 2006; McNiff, 1992). These archetypes serve the purpose of helping the individual to reconcile the forces that control their lives and to help create order to their lives and the universe in which they live. (ibid). Again we are brought back to the notion of art helping the individual create meaning in their lives. Ullman (1975) states

What is essential to art activity: It’s motive power comes from within the personality; it is a way of bringing order out of chaos – chaotic feelings and impulses within, the bewildering mass of impressions from without. It is a means to discover both the self and the world, and to establish a relation between the two. It is the complete creative process, inner and outer realities are fused into a new entity. (p.13)

Archetypes and symbolism within art pertains to the psychological integration of the individual. As Jung tells us, symbols can help the individual create meaning and find understanding within their lives. As we will see in this research, the use of symbols in woodcarving can be very pervasive and can be imbued with meaning for the carver. The use of symbolism is particularly important in the context of Indigenous carving. The Coast Salish carvers who participated in this group actively used symbols that held deep personal and cultural meaning.

Since a number of the participants of this research are Coast Salish carvers, it is important that we recognize the importance of symbolism within their artwork. It should also be noted that the stories and legends attached to many carvings have deep cultural importance and value.
2.3. Being in the Woodcarving ‘Flow’

Becoming completely engrossed with woodcarving is a common experience which has positive psychological benefits. Carvers will often become so immersed in the task that they lose track of time and their surroundings. The most pertinent Art Therapy literature relating to our research and this temporal state is that of Positive Art Therapy, which is a relatively new area of study within the umbrella of Positive Psychology as theorized by Martin Seligman & Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi. (2000) Positive Art Therapy, and Positive Psychology on a whole, is not so much concerned with alleviating psychological distress and mental illness, as it is concerned with enhancing and bringing satisfaction to a persons' life.

The therapeutic benefits that may develop in people engaged in woodcarving align with Csikszentmihalyi’s theory of flow. (1990, 1997) Flow is the term used to describe a psychological and physiological state of being that constitutes the individual’s optimal engagement with the task at hand (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, 1997; Wilkinson & Chilton, 2013; Chilton, 2013; Compton & Hoffman, 2013). Flow describes a state of being and consciousness that an individual may experience when they are engrossed with a task that is meaningful and challenging. Here Csikszentmihalyi provides us with a working definition of flow:

Flow denotes the holistic sensation present when we act with total involvement...It is the state in which action follows upon action according to an internal logic which seems to need no conscious intervention on our part. We experience it as a unified flowing from one moment to the next, in which we feel in control of our actions, and in which there is little distinction between self and environment; between stimulus and response; or between past, present, and future. (1975, p.43)

Compton and Hoffman (2013) outline the eight characteristics of flow as follows:

- A merging of action and awareness
- Complete concentration on the task at hand
- Lack of worry about losing control, which paradoxically results in a sense of control
- Loss of self consciousness
- Time no longer seems to pass in ordinary ways
• Autotelic nature of the experience
• Flow accompanies a challenging activity that requires skill
• An activity has clear goals and immediate feedback

Researchers have investigated why this form of psychological optimal engagement has a positive influence on people’s lives and why it is beneficial to one’s wellbeing. This research suggests that the more time people spent in the flow experience, a better quality of life is achieved (Lefevre, 1988). This included an increased ability to concentrate, greater creativity and more positive emotions. Wells concluded (1988) that achieving flow had a positive correlation with increased self-esteem.

It should be noted that some of the benefits associated with achieving flow may overlap with the benefits attributed to mindfulness and the therapeutic benefits mentioned in the previous section. Indeed both mindfulness and flow are considered areas of research within the field of Positive Psychology. At times the two areas of study, flow and mindfulness, may seem to overlap or be interchangeable. Despite their similarities, I have deemed it best to address these two areas separately within the review of literature.

2.4. Woodcarving as a Meditative Practice and Fostering Mindfulness

Many aspects of woodcarving can be a meditative act. In his book, *Grain of Truth: The Ancient Lessons of Craft* (2001), Ross Laird describes the act of tool sharpening as follows:

Yet of all the rituals of working with wood, all the diversity and challenge of it, sharpening is among the most meditative acts. The most physical and the most ethereal. It’s not a clean meditation, not refined or rarefied or purely ecstatic – no, it is a meditation of the earth, of sweat and blood and dark stone. Sharpening sluices away thoughts of being elsewhere, of being greater or lesser, of calculated plans and secret schemes, of expansive future and protected past, of hunger in all it’s forms, of specialness and wisdom and imagined clarity. Sharpening slices through the illusion that being human is something greater than the earth itself. It
presents the simple truth of the body, stained hands and useless protests creating a tiny shard of nothingness. Sharpening makes everything disappear into that invisible edge. (p. 20-21)

This rich narrative provided by Laird gives us insight into how activities such as sharpening a blade can be meditative exercise that yields personally transformative results. For the purpose of this research, we will define mindfulness as: A psychological state of maintaining focus on the present moment in which one accepts their emotions, thoughts and bodily sensations.

Kashdan & Ciarrochi, eminent researchers in this field, present mindfulness as a state of mind in which one is, “paying attention with openness, curiosity, and flexibility.” (2013) In their text, *Mindfulness, Acceptance, and Positive Psychology*, there is a whole chapter dedicated to how mindfulness broadens awareness. Within this text, there is extensive referencing to some of the scientific research that has been conducted to validate mindfulness as an evidence based practice. For the purposes of this research, it is adequate to confirm that such scientific validation has been done regarding the benefits of both mindfulness based therapies and flow. As will be demonstrated in Chapter 4, this research demonstrates that woodcarving is conducive to achieving mindfulness and allows individuals to achieve flow.

As with flow, mindfulness is associated with being in the moment and fully present. In addition to this, mindfulness tends to allow the individual to practice acceptance around uncomfortable emotions or life situations as well as letting go of unhelpful thoughts. (Kabat Zinn, 1994, 2005; Kashdan & Ciarrochi, 2013)

Thich Nhat Hanh is a well-known Buddhist monk who is recognized for bringing mindfulness and meditative practices into mainstream Western society. According to Thich Nhat Hanh, everyday activities such as drinking tea, walking or doing the dishes can be forms of meditation (Hanh, 1991, 2001, 2011). When Hanh was studying to be a Buddhist monk in Vietnam during the Vietnam War, he recognized the need to develop a form of ‘applied Buddhism’ that was applicable and relevant to the trials of modern living (Hanh, 2011). He declares that everyone needs a spiritual practice in their life.

No matter what you’re doing, you can choose to do it with your full presence, with mindfulness and concentration; and your action becomes a spiritual practice. With mindfulness, you breathe in, and there you are, well established in the here and now. Breathing in touching your full aliveness, is a spiritual practice...Mindfulness and concentration are the core energies of spiritual practice. (p. 5-7)

We are told that having an awareness of ones’ breathing is at the heart of a meditative practice, not trying to control the form of the breathe, just being aware of it (Hanh, 2001). It would seem that woodcarving provides and excellent opportunity to become a meditative practice for those who wish to pursue it as such. In a conversation about my research, my neighbour Jennifer Solley, a student of Thich Nhat Hanh, explained this approach of practical Buddhism as follows. “We are so busy doing things from our head, when we do something from our heart, we bring our true presence to the task.” (personal communication, February 23, 2015). She went on to say that practice of mindfulness brings us back to our spiritual nature, and that the essence of this spiritual nature is creativity.

It is not possible to fully examine the phenomenon of woodcarving without acknowledging the spiritual aspects of this practice that exist for some woodcarvers. We will examine this topic more closely in the Carving Relations portion of Chapter 4.

Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn, a professor emeritus at the University of Massachusetts School of Medicine and leading author and researcher in the field of mindfulness, has been studying the negative effects of stress for over thirty years. He is a pioneer in utilizing mindfulness in western medicine. His academic work has helped to bring mindfulness into the mainstream of public health awareness. He describes mindfulness in *Everywhere You Go There You Are* (1994):

Mindfulness is an ancient Buddhist practice which has profound relevance for our present-day lives. This relevance has nothing to do with Buddhism per se or with becoming a Buddhist, but it has everything to do with waking up and living in harmony with oneself and with the world. It has to do with examining who we are, with questioning our view of the world and our place in it, and with cultivating some appreciation for the
fullness of each moment we are alive. Most of all, it has to do with being in touch. (p.3)

As we will see in the results chapter of this research, woodcarving can help individuals get in touch with themselves, other carvers and with the natural world.

2.5. Indigenous Perspectives: The Therapeutic Benefits of Woodcarving

Participants included both Indigenous carvers in the Coast Salish tradition and non-Indigenous carvers. The meaning and experience of woodcarving is situated in and profoundly shaped by the history of the colonization of Indigenous peoples in North America. This section reviews this history briefly, in order to illustrate the importance of retaining traditional cultural practices; to inform the reader how woodcarving as a traditional cultural practice can be therapeutic and healing for Indigenous populations; and to provide a conceptual foundation for how traditional craft practices might provide therapeutic benefits for a non-Indigenous populations living in post-industrial society.

To begin, I would like to refer to the work of annie ross. Dr. ross is the senior supervisor of this research team and is a professor in the department of First Nations Studies at Simon Fraser University. In her work within this department, one of the courses she teaches is traditional weaving. When learning traditional cultural crafts such as weaving, Dr. ross states that there are two forms of Indigenous craft traditions. Those which are an unbroken chain of tradition and those which are a mended chain of tradition (personal communication, 2014). The metaphor of the chain represents the lineage of a cultural tradition, each revolution representing a generation or individual within the culture. When a cultural practice has been practiced continually without disruption in the society, it is a unbroken chain. When a traditional practice, such as weaving or woodcarving, has been disrupted for some length of time and then is taken up again by a younger generation, a process of remediation and healing occurs and the chain of tradition in mended.

As we will see in the results section of this paper, the West Coast Salish participants in this study are working within a specific community where a mended chain
of cultural practices has been forged. Woodcarving traditions that were lost for two generations were revived by a member from another Coast Salish community visiting and re-teaching these practices. (interviews from this study, October, 2014) Using this metaphor of cultural traditions, I would propose that post-industrial society for a large part has a broken chain of traditional crafts practices.

Dr. ross proposes that engaging in traditional Indigenous crafts, such as weaving or carving, is a way to:

Be in relationship with the spirit of that place, by active reciprocity with the natural materials, involvement in the annual round of life and rebirth (animals, plants), by knowing Indigenous names of all living beings of the area, of engaging in the give-and-take necessary to gather materials with proper respect and protocol. It is also a form of environmental justice, honouring Creation by reciprocal acts, ensuring survivance of all species, and resisting the throw-away consumeristic norms of a modernity’s canon and failed utopia based upon massive, violent, and abusive resource extraction and abridgment of human and inter-species rights.

(personal communication, February, 2015)

2.5.1. Into Darkness: The Effects of Colonization

It is estimated that within 100 years after the Europeans arrived in North America, 90-95% of the Indigenous population died due to wars, epidemics, and starvation (Dion-Stout & Kipling, 2001). Historical trauma among Indigenous peoples was caused by colonization, including the forced removal from traditional lands, the residential school system, and ethnocide (Duran & Walters, 2004; Fleming & Ledogar, 2008; Kirmayer et al, 2011). Historical trauma refers to the cumulative psychological, physical and emotional wounding that has taken place over individual lifetimes and across generations. This historical perspective is vital to the understanding of the factors that currently help or hinder psychological wellbeing among Indigenous peoples in Canada. While many Indigenous populations recovered, there was disruption in the transmission of cultural knowledge and social cohesion for many (ibid).

In the wake of this decimation of populations, political mechanisms were developed to control the Indigenous peoples of Canada (Duran & Walters, 2004; Fleming & Ledogar, 2008; Kirmayer et al, 2011). In 1884 the Indian Act was changed to
include bans on the potlatch ceremonies which were practiced among west coast Indigenous peoples, and in 1895 the ban was extended to include all ceremonies, dances, and gift-giving for all Indigenous peoples in Canada (Chansonneuve, 2005; Miller, 2009; Milloy, 1999). The Gradual Civilization Act of 1857 created a church-state partnership that lead to the Indian residential school system. From 1874 to 1996 over 150,000 Indigenous children were removed from their communities and placed into residential schools. Speaking hereditary languages and performing traditional cultural practices were vigorously suppressed (ibid). The goal of residential schools was to forcefully, fully and quickly assimilate Indigenous children into Canadian society. In doing so, destroying many cultural practices and separating families often within one generation (ibid).

Despite this, Indigenous scholars state that many Indigenous cultural practices, languages, and spiritual beliefs have survived despite 500 years of colonization (Henderson, 2008; Kirmayer, Simpson & Cargo, 2003; McIvor, Napoleon & Dickie, 2009). This supports the importance of research into the therapeutic benefits of traditional cultural practices and traditional crafts for Indigenous populations. As well, how such practices could benefit a wider population whom have also lost many of their cultural practices, which formerly rooted them in place.

### 2.5.2. Mended Chain of Cultural Tradition

Despite facing attempted genocide, the abolishing of their cultural practices and the terrible legacy of residential schools, the Indigenous people of the West Coast of Canada have shown amazing resilience and tenacity in retaining their cultural traditions and a healthy sense of identity. The literature tells us that when a person is denied their cultural heritage and they are forced to live within the predominant culture, they are more at risk of being afflicted with depression, alcoholism and addiction. Wolfgang Jelik was a psychiatrist who worked with many Indigenous communities on the West Coast in the early 1970’s. Jelik developed the theory of Anomic Depression (1974), which explains how the loss of one’s primary identity and culture can have devastating effects on an individual’s psychological well-being and mental health. He describes Anomic Depression as follows:
Anomic Depression is a chronic dysphoric state characterized by feelings of existential frustration, discouragement, defeat, lowered self-esteem and sometimes moral disorientation. The state is often the basis of the specific psychic and psychophysiologic symptom-formation manifested by contemporary sufferers from spirit illness who turn to spirit dancing for genuinely therapeutic reasons. (p.52)

When referencing Coast Salish Spirit Dancing, Jelik is discussing spiritual, religious and cultural ceremonies performed by Coast Salish people. These ceremonies often utilize carved masks and other culturally significant items, such as drums and various regalia. Jeliks’ extensive work with Indigenous communities on the west coast demonstrated that the resurgence and celebration of cultural traditions did more to enhance the mental health of individuals within Coast Salish communities than any other interventions (Jelik, 1974). These customs included traditional carving, weaving, the use of spirit-songs, spirit-dancing and the retention of language.

What is poignant in relation to our research is that within these Indigenous populations the artistic practices and crafts we have been discussing were deeply infused into everyday life. The split between ‘what man is and what man does’ (p.27) that William Pirsig was referring to did not exist for the Coast Salish peoples little more than two hundred years ago. The reconnection with traditional cultural practices, including woodcarving, has helped Coast Salish peoples overcome tremendous adversity (Jelik, 1974; participant interviews 2014-2015). This is why taking into account Indigenous perspectives pertaining to the therapeutic benefits of woodcarving is so valuable to this research in particular, and the potential psychological benefits of crafts in general. I propose that there are parallels that exist for the benefits of reconnecting with pre-industrial everydayness of craftwork for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

As a non-Indigenous researcher working with Indigenous participants, I endeavoured to be sensitive and aware of the cultural nuances that needed to be taken into consideration to respectfully represent the lived experience of these participants. I found the work of therapist Eduardo Durand to be very helpful in this regard. In his text Healing the Soul Wound: Counselling with American Indians and other Native peoples (2006), he provides a very practical guide to engaging in culturally competent counselling practice with Indigenous peoples. In his text, the historical trauma that was
referred to earlier is the *soul wound*. In his practice he informs clients that the pain they experience contains what he calls the 'spirit of healing' within that pain. This transformative spirit of healing was also described by two of the participants of this study. They both stated that through the pain of their personal struggles they have become stronger individuals with a deeper appreciation of who they are as individuals and within their community. After interviewing the Indigenous participants in this study, I found that their experience and journey of learning traditional Coast Salish woodcarving and how it transformed their lives was a powerful narrative, a narrative that provided much insight and understanding for me as a non-Indigenous person.

Eduardo Duran also talks about what he describes as the soul wound to the land. In this study it was found that woodcarving can foster a connection to nature, and that this process also helped to heal this soul wound to Nature that some participants described. The following is a description from Duran’s book that describes this healing process.

Once community awareness has been raised, the community needs to design interventions to address its specific soul wound. One community I worked with was very concerned with some of the insults and injuries that occurred to the land. I advised the people that they needed to go to the specific places on the land where the injuries occurred. These injuries could consist of direct assault of the land as in mining or deforestation. Soul wounding of the land can also occur when there is a massacre of human beings on the land. Basically, the land needs to undergo assessment and treatment in order to restore balance. It is difficult to restore balance to the community of human beings if the land’s soul has been wounded and left unhealed. (p.121)

Duran goes on to say that this is a strange idea for the field of psychology and Western thinking, where people are considered separate from Nature, and where the land is objectified as a commodity. He also says, “As human beings, our sense mechanisms are the only way that the land, which makes up our body, can express the pain it feels through our/its consciousness.” (p.121). The themes of many of the carvings I encountered while doing this research honoured Nature in different ways, either explicitly or indirectly, by making plants and animals the subject of the carving and by carving within a culturally significant context that holds Nature to be central to the carvers’ spirituality.
Although many non-indigenous people in post-industrial society have not been exposed to the trauma of colonization or similar abuses, there seems to be a disconnect with traditional crafts in everyday life as well as a disconnect to Nature in post-industrial society. It is possible that woodcarving offers the opportunity for therapeutic and life-enhancing benefits in these and possibly other ways for both indigenous and non-indigenous populations.

2.5.3. Indigenous Experience Informing the Academy

Earlier when we examined the division between technology and art in everyday modern life, we ascertained that many people in modern society have less competency with fundamental tools such as knives and knowledge of techniques such as woodcarving. Let us examine more closely what effect this might have on an individuals’ psyche. To do so, we will see what the literature tells us about the role of crafts in the retention and celebration of cultural practices for certain Indigenous populations. By examining how cultural practices, such as woodcarving, have helped Indigenous peoples maintain psychological well-being or healing from the trauma of colonization, we might develop a deeper appreciation how such craft practices might also support non-Indigenous populations and develop healthier psychological well-being.

My research shows that Indigenous cultural traditions and perspectives have much to offer modern post-industrial society. By interviewing First Nations carvers and being open to their lived experience of woodcarving, I found that we were able to discover clues as to how we may narrow the distance between individuals, the natural world and humanity as a whole. Moreover, by applying an Indigenous perspective to this research (as taught to me by my research participants), I propose that we may gain a deeper understanding of how the practice of craft facilitates a holistic connection between art, technology, and the world that we live in. Practicing crafts in our daily lives may help us care more deeply and develop more meaningful connections to our psychological and social, physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of life.

There is significant research regarding the psychological and social benefits of celebrating traditional cultural practices among Indigenous communities (Kirmayer et al,
Within the context of this research we are examining two different epistemological world views pertaining to woodcarving: Carving as an Indigenous cultural practice that connects individuals to cultural heritage and to the therapeutic benefits therein; and carving as a hobby for non-Indigenous peoples and the benefits garnered from practicing this ancient craft. In particular, how can practicing an ancient craft help people in post-industrial society remediate the disconnect between art, technology and the natural world?

Kenny Ausubel, an environmental journalist and filmmaker, tells us that Indigenous perspectives provide much needed guidance in a world that is faced with ecological distress and global violence, and that this perspective is, “precisely what humanity most needs now to slip through this epochal keyhole of history where the stakes are the very survival of our species and countless other beings in the web of life” (2008, p.xxi). The Coast Salish participants in this study have used woodcarving as a means to share their Indigenous perspectives with people from various cultural backgrounds with resoundingly positive effect. In particular, all three of them have been to Scotland on numerous carving-cultural exchanges in which they helped local Scots carve their own totem poles that incorporated local legends into the imagery used in the pole designs. (Appendix C)

Verbos and Humphries, two scholars in the field of business ethics, (2013) discussed what they called a “Native American relational ethic” that encompasses a responsibility to look after the natural environment, animal species and other members of the human race. Although their academic work pertains to the field of economics, it is pertinent to our discussion to how woodcarving and craft exist within a socio-cultural context. These relational values are echoed by some of the Coast Salish participants of this study and will be discussed in the results chapter in regards to how they are encompassed within their carving practice. Verbos and Humphries state:

Recognition is growing that the prevailing systems of capitalist development and their related instrumental values are exacerbating rather than reducing social inequality and environmental degradation (Kockel 2012; Maxton 2011; Stiglitz 2012) The nigh elimination of ethical systems based on relational values from prevailing commercialism is coming under increasing review. By relational values we mean a way of being, knowing, understanding, feeling and acting in relationship to other
humans, plants, animals, and the natural world, as interrelated and spirit-filled. (Cajete, 2000; Nelson, 2008)

The field of environmental education can also help to inform our study of the therapeutic and life-enhancing benefits of woodcarving. Beckford, Williams and Nahdee (2010) discuss how Indigenous environmental epistemologies have valuable lessons, which should be taught in regular classrooms throughout Canada. They also state that past Euro-centric educational practices have been lacking in the relational ethic that Verbos and Humphries discuss. Many school districts in British Columbia now have Aboriginal Enhancement Agreements in which Indigenous perspectives and values are taught in the common curriculum for elementary classrooms.

Indeed, some school districts, (such as North Vancouver and Vancouver and the Sea to Sky School Districts) have already incorporated woodcarving projects with great success into their curriculum. In the Results chapter on page 80, we will be provided with an individual narrative example of how such a program helped one individual in particular as well as a more general description of how Indigenous perspectives are shared in classrooms by teaching traditional craft practices.

In relation to this specific research, the Indigenous perspective of the Coast Salish participants helped to inform the main themes that were derived from the common lived experience of woodcarving. If I had not been able to interview these individuals, or they had not been willing to share their personal experience of woodcarving, this research would have been less rich and meaningful. My experience as a researcher highlights the reality of what Indigenous education scholar Gregory Cajete proposes when he states:

The accumulated knowledge of the remaining Indigenous groups around the world represents a body of ancient thoughts experience and actions that must be honoured and preserved as a vital storehouse of environmental wisdom. This environmental understanding can form the basis for evolving the cosmological re-orientation so desperately needed. Modern societies must recapture the ecologically sustainable orientation that has long been absent from its psychological, social and spiritual consciousness. (1994, p.78)
An Indigenous perspective on the value of and benefits of woodcarving (and crafts) in everyday life can help inform us as to how these practices can provide therapeutic benefits for individuals. We have established that crafts such as woodcarving are no longer prevalent in many people’s lives within modern post-industrial society. We have also established these crafts were regular common activities within pre-industrial societies, and that they have played a pivotal role with Indigenous populations maintaining and promoting cultural traditions and psychological well-being. By examining the socio-cultural role that woodcarving and other crafts have played in the past, we may have a vision for what role these practices may have in the future. As Gordon Shawanda, a Potawatomi man who wrote an article for the First Peoples Child and Family Review (2010, p.22) states, “The further backward you can look the further forward you can see.”
Chapter 3.

Methods

“Let the question be the teacher.” – Dr. Cheryl Amundson
Quote from class lecture June, 2013.

When I heard Dr. Amundson make this statement in her class I took this to heart and have arrived back here many times during this academic journey. My own personal experience woodcarving and the experience of each participant helped to reveal the therapeutic essence of this craft. By sympathetically reading and re-reading the interviews I was able to get further perspective on the shared experience of woodcarving and create a robust picture that encompassed the therapeutic elements of this phenomenon. This chapter will summarize 1) the inquiry process used in this research and why this particular approach was chosen, 2) participant sampling and recruitment, 3) the interview process, 4) data analysis, 5) and finally how I validated the results.

In order to identify and explore the therapeutic benefits of woodcarving, I focused on the phenomenon of woodcarving. To best illuminate what the essential therapeutic and life-enhancing benefits of woodcarving are, a phenomenological approach to this qualitative research has been used. Phenomenological research is a qualitative research methodology that is concerned with defining the lived experience of a phenomenon. By lived experience we mean how an individual senses, feels and experiences a phenomenon or situation. We are concerned with the lived experience of woodcarving. To better understand the experiential qualities of woodcarving, participants were asked to describe what they sensed and felt while carving. As a researcher I paid attention to words and phrases in the interviews that seemed intuitive by nature. I also took field notes on what I saw participants do while woodcarving and tried to articulate what I witnessed. For example, when I witnessed a participant in what
seemed to be a flow state, I would try to describe how they interacted with their carving and with their carving tools.

At this point, I would like to acknowledge the work of Amy Rose Green. She wrote a Masters thesis in 2013 that was a hermeneutic phenomenological study that I found to be very helpful as a guide to doing this research. It was called, *Exploring the Lived Experience of Visual Creative Expression for Young Adult Cancer Survivors*. Although our particular areas of research differ, her research approach and structure were both applicable and useful in designing this study.

There are two widely recognized doyens in the phenomenological research field; Max van Manen and Clark Moustakis. Max van Manen was born in the Netherlands and moved to Canada in 1967. He started his career as a high school educator then went on to become a professor of secondary education at the University of Alberta. Being raised in the Netherlands, he was taught a pedagogical philosophy that focussed on personal, relational, emotional, and value based teaching practices. These differed from a more behavioural approach to teaching that he found to exist in North America. In order to engage in educational research that was compatible to his pedagogical values, he wrote the seminal text, *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy* (1990). Since then, this methodological approach to qualitative research has been widely used in the social sciences.

Clark Moustakis (1923-2012) was an American psychologist who founded the Association for Humanistic Psychology. He was a co-founder of and professor at the Michigan School of Professional Psychology. His text, *Phenomenological Research Methods* (1994) he provides a comprehensive guide to engaging in transcendental phenomenological research, which is the study of the core essence of a phenomenon in which the researcher attempts to suspend all previous beliefs and values.

Throughout this research, I am using my personal experience as a starting point in establishing that the life-enhancing mystery of woodcarving is indeed knowable. Van Manen tells us that a hermeneutic (interpreive) phenomenological research approach best enables us to understand people’s experiential reality (1990). I found it extremely difficult to remove my personal experience from the research process and
therefore decided to embrace it. Many of the conclusions that I have come to were initially developed from personal experience, however I have taken great care to validate these conclusions with the participants during follow-up interviews. There is one fundamental aspect of this research which is derived from Moustakis’ (1994) transcendental phenomenological methodology; that we are looking to identify the common therapeutic and life-enhancing benefits that are shared by all participants in this study.

By exploring the shared benefits of woodcarving, we will have a place from which to start when considering how this craft might be applied within clinical counselling practice and how to enhance the literature of counselling psychology.

3.1. Hermeneutic (Interpretive) Phenomenological Inquiry

An interpretive phenomenological research approach is an appropriate means to start researching the therapeutic benefits of woodcarving. The most appropriate starting point was to identify the common therapeutic and life-enhancing elements that were shared, (to a greater or lesser degree) by all of the study participants. In addition to this, I used my own personal experience as a means to help interpret the data and gain insight into these and any other benefits of this phenomenon that arose from the data. This is not a linear research study concerned with specific cause and effect benefits of woodcarving: We are concerned with theory generating rather than theory-testing (van Manen, 1990). This means that we are developing new theories concerning a field of research that has not been studied before versus testing the validity of an existing theory.

This research is concerned with reaching across boundaries and gaining insight into this phenomenon by interpreting the participants’ individual experiences with woodcarving. As Luker, a law professor and qualitative research expert eloquently states, our search concerns “…knowledge [that] comes not from mastering esoteric facts or techniques, but in making connections across traditional boundaries – going wide rather than deep.” (Luker p.13).
The goal of phenomenological research is to gain a deep understanding of how an individual experiences an event or phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). According to Creswell, a contributor to 26 texts on research design and expert in the field of qualitative research, with the transcendental phenomenological approach (as developed by Moustakis, 1994) the researcher attempts to bracket or suspend their personal beliefs and experience, thus becoming as objective as possible. Within a hermeneutic research approach, the researcher embraces their personal experience to aid in the interpretation of the data.

Since I have a deep personal experience in woodworking and was actively woodcarving while conducting this research, the most appropriate methodology to use is the interpretive phenomenological approach as outlined by van Manen in his seminal book on the subject, *Researching Lived Experience: Human Science for an Action Sensitive Pedagogy* (1990). Using this approach I embraced my personal experience and perspective while capturing the essence of this experience through my interviews with other carvers. This method of research is not designed to find a solution to a particular problem, but rather to articulate and capture the essence of the life-enhancing experience of woodcarving. Van Manen describes this best when he states:

Researching the therapeutic benefits of woodcarving is “not a problem in need of a solution, but a mystery in need of evocative comprehension” (p.50, The first eight words are the authors).

Although I will be using a more interpretive and personal approach to this research than what Moustakis proposes in his transcendental phenomenological research approach, I emphasize that we will be looking for common themes which are shared by all the participants. This tends to be a more transcendental research method and we are therefore blending these two approaches to phenomenological research.
3.2. Existentialism

Phenomenology arose out of the existentialist movement pioneered by Soren Kierkegaard and further developed by Martin Heidegger (1927) and others. (van Manen, 1990; Langdridge, 2007). Existentialism contests that the human experience is essentially a subjective reality and that human beings are unable to be truly objective; objectivity is an illusion. Kierkegaard believed that at the core of the human experience is the struggle to be free (1843). This struggle for freedom is not purely a philosophical one but one that must be lived, and through the trials of living one may learn how to be free (van Manen, 1990).

In his text, *Being and Time* (1927), Martin Heidegger went on to further develop the hermeneutic philosophical tradition. Hermeneutics is the art of interpretation (van Manen, 1990). As a starting point for this research, an interpretive approach to studying this phenomenon will best serve the work and provide the most insight into this new area of study. By concerning ourselves with the lived experience of woodcarving for each participant, we may then illuminate what are the common therapeutic experiences of woodcarving. These benefits could be considered on a continuum where some may find them slight or mild whereas others may find them profound.

3.3. Participants

3.3.1. Sampling & Recruitment

Participants for this study were recruited through word of mouth and by visiting a local carving club and asking if members were interested in participating in this research. I used *purposeful sampling* (Langdridge, 2007) to target a specific population of carvers that had been engaged in this pastime for at least four years. Purposeful sampling is a method in which participants are chosen because of their suitability to a study instead of by chance or happenstance. A suitable participant needed to be someone who had at least an intermediate level of capability so that when discussing the concept of flow, there was a level of competence that was conducive to this experience. I was also looking for participants that found woodcarving to be a life-enhancing exercise,
something that benefited their daily lives. By attending the local carving club and interacting with members, I was able to identify potential participants. As well, I reached out to several First Nations carvers through the Internet.

My initial contact with Xwa-Lack-Tun, one of the Coast Salish carvers, was done through email correspondence. I viewed his website and was able to make initial contact this way. After our initial interview he then recommended that I interview his son James and one of his students Aaron. The last participant, Dr. France, was contacted by email. I searched the Internet to identify academics in the field of counselling psychology who use woodcarving in their therapeutic practice, which was indeed the case with Dr. France. After communicating by email I met him at the Canadian Counselling and Psychologists Association Conference in Victoria B.C. (May 7th-9th, 2014) and interviewed him there.

My intention was to draw upon a diversity of participants so that I could gain as much perspective as possible on the therapeutic benefits of woodcarving. I sought out people who were hobbyist carvers, professional carvers, carver/scholars within the field of counselling psychology and carver/teachers within the Coast Salish tradition. Eventually I had ten potential participants who had agreed to participate. My final selection of eight participants provided what seemed the best diversity for this study. I did not include one of the potential participants because his skill level was low. The other was not included because the interview we conducted was sparse and did not include much relevant information.

There was no financial incentive to participate in this study. However, participants were offered food as a token of appreciation. When conducting interviews at the carving club, I brought donuts for the members of the club. When interviewing First Nations participants, I made sure to bring baked goods to demonstrate appreciation for their time and as a symbol of sharing and friendship. Some may consider this practice is in accordance to the First Nations protocol where gift-giving or sharing is a long standing tradition. The sharing of food is a symbolic gesture to cement potential friendships, as an honorific show of respect to the person one is meeting and a 'best
practice’ that many aboriginal people participate in. (Dr. annie ross, personal communication, September, 2014).

3.4. Data Collection

3.4.1. Interview Protocol

At the start of interviews, I briefly introduced myself and gave a summary of my academic background and rationale for being interested in this research. Participants were initially briefed on the study parameters and rationale behind the study. After the participants gave initial consent and agreed to participate, I then reviewed the informed consent form with each individual and requested that they sign the last page. Participants were briefed on how confidentiality was being assured and how they had a right to withdraw from participating at any time. Participants were informed that the interviews would be recorded and then transcribed. I informed participants that after I had compiled the data and made my conclusions, I would then do a follow up session in which to verify the data and check with them to see if the data was accurate.

Before conducting the interviews I took time to introduce myself in a casual way. I described my experience as a wood-shop teacher and how I came to be interested in this area of study. I explained that in developing a research topic, I endeavoured to make it relevant to my personal experience and area of expertise. While introducing myself I took the opportunity to answer questions and get to know the participant better while at the same time developing a rapport with them. I believe that by sharing some of my experience of woodworking and teaching woodwork, I was able to promote interest in this research and engagement with the participants. I felt it important that the participants understood how I had a vested interest in this research.

When interviewing aboriginal carvers I informed them that this research was concerned with their individual experience as carvers and was not a study of their cultural traditions per se. In particular, I explained how this research was not meant to appropriate the cultural or intellectual property of the Coast Salish people. However, as mentioned earlier, it is anticipated that the individual experience of these carvers,
working within traditional cultural paradigms, might help to give us insights into how engaging in craft can be therapeutically beneficial for individuals living in a post industrial society. We will be concerned with how their individual experience as aboriginal master-carvers can inform our research.

3.4.2. Interview Procedure

Interviews varied in length, anywhere between twenty minutes and one hour. Since this was my first experience with doing qualitative research interviews, my practice evolved somewhat over the course of interviews. The interviews were semi structured and were participant led. This means that after an initial summary of the study rationale the participants were given the opportunity to start talking about what they thought to be relevant. During the interviews I would use probing questions or asked the participants to elaborate when I thought appropriate.

I was prepared for the interviews with a list of questions (Appendix A). However, it should be noted that I had little use of this question sheet. The interviews unfolded naturally in a conversational manner. I found this to be a much better approach to exploring the individuals’ lived experience of woodcarving. As Moustakas states, “Interviews should be informal in nature so that the participants will feel at ease and better prepared to lead the dialogue where they deem appropriate” (1994). In this way the participant was able to focus on what they found important at the time. If I found we had not covered any specific area of discussion, I would then prompt them with an open question. Often interviews would start with a prompt such as the following: “So we are essentially interested in how woodcarving has benefited your life and why you enjoy doing it.”

When studying van Manens’ text on hermeneutic phenomenological research methods, I came across the following quote by Howard Pollio a psychology professor at the University of Tennessee. It provides an apt description of the interviewing approach I was attempting to use,

Since the goal of any Phenomenological interview is to attain a first person description of some domain of experience, with the course of
dialogue largely set by the respondent, the interview begins with few pre-specified questions concerning the topic. All questions flow from the dialogue as it unfolds rather than having been determined in advance. (pp.29-30)

I tend to have strong interpersonal skills and this proved to be a great asset during the interview process. My interviews were attentive and I was able to pick up nuances provided by the participants. Sometimes I asked participants to elaborate on certain points, which proved to be very useful. I would provide space between comments and make sure the participant had finished making their statements. At other times I missed subtle points and had to go back for clarification at a later time. I believe one of the greatest assets to my interviewing process was that I kept the interviews very open and participant led. I was told later on by two participants that my interviewing style was respectful and attentive. Finally, I believe that by keeping the interviews as informal as possible, it allowed for the participants to be relaxed, which in turn allowed for a more personal and emotionally safe atmosphere.

3.4.3. Additional Data Collection

While visiting and participating with the carving club, I took field notes of what I witnessed and descriptions of what I saw. I paid especial attention to people’s facial expressions and body language. When I noticed a member of the club was fully engaged and potentially experiencing the flow experience, I would try to describe what I was witnessing. My field notes were a random assembly of thoughts, impressions, and questions that were compiled over two years of research. After each interview I would make an entry into my journal to try and help with the meaning making process of this research. Sometimes during interviews I would take notes regarding notions or insights that came to mind and I thought were significant. As well I would record my emotional impressions after the interviews. These were attempts to describe what impact these interviews had on me and to articulate any notions or ideas that were not adequately recorded during the interviews.

As well I kept a personal log of my own carving experience. This was essentially a personal narrative in which I tried to document relevant ideas or emotions regarding the activity of woodcarving. This log also included brief notes or ideas that would come
up during my day-to-day activities. Sometimes I would be at work and an idea or notion would pop into my head. For example one entry occurred after I had been driving home from work one night.

As well it was important to take the works of art into consideration themselves. These artifacts also had their own story to tell us.

In order to help illustrate some of the themes and ideas presented in this research, I have included photographs that I feel have relevance to this study and help to enhance our conclusions.

3.5. Data Analysis

For the process of data analysis, we have used the procedure outlined by John Creswell (2007). His work on qualitative research design is highly regarded in the social sciences. We made a conscious decision not to use computer software for the analysis of our transcriptions, deciding that it was more prudent to do this process in a more traditional manner; using highlighter, pencils and paper. I found this to be a thoroughly enjoyable and illuminating exercise. My preference has always been to start writing with pen and paper, which I find to be more tactile and intuitive than writing on a computer. By highlighting and sorting the documents by hand I found that I was interacting with the text in a tangible way. By the end of the data analysis process, the transcriptions became colourful and worn documents. It was a challenge to isolate and tease apart the themes as they were often intertwined. I found the organic process of using pen and paper to be engaging and meaningful as it promotes deep thinking, deep reading and placed me directly in scholarly analysis, something I would have missed if I had relied solely on a computer screen.

The following are van Manen’s six steps to interpretive phenomenological research (1990) used to analyse the data and develop my six themes (as presented in Figure 1.1 p.3). This was an organic process that took time and involvement. In retrospect, it would be accurate to say that the data analysis process took more than a year to complete. I transcribed the interviews myself and found this to be worthwhile; I was assimilating the data as I was transcribing the interviews. During the later stages of
data analysis I developed drawings, diagrams and idiomatic phrases to help articulate the essential themes of the research. This was a fluid process that occurred while reading and re-reading the transcriptions.

1) Turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;
2) Investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;
3) Reflecting on the essential themes that characterize the phenomenon;
4) Describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and re-writing;
5) Maintaining a strong and oriented relation to the phenomenon;
6) Balancing the research context by considering parts and whole.

These six steps provided the basic framework used to approach this research. They guided my work in preparation for conducting interviews and in preparing the literature review. Van Manen informs us that hermeneutic phenomenological research does not have a rigid set approach, but rather should be customized according to the individual phenomenon being studied (1990).

These steps would go back and forth and weave into each other. As I was working on the development of my themes I would discuss my ideas with other people, talk about the work with my wife and friends and even at social gatherings. All of this helped me to articulate the work. I recall one evening a woman responded by saying, “That sounds like why I do knitting! It gives me a chance to relax and sort through the events of the day. I find just doing something with my hands to therapeutic.” By having these discussions with other people I was able to gain confidence that I was on the right track. In particular, I was unsure as to whether engaging in crafts could help alleviate the stresses of modern living and whether or not crafts could have a significant therapeutic role to play in post-industrial society. Conversations with people outside of the realm of this research helped me to develop these intuitive notions into articulated themes.
3.5.1. Checking the Results

Finally I would like to explain how I went about checking the results of this research. This body of research is a summative interpretation of the common therapeutic and life-enhancing lived experience of eight individual woodcarvers. It was important that my meaning making and conclusions were congruent with those of the participants. In order to verify my conclusions, I engaged in follow up sessions with six of the eight participants that were sometimes as brief as ten minutes or up to two hours in length. During these interviews I summarized my finding and engaged in discussion around the meaning of these findings. Some participants simply agreed while others had additional contributions to make. I must admit that at times I was nervous about this process but also found it very rewarding. Fortunately, there was no need to make drastic changes to the conclusions that I had made.

In conclusion to this chapter I would like to acknowledge the kindness and openness of the Coast Salish participants of this study. Their Indigenous epistemology and experience provided a rich context with which to approach this research. Upon the recommendation of my supervisor, and in accordance to the Indigenous practice of naming and honouring the contributions of individuals that have guided me on this path, I have made the decision to use the actual names of the Indigenous participants of this study. To do so I had to make a separate application to the Office of Research Ethics at Simon Fraser University. Standard practice for research in the field of counselling psychology dictates that the confidentiality of study participants be protected. However, in order the fulfill the ethical duty of acknowledging the contributions of the Indigenous participants, I have opted to change this practice for four of the participants of this study. If it were not for the fact that this research project has indeed been an interdisciplinary endeavour, and that my senior supervisor is from the Department of First Nations Studies, making this adjustment in protocol may not have happened.

At this time it is also appropriate to acknowledge that woodcarving and other traditional Indigenous craft practices have been actively used with much positive effect by numerous Indigenous communities throughout North America (H. France, personal communication, May 8th 2014; Duran, 2006; Jelik, 1974). This is an excellent example of how Indigenous experience and knowledge can help to inform the academy. During
the data analysis process, it became clear that comparing the two epistemological lived experiences of woodcarving, the Indigenous and the non-Indigenous, offered a unique and rich research opportunity. It is my hope that the reader is able to appreciate this while reading the next chapter.
Chapter 4.

Results

In this chapter I will conceptualize a vibrant picture of what the 1.) shared therapeutic and 2.) life-enhancing benefits of woodcarving are. As mentioned in the second chapter, the definition of therapeutic within this paper is having positive effect on ones’ body or mind. Life-enhancing benefits are defined as either practical lessons or social and cultural values or experiences that enhance the quality a participants’ everyday life.

The aim of this study was to generate a rich understanding of the life-enhancing and therapeutic benefits of woodcarving. A goal of phenomenology is to identify the common elements shared by all the participants, while grounding this knowledge in the rich understandings of the individual lived experiences. Analyzing within and across participants experiences allowed me to identify common therapeutic and life enhancing benefits. Working with indigenous and non-indigenous participants enhanced the interpretation and analysis, yet, ultimately common shared themes were identified. As has been mentioned, in this study we are comparing the lived experiences within the phenomenon of woodcarving; looking at, researching, data collecting and analyzing with Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants. This is a unique and illuminating aspect of this.

In section 4.1 I will first introduce the participants of the study, provide some brief descriptions of their individual relationships with woodcarving and discuss what attracted them to this craft. Let us again define the word craft for the purposes of this research: To make or construct something by hand in a manner suggesting great care or ingenuity using natural materials and applying traditional knowledge and skills. My work demonstrates that woodcarving provides therapeutic and life-enhancing benefits. By
having some understanding of the participants’ individual relationships with the phenomenon of woodcarving, we will have more vibrant context with which to examine the common themes of this research.

1) Woodcarving is conducive to flow and mindfulness
2) Carving reduces stress and promotes positive emotionality
3) Woodcarving helps with emotional integration
4) Woodcarving provides social engagement and cultural meaning in ones’ life
5) Woodcarving as an artistic activity is inherently therapeutic
6) Woodcarving fosters a connection with nature

Next we will examine these common themes which are shared by all of the participants. In this way we will be best equipped to understand the essence and lived experience of the therapeutic and life-enhancing benefits of woodcarving.

4.1. Participants

At this point I will include a brief biography of each participant in order to provide a narrative with which to examine their individual lived experience of woodcarving. The biographies will allow us to follow which statements are said by whom, and to better appreciate the individual lived experiences portrayed in this study. Within the field of counselling psychology it is common practice to ensure the confidentiality of study participants, so for non-Indigenous participants I asked them to choose pseudonyms. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the Indigenous participants chose to retain their actual names. This choice was made to acknowledge that these participants are holders of cultural knowledge that they were sharing with me and that the lineage of this knowledge needed to be documented a properly and respectfully.
4.1.1. Personal Introductions

Carving Club

The four non-Indigenous participants of this study are all members of a local carving club that meets once a week for ten months of the year. Members of the club come from a wide variety of backgrounds and are all drawn together by their interest and passion in woodcarving. The club has been running for over two decades.

Elaine: Carving Club Member

Elaine is a woman who emigrated to Canada from Northern Ireland in the early 1970s. In Ireland she was a Home Economics teacher and was raised in a family that engaged in many creative activities. She saw her father do woodworking as a hobby but never actually learned woodworking from him and tended to be more involved in traditionally femininely gendered activities such as knitting and cooking. She describes herself as someone who has always been creative and likes to use her hands. Elaine stated that she had always known she had wanted to learn woodcarving, but was just waiting for the right opportunity to present itself.

Carving had always been something that was in my mind that I’d like to do. I ran into [carving club members] at a [local farmers market promoting the club] and started there four years ago. And I would never have thought that I could carve a head, you know. [here she is referring to the carved image below]
Figure 4.1. A carving by Elaine that demonstrates how her skill level has exceeded her initial aspirations when she joined the club.

Note: Photo by Graeme Hamilton (May 30th 2015).

In Canada she had a career in banking and upon retirement was keen on learning woodworking. She is happily married with no children and is very close to a niece and nephew. Woodcarving and woodworking is an activity that she shares with both of these young people. Her husband is also a member of the carving club but was not interviewed for this study.

Rob: Carving Club Member

Rob is of European decent, retired and has been a member of the carving club for 5 years. He first got interested in this hobby by chance. He met some of the members of the club while they were having the yearly carving exhibition. Rob often uses the weekly carving club meetings as an opportunity to socialize with others and is
known to be quite chatty. He carves at home sporadically and his interest in the hobby fluctuates. He has finished a number of different carvings and finds it rewarding. Like Elaine, Rob likes to share this hobby with a younger generation in his family. Rob spends time with his two grandsons and shows them how to do woodcarving. During the time of these interviews Robs' wife was sick with cancer. Coming to the carving club seemed to be an opportunity for him to get his mind off his wife’s sickness and keep occupied.

Rob says, “I liked doing it. If it becomes a chore, I’m gone. You know? I have got to get something therapeutic out of it, some emotionally good feeling. You know? Or I don’t want to do it.” After retirement Rob was looking for a meaningful way to spend some of his spare time, and he found it in woodcarving.

**Edward: Carving Club Member**

Edward emigrated from South Africa 1993. Like myself, he is a high school Technology Education teacher and is in his late forties. He has been carving for ten years and has been involved in the carving club for two years. He finds it a very rewarding pastime. During the time of the interviews he had started to bring his teenage son to the club as a way of bonding, a way for his son to work on strengthening his fingers and hands and to socialize with adults. Edward provided some excellent insights as to whether or not the themes that emerged where shared to a greater or lesser degree by all participants. I have known Edward quite well both professionally and personally and therefore appreciated his input to this study. He was quite willing to question my logic and conclusions regarding the data collected which was very helpful. The following quote summarizes his approach to carving very well: “It’s a good use of time to make something, just the process of creating has always been strong for me.”

**Peter: Carving Club Member**

Peter is of European decent, in his early sixties and is looked upon as the patriarch of the carving club. He is an accomplished carver who sometimes engages in commissioned work and is also employed as a graphic designer. He has been carving for over twenty years and carves most days. Due to the fact that he is often mentoring other carvers or otherwise engaged at the carving club, we conducted the interview at
his home workshop, which was a wonderful opportunity to see the atmosphere. It was eclectic, dusty, full of various tools, woods and old projects; the quintessential workshop of a passionate craftsman and artist. From observing Peter numerous times interacting with others, it became very clear that he is passionate about woodcarving and that he receives deep satisfaction sharing this passion with others. He has created a lifestyle that balances work and leisure, which I found to be quite interesting and enviable because he is able to follow his creative passion within a career which has supported himself and his family. He says,

If I’m having problems in the carving I’ll go back to the computer, or if I’m having problems with the computer I’ll come back out here. There’s a balance here and I think it has certainly created a lifestyle in that I have carved for so long.

**Dr. Honore France: Cherokee Carver, Clinical Counsellor & Academic**

Dr. France is of Cherokee decent and was born and raised in North Carolina. He is a professor of counselling psychology at the University of Victoria and has a clinical counselling practice. The interview with Dr. France offered a unique opportunity to gain insight into how he uses woodcarving as both a form of personal self-care and growth as well as a clinical tool. He describes a woodcarving as “a special thing, and a reminder that life is a journey, so art is like a metaphor that way.” He has worked in the past with residential school survivors and found woodcarving to be a very useful therapeutic tool.

He describes one of the allures of woodcarving as follows: “I can spend hours and hours sitting outside just carving with a piece of wood…I am away [from] what is going on around me [here he is referring to the trials and tribulations of everyday life]…It is very, very relaxing and centering.” We can see how Honore uses woodcarving as a means of self-care and that it is a rejuvenative practice.

**Xwa-Lack-Tun: Coast Salish Carver/Namgis**

Xwa-Lack-Tun is a Coast Salish/Namgis carver from the Squamish Nation. He has much experience teaching carving to adults and youth and because of this experience was able to provide much insight toward the development of this research. His son James was also a participant of this study, as was one of his pupils, Aaron.
Xwa-Lack-Tun is a woodcarver first and foremost and is engaged in this activity as a full time job. He first was drawn to woodcarving when he wanted to learn more about his Coast Salish heritage and woodcarving seemed like a good way to do this.

Although his pupil Aaron is quoted more substantially within this paper, it should be noted that many of these ideas and thoughts were derived from Xwa-Lack-Tuns’ experience and teachings. I found Xwa-Lack-Tun to be a reserved and humble man at times, but willing to share openly and also very sincere.

Aaron Nelson Moody: Coast Salish Carver

Aaron Nelson Moody is a member of the Squamish Nation and an accomplished woodcarver and artist. He works in several different mediums including making jewellery based upon Coast Salish designs. I found Aaron to be a very articulate and thoughtful man who cared deeply about the art form and craft of woodcarving, his community and the world. During the course of two separate interviews and a number of different conversations, he became quite engaged with this research. He asked to be able to read this work when complete and helped to articulate some of the themes. He was afforded me a great compliment when he said this work may have something to offer back to his community in terms of articulating the therapeutic benefits of woodcarving and potentially the development future research or woodcarving programs. Aaron initially became interested in woodcarving as a way to get in touch with his heritage and has found great meaning and purpose in that journey.

James Harry: Coast Salish/Namgis Carver

James is a Squamish Nation carver in his mid twenties. He recently finished his degree in fine arts from Emily Carr University of Art and Design. His participation in this study provided a unique perspective on woodcarving in that he has grown up immersed in the art form. He described woodcarving as a “kinaesthetic relationship of knowing how to work with your body, understanding the material and understanding your tools.” He seemed to work in a very intuitive way and has always been drawn to working with wood. I was struck by what a thoughtful and grounded young man he was. He is working towards being a professional artist and has created some very abstract and conceptual pieces. James describes his introduction to woodcarving as follows:
I’ve been immersed in it my whole life... (points to his father who is present in the interview) I’ve been watching him my whole life, [since] a little baby pretty much. So it’s almost like it’s second nature to me. It’s like part of who I am, sometimes I meet...people [who] might not have the same understanding. It’s hard to put myself in other peoples shoes who don’t understand it, cause it’s just like I’ve known it my whole life.

The participant sample for this research reflects a fairly broad demographic representation considering its size. In retrospect, it would have been favourable to have more females represented, but all things considered I am content with the variety of background and experience of the participants. Each participant has had their own journey that brought them to woodcarving, but all were drawn to the craft because they perceive it as life-enhancing and having therapeutic benefits.

Let us now proceed to discuss how we will be examining the phenomenon of woodcarving.

4.2. Depicting the Lived Experience of Woodcarving

As described in the Methods chapter, we will be concerning ourselves with the existential ‘life-worlds’ of human experience; lived time, lived body, lived relations, and the lived space of woodcarving (van Manen, 1990). Each participant has their own unique relationship with this activity. As each different species of tree have their own distinctive bark, leaves, grain texture, smells and numerous other qualities, each woodcarver has their own distinctive relationship with this ancient human endeavour. By exploring and examining the lived existentials of woodcarving through these individual interviews, we are able to uncover the essence of woodcarving and it’s healing and life-enhancing benefits.

Before we are able to delve deeply into the particular aspects of this research, I would like to first elaborate on how we will be exploring and defining the four different life-worlds of human experience. The following are four summative explanations of the lived experience of woodcarving pertaining to lived time, lived body, lived relations and lived space. What follows these summative explanations is a fuller more in depth
explanation of these *life-worlds* that include the main themes revealed in this research and participant quotes to help illuminate these themes.

4.2.1. **Lived Time: Benefits of Flow and Mindfulness**

Csikszentmihalyi’s theory of flow provides us with a very comprehensive psychological framework with which to study optimal engagement in woodcarving and why this is beneficial to the individual. All the participants of this study described the flow experience as a desirable by-product of woodcarving. Within the existential context of lived time, the theory of flow very aptly and comprehensively describes how optimal engagement in a creative and kinaesthetic activity can be therapeutic, life-enhancing and help bring meaning to an individual’s life. Woodcarving can provide and excellent opportunity for the carver to achieve the flow experience; optimal engagement and being engrossed in a task. The hectic pace of modern living does not often afford individuals much time for restful and therapeutic activities. That is why a study of the therapeutic benefits of crafts such as woodcarving is worthwhile and academically appropriate to the field of counselling psychology. In the Carving Time section we will examine how participants found woodcarving conducive to creating the flow experience.

In addition to studying the benefits of flow, we will also be examining how woodcarving can be a meditative practice and foster mindfulness in the participants lives. As was mentioned in the literature review, many activities can be used as meditative practices. We will see how this too can be the case with woodcarving. As revealed in our interviews, this is clearly demonstrated by the experience of participants in this study.

4.2.2. **Lived Body: Woodcarving Promotes Positive Emotionality and Helps to Alleviate Stress**

To elucidate why exactly the physical experience of woodcarving is therapeutic and life-enhancing is an abstruse exercise, in that people are aware of it but it is not a common topic of discussion and it is also difficult to define. I have experienced the therapeutic and life-enhancing benefits of woodcarving for myself, and witnessed transformations in other carvers. Through this research I have been able to more
systematically and carefully delineate the processes potentially contributing to these benefits. The kinaesthetic act of woodcarving provides physiological and psychological benefits. These two benefits have been experienced by all of those interviewed to some degree: Woodcarving is a relaxing activity that helps reduce stress and promotes positive emotionality, and the kinaesthetic activity of woodcarving provides an opportunity for psychological integration and resolving emotional incongruence.

As previously mentioned, there seems to be something inherently therapeutic about working with one’s hands. Woodcarving is a very tactile, rhythmic, kinaesthetic activity. Due to the scope and purpose of this paper, we are unable to fully explore and research this avenue of study at this time; the therapeutic benefit of working with one’s hands. However, let me point out that when we examine the emotional and psychological benefits described by the participants, I would propose that some are directly linked to working with one’s hands and not just because woodcarving is an artistic endeavour or a form of meditative practice.

**4.2.3. Lived Relations: Social & Cultural Benefits of Woodcarving**

Woodcarving usually encompasses traditions and techniques that are passed down through generations and through individuals (Oughton, 1976). Learning to wood carve can be a social activity that is most effectively learned in a hands-on manner from other individuals; the teachers or mentors. Even if someone starts learning how to carve from a book, the author of that book is teaching the reader through their words, pictures and descriptions. Although carving can often be a solitary pursuit, in this study the results showed it is most often learned within a social context.

Again I would like to point out a unique aspect of this research. Half of the participants of this research are of Indigenous decent, and within the context of their lived relations and aboriginal heritage, the practice of wood-carving carries with it deep cultural and spiritual significance. As discussed in the literature review, the practice of arts and crafts such as weaving, painting, woodcarving, singing and dancing have been critical in keeping culture alive (Duran, 2006; Jelik, 1974) despite attempts to destroy cultural heritage and traditions (Chansonneuve, 2005; Miller, 2009; Milloy, 1999). By
paying close attention to how woodcarving has helped to preserve and promote the
cultural heritage of a particular community, this study can help inform us as to how the
therapeutic benefits of woodcarving can be utilized within a wider population. This
research has enabled us to access a unique Indigenous perspective, which has
informed and guided this research to a significant degree. This Indigenous perspective
provides us with insights into how ancient craft practices such as woodcarving can
provide therapeutic and healing benefits for people living in modern post-industrial
society.

I have found that my interviews with the Indigenous participants were very
revealing and provided insights into the essence of the lived experience of woodcarving.
These insights helped to articulate the essential themes that revealed themselves in this
study and were shared to a greater or lesser degree by all participants. I believe that by
studying woodcarving within a more traditional cultural context, we are able to better
understand how these practices can be of therapeutic value to a broader population and
perhaps within a more clinically defined practice.

Within a social-psychological framework there were also some clear benefits of
woodcarving that were apparent with all of the participants. Being a part of a group and
a contributing member of that group helped to 1) build self-esteem, 2) confidence and 3)
helped to create meaning within the individuals’ lives. Woodcarving can provide a 4)
bonding experience for individuals and 5) an opportunity to connect with like-minded
people. We will see how the learning and sharing of skills and resources within a social
context has its own inherent therapeutic benefit.

4.2.4. Lived Space: Woodcarving is an Artistic Endeavour that
Connects One to Nature.

Two main themes became apparent pertaining to the lived space of woodcarving.
Firstly, that as an artistic endeavour, woodcarving is inherently therapeutic in that people
feel better both physically and emotionally after engaging in this practice. Secondly, that
woodcarving promotes a connection to the natural world which is life-enhancing by
promoting a sense of well-being and increasing happiness.
The goal of woodcarving is to create an aesthetically pleasing article out of a piece of wood using sharp-edged tools. The resultant carving often is infused with meaning and is often shared with others. As discussed in the literature review, creating a work of art is a life affirming and often cathartic experience (McNiff, 1992, 2004; Malchiodi, 2003; Malzoomian & Brooke, 2006). As with other art forms, the creator is leaving an imprint upon the outer world that was first manifest from within themselves, and some would say, from within the material as well. The essence of this creative process in relation to woodcarving and working in wood is what we are attempting to explore within this research.

Most participants often talked about the texture and nature of the wood that was being carved, how it reacted to being carved. Xwa-Lack-Tun said tools sometimes ‘sing’ when the shavings are coming off the wood properly. We will see how working with this natural material and the subject being carved can both connect the carver with the natural environment.

4.3. Carving Time

4.3.1. The Lived Experience of Flow in Woodcarving

Flow denotes the holistic sensation present when we act with total involvement. It is the state in which action follows upon action according to an internal logic which seems to need no conscious intervention on our part. We experience it as a unified flowing from one moment to the next, in which we feel in control of our actions, and in which there is little distinction between self and environment; between stimulus and response; between past, present, and future. (1975, p.43)

It was clear from the very start of this research that Csikszentmihalyi’s theory of flow was an excellent framework with which to approach many of the therapeutic benefits of woodcarving. Within this paper, we will concern ourselves with how the participants descriptions of the lived experience of Woodcarving Time were relevant to the flow experience and in the next section; mindfulness. Let us now use Csikszentmihalyi’s eight defining characteristics of the flow experience to make a
detailed study the participants’ lived experience of woodcarving that relates to optimal engagement.

1) **Merging of Action and Awareness**

Aaron describes this as follows, “Everything seems to come together…It’s just like relaxed with everything around you…Anyways, it’s just feeling comfortable with everything, the smell, the touch, the sight. The comfortableness of the environment you are in.”

The following description provided by Peter below illustrates this merging of action and awareness as well, “It’s talking to you, it’s telling you the knife is sharp and the cells are slicing apart nicely.” Xwa-Lack-Tun says, “With a sharp tool, you hear that sound ‘whoosh’ [ It ] makes that real nice cutting sound.” They are describing something that is unique to woodworking. A finely honed blade will slice wood shavings in a very particular manner which requires careful attention and control.

2) **Complete Concentration on the Task at Hand**

There seems to be the development of a carving intuition that occurs over time and with experience. Skilled carvers just *know* what needs to be done without having to *think* about it. James, who has been around woodcarving his whole life, describes it as a kinaesthetic knowledge or muscle memory that develops.

Well, I feel like (there) is a kinaesthetic feeling that you get; it’s just you spend a lot of time learning how the wood works how the grain works… how sharp you’ve got to keep your knives and there is a lot of small things that you don’t think about before you even begin to carve, and even understanding those small details really opens kind of your perspective to how detailed [carving can be, and] how you’re supposed to pay attention to those small details. And I think that can just apply in life too. It’s that kinaesthetic relationship of knowing how to work with your body and understanding the material and understanding your tools.

Here James is describing full engagement with the task at hand and how this engagement is an exercise that takes practice and is an ongoing process. I believe it is very telling that he states that this engagement can ‘apply in life too’ and that the flow
experience achieved through carving provides benefits in different areas of his life. James struck me as a very grounded and self-aware person and I believe that these traits are connected to his being an accomplished carver and that he seems to achieve the flow experience through carving on a regular basis.

3) Lack of Worry About Losing Control, Which Paradoxically Results in a Sense of Control

The following is a description of how Edward looked forward to his time spent at the carving club and aptly describes this characteristic of the flow experience:

You get a chance to go and you don’t have to think about work, you don’t have to think about home stuff, you don’t have to think about groceries, you’re just focussed on what’s in front of you. And just having that time and giving yourself permission to say, ‘I’ve got two to three hours here and this is my time to do this.’ And then you go for it. And then whether the carving is successful or not, just having that time to focus on the activity in front of you, and you know, just being able to work on it. I find that gets interrupted though when you are concerned about what you are doing, so when you don’t care a whole lot about the carving, you want to do it and you enjoy what you are doing but you are not super stressed out about the techniques and about what’s going on. Like, ‘Should I be doing it this way? I don’t know how to do this.’ Then that [kind of thinking] brings the stress back.

It seems that attending the carving club allows for a set amount of time where Edward can experiment and have fun with his woodcarving, without any professional or teaching commitments attached to his work. He has time to play and experiment which is enjoyable and beneficial to his overall well-being.

4) A Loss of Self-Consciousness

During the interviews, none of the participants explicitly described this state of being; a loss of self-consciousness. Herein self-conscious is defined as being excessively aware of ones’ actions or how they are perceived by others. It is a state which can inhibit creative expression, experimentation or problem solving attitudes. In follow up interviews it was determined that this psychological state does occur, and that when carvers are in the state of flow self-consciousness is diminished.
5) Time no Longer Seems to Pass in Ordinary Ways

All of the participants described getting “lost” in the activity of carving and losing track of time. When Xwa-Lack-Tun was asked if he gets lost in woodcarving he answered:

Always! (Laughter) Yeah, even my wife will come out and holler “It’s dinner time, did you have lunch?” and no, I didn’t have lunch! Just focused, so focused. Even before I was married, I would work like 16-hour days, and when my stomach started growling that is when would go in and eat. There wasn’t a time set for me to go and eat lunch.

Here is how Elaine describes her experience of time passing: “I’m not generally conscious of time [when woodcarving].” “I can get totally lost…then as I say, hours can pass. Absolutely hours.” Later she stated, “I don’t even notice time passing.” These excerpts from Elaine’s interview give us a rich description of how she becomes fully engaged with the carving experience while experiencing flow and how her conception of time seems change.

6) Autotelic Nature of the Experience

This characteristic of flow in woodcarving means that there is an intrinsic motivation for the carver. He or she is not carving for external reward or recognition, but because they find it life-enhancing in and of itself. This quality was articulated by participants. Peter says, “It’s not like slapping your own back, congratulating yourself or doing something. I think it’s a humbling experience to realize that you are capable achieving something that appeals to you.” Rob states that, “You challenge yourself, there is no push.” The autotelic nature of woodcarving was also described by Elaine as thus; “It’s given me a lot of excitement, and the potential that I can constantly do better. And I keep raising the bar for myself.”

7) Flow Accompanies a Challenging Activity that Requires Skill

All of the eight participants of this study are accomplished carvers. Woodcarving is a craft that takes hours of practice before one even starts to get somewhat comfortable using carving tools. As was stated earlier in the paper, the participants were selected based upon competency. New carvers are often frustrated and it takes a while
before they are able to experience optimal engagement and flow. Suffice to say that
woodcarving is indeed a challenging activity and that it requires skill. Although none of
the participants articulated this, I am confident it was because this was self-evident to
both the participants and the researcher during the interviews.

8) An Activity has Clear Goals and Immediate Feedback

Most carvings projects require procedural planning and a design process of
some sort. This will be discussed more thoroughly in the Carving Relations section of
the paper, as it pertains to the type of life-enhancing lessons that are learned from
woodcarving. Essentially, the larger goals of a carving pertain to the desired shape of
the carving. To get to this larger goal, often smaller goals must be achieved. This may
the roughing out process, when larger volumes of material are removed. Another
example would be the smoothing process, when differing grits (a grade of roughness) of
sandpaper are used to achieve a smoother and smoother surface. Essentially, a carving
project is made up of many different stages to reach an end result. Peter describes the
process very aptly this way, “There is no such thing as instant gratification on the
[finished carving], but there is instant gratification along the way.” Carving provides very
immediate feedback, especially if you are doing it wrong or trying to ‘force’ the wood.
This also will be discussed more thoroughly in the Carving Relations section, in
particular we will discuss the importance of keeping one’s tools sharp and being attuned
to when the tool’s cutting edge is becoming dull and the nature of the wood as an active
element in carving.

So it is abundantly clear how the lived experience of woodcarving can provide
rich opportunities for optimal engagement and experiencing flow. Indeed in my opinion,
this is an area which warrants more research and attention. At this point let us be
satisfied with knowing that the shared lived experience of our participants robustly and
thoroughly satisfied the characteristics of Csikszentmihalyi’s theory of flow. Next, let us
explore how woodcarving can also be a meditative practice and promote mindfulness.
4.3.2. **Woodcarving can be a Meditative Practice and Promotes Mindfulness**

Again, it will serve us well to start with a working definition of what we are examining. Compton & Hoffman (2013) describe mindfulness as, “paying attention to one’s own ongoing experience in a way that allows openness and flexibility. It is being fully present and aware during our daily activities.” If I were to have used this description of mindfulness with participants during the interviews, I am confident that all of the participants would have reported that woodcarving helped them to achieve some degree of mindfulness when they are woodcarving. However, as I have already stated, my interviews were conducted in a very open manner in which I did not use directive questioning. Therefore, I am making the informed supposition that this was a shared experience for all the participants. Let us examine what two participants did say.

“It is a sort of meditation, cause your mind is totally focused on what you are doing...” - Aaron

“I think I kind of share that same zone as with painters for example. Like they get into the zone of it, like a meditative process. So I feel as though that is sort of a medicine in itself. You don’t really think about it until you’ve really experienced it, and you know it’s not for everybody (woodcarving as a means to achieving mindfulness), but I definitely go into that zone.” – James (italicized words are the authors)

As with other aspect of this research, I conducted follow-up interviews with participants to check if the findings were compatible to their experience. Although none of the participants I asked have a regular meditation practice in their lives, those I checked with agreed that woodcarving is conducive to a meditative state, which promotes mindfulness (using Compton & Hoffmans' definition provided above).

While flow and mindfulness seem to be important processes that contribute to the life-enhancing and therapeutic benefits of woodcarving. I came to see that not all of the therapeutic and life-enhancing benefits of woodcarving would be adequately encompassed within the theory of flow or mindfulness. My use of a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to this research, guided me to not constrain analysis by focussing the study only on the lived experience of flow in woodcarving. Had this
become the sole focus, we would likely have missed such key aspects as the cultural and social benefits of woodcarving.

4.4. Carving Body

4.4.1. Woodcarving is a Relaxing Activity that Promotes Positive Emotionality.

Participants were very vocal about how woodcarving is a relaxing activity and how it makes them feel better. Elaine stated that, “It certainly de-stresses me a lot. It calms me down. It makes me feel happier, I’m a lot more content.” “Relaxing” is a descriptive word that was used many times in the interviews. Edward said that he slept better on Wednesday nights, when the carving club ran, and that these nights were very “therapeutic”. James and Aaron described carving as a “healing” practice. Words like “satisfaction”, “enjoyment”, “contentment” and “happy” were used to describe the carving experience. It is clear that the carving experience promotes positive emotionality with the participants. At this point we can only hypothesize as to what the physiological reasons behind this are. However, the qualitative data clearly states that woodcarving provides a myriad of positive emotional content for the participants.

At this point we will examine some sub-themes that have become apparent relating to the emotional content of the participant interviews. In this section of the paper we will be examining the emotional content of the lived experience of woodcarving. What types of emotions were shared by all of the participants to some greater or lesser degree?

Participants Found Woodcarving to be Relaxing.

Of course woodcarving is not always a relaxing activity, and indeed sometimes it can be a frustrating one. Rob stated that, “It can be very relaxing, it can also be very frustrating working with wood.” However, all of the participants stated that this pastime gave them an opportunity to relax. We will further explore what participants said in relation to woodcarving being a meditative practice and an opportunity to practice
mindfulness in the Carving Time portion of the paper. Now we will be examining how the lived experience of woodcarving is emotionally relaxing.

To some degree woodcarving requires a person to be physically, and therefore emotionally, relaxed. Often participants stated that it does not serve to ‘force’ the wood. Early on carvers must learn patience in order to be successful at woodcarving (further discussed in the Carving Relations section).

“It’s more organic using a hand tool...To me there’s more harmony in using a hand tool than a power tool to get something done.” Peters description very aptly describes the nuance of using hand tools, specifically not forcing the work and being at one with the activity. The very words organic and harmony bring with them a sense of relaxation and tranquility. Xwa-Lack-Tuns’ interview was particularly interesting due to the lack of description around being ‘relaxed’ or ‘de-stressed’. This was interesting to me as a researcher because he is one of the most calm and grounded people I have ever met. His speech was always calm and deliberate, and he did not seem to be a person that was easily dismayed. He was described by other participants to have immense patience and compassion, yet at the same time he has high standards and expectations of himself and his pupils. I do not think it is at all a coincidence that this person spends much of his time carving. His manner is calm and deliberate and I felt very much put at ease in his company.

Other participants were very clear with how the lived experience of woodcarving helped them relax in their lives. As mentioned earlier, Elaine said that woodcarving ‘de-stresses’ her. She actively uses woodcarving as a means to let go of personal issues and to get away from the stresses of everyday life. She went on to describe a particular instance where she was able to process and let go of anxiety relating to a siblings’ divorce. She described it as a very difficult time for her family, and that woodcarving offered a way for her to cope and provided her with an emotional buffer to what was going on. She states:

It’s been a long process and a lot of family crap...so it’s always on your mind, but once I sit down...carving at the bench, within five minutes it’s gone. Because you can’t create something and have a lot of negativity in your head.
It was evident that all the participants found woodcarving relaxing, but for some it was more than this.

**Woodcarving is a Joyful Experience and Provides Satisfaction.**

Dr. France describes carvings as “joyful things.” Peter states that, “the joy of carving is experiencing the unexpected, what’s actually going to come out of this.” “You want to do it and you enjoy what you are doing.” Xwalcktun recounts his earliest experience woodcarving as follows; “I started off my first carving at age twelve. Someone came by and taught us for the one weekend and I really enjoyed doing this. Wow, this was amazing!”

Participants also described feelings of deep satisfaction and pride. The positive emotional experience and benefits are often enduring. Rob spoke about how he had carved Christmas presents for his grandsons. When he stated that they each still have these gifts on the shelves in their room, he was visually moved and his voice was full of emotion. It was obvious that he loved his grandsons very deeply and was moved that they treasured their gifts from him. Woodcarving has become a bond with him and his two grandsons which I will discuss in the Carving Relations section. What is of interest to note at this point is that when he talked about carving with his grandsons he was very emotionally charged. He said, “I get a kick out of doing that with the boys.” One of the boys, “loves watching me work with wood.” This interview was particularly interesting because he did not provide much emotional content throughout the rest of the conversation, but he clearly conveyed how woodcarving has provided an opportunity to share and express positive emotions with his grandsons. He gains a deep sense of satisfaction and enjoyment out of sharing this activity with these boys.

Dr France uses carving and other art mediums as a clinical tool in some group therapy sessions. Some of his work has been with Indian Residential School survivors and helping them work through some of the trauma that they experienced. He explains that woodcarving can help with the healing process when he states:

Well, one thing that I have noticed is at the end of the day we would sit and we would carve. The whole atmosphere would change – everyone was relaxed and laughing, listening to music and helping each other. Art kind of does that, it brings a peacefulness to you and
it brings a sense of [bonding] when we would do it together. I love carving with other people. So it created, you might call it cohesion, when you are working together.

Dr. France is a very caring and compassionate person who not only uses woodcarving as a therapeutic tool in his clinical practice, he also uses woodcarving as a means of self care and personal healing. He explained that woodcarving can be a means of escaping the tumult of life and pressing problems. He states, “I can spend hours and hours sitting outside just carving with a piece of wood, and everything around me...I am away [from] what is going on around me, it is very, very relaxing.” Later Dr. France confirmed that woodcarving can be a means to help put the travails of life into perspective and with the emotional integration we will be discussing next. Woodcarving provides an opportunity for the mind to sort through the flotsam and jetsam of everyday living and create a space for the individual to prioritize what is important to them and what is not. This leads us to the next section, which discusses how woodcarving helps people to process their thoughts and emotions.

**Woodcarving can be a Healing Experience**

For some participants, woodcarving is a healing experience. James stated “there is a certain therapeutic nature about it...I feel that spirituality when I’m carving, very closely.” James is referring to the ‘First Nations spirituality’ that he practices and celebrates through carving and other aspects in his life. We will discuss this more in the Carving Relations portion of the paper. It is important to acknowledge here that woodcarving provides emotional healing and growth within this cultural context. Woodcarving can be “medicine” in that it heals the carver both physically and emotionally.

Both Xwa-Lack-Tun and Aaron have taught carving to high school students. Originally their carving programs were developed for helping at-risk aboriginal students. However, the participants of these projects were also non-aboriginal students, there were also students who participated that were not undergoing psychological distress, or were ‘at-risk’. The following description illustrates how woodcarving can be used as a therapeutic and teaching tool. I have included this description here because it is very pertinent to the emotionally therapeutic benefits of woodcarving. However, many of the
life-enhancing lessons derived from woodcarving that are described here, will be further elaborated on in the Carving Relations portion of this chapter.

What we were carving was [a totem pole]. You know teachers wanted to fence it off, they wanted to put this giant fence around it. They wanted to keep all of the kids away from it. We said “they aren’t going to want it or like it if they can’t interact with it”. If they don’t know what it is, they aren’t going to want it. So we got them to take the fence down. And let the kids go there whenever they wanted. And there was a whole variety of kids that came and worked with us, but I remember very clearly, it seemed like every day or so some kid was getting kicked out of school.

And there was this one girl, and I don’t know why she was being booted out, but they were waiting for her mother to come and get her and they couldn’t get hold of her mother so they had her just waiting and sitting on the step. When the principal came out we said, “so what is going on with this kid”, and he started telling this big story about why the kid had to go home. We said, “well, if it is ok with you and ok with her, she is welcome to join us.” And she came over and she was so mad, she didn’t say anything to us for two or three days. And then one day she just started talking, so she came with us, and she could still come to school, you know, still see her friends, you know, and it was easier on her single mother who was working and didn’t have any childcare. So it kind of worked for everyone, and we didn’t really need her to do anything at first. She looked unhappy, so we just left her alone. We would ask to include her but there was no real pressure, we said, “When you are ready, if you like, you can come help us”. It took about three days before she did, and she was just full of emotion, she was having a really hard time. You know, it was amazing that she even made it to school. She didn’t do great when she was there, she was just so overwhelmed. It was amazing she was able to walk through the door there. So she hung out with us for a bit and she eventually started to help us, but that is the kind of approach that we learned. You can’t make a kid learn stuff when you want them to. And we treated her with respect. In the way we work, it isn’t like we are a classroom teacher where you have to do things, by law you have to do this, this and this. We didn’t have to do that stuff so we could just wait her out, and it took her three days to calm down. Then once she started working with us she was slow and awkward and she needed our help and you know, she did pretty good. She kind of made it through that rough patch.

Much of the content of this story is relevant to Carving Relations in that it describes the relationships and interactions between the carvers. However, it is a very powerful narrative when concerning ourselves with the potential healing and therapeutic value of woodcarving. That is why it is included here, to provide a narrative of the
healing potential of this activity. We see that within the context of a carving project, the young girl was offered an opportunity to decompress and work through some of her anger and other emotions. She underwent a healing and transformative process that helped her to re-engage with school in a more positive way. The carving teachers allowed her to have the space and time that she needed before she was ready to participate and actually start learning how to carve.

We will now concern ourselves with other positive emotions that were associated with the lived experience of woodcarving.

4.4.2. **Woodcarving Promotes Psychological Integration.**

Woodcarving provides the individual with an opportunity to resolve emotional conflict and to help integrate emotions into psychological awareness. It seems that while engaging in the creative and challenging task of woodcarving, the mind is given an opportunity to step back and process its emotional content. Dr. France again offers more insight when he says, “So, art [carving] has that ability to speak to another part of who you are, so you are not just thinking about things, you are really feeling things.”

Elaine tells us that the time spent woodcarving:

Really helps to be able to take a step back and get involved in the carving. Then you can take a fresh look at what the issues are going on outside and either make a solution for it or walk away from it or whatever. You know?

Elaine is telling us how she is able to use her time woodcarving to work through personal issues and emotional conflict. She went on to indicate that woodcarving gives her mind the space it needs for psychological resolution and helps her make decisions that are difficult in her personal life.

Again, I would like to posit that there seems to be a therapeutic benefit to just working with ones’ hands. The psychological state that people enter when working with their hands seems to help facilitate the processing of emotions. Woodcarving is an excellent example of working with one’s hands, but many other examples seem to exist
and they do not necessarily need to be artistic or creative in nature. From my own experience I have found that activities such as raking leaves or shovelling dirt to be therapeutic. We are reminded that Thich Nhat Hanh tells us any such activity can be a meditative exercise and thus therapeutic (Hanh, 1991, 2001, 2011). This will be further discussed in the Carving Time section of the paper. Yet at this point we are looking at a different aspect of the therapeutic benefits of working with our hands. Working with one’s hands seems to fulfill a very intrinsic urge within human beings. Humans seem to have an innate need to use their hands (as was illustrated within the literature review chapter on page 13). We need to ‘get our hands dirty’ sometimes and that these types of hands on activities can promote positive emotionality.

Aaron describes woodcarving as a very “sensuous” experience. Elaine says, “I just like the feel of wood. It’s alive, it’s got personality.” The following descriptions further enlighten us as to how the carvers’ senses are excited and utilized while carving. Peter states,

It is so tactile, (in) carving you use all your senses. It’s hearing, because a real sharp knife will play music in a piece of wood. A lot of carvers look at me and go, “What are you on drugs?” No, you got a sharp knife and a piece of wood listen to that wood be cut. It’s talking to you, it’s telling you the knife is sharp and the cells are slicing apart nicely. There is a lot of joy working in a piece of wood in so many things. The colour, the grains, and the smells and the sounds it gives you.

James very succinctly states that with woodcarving, “it’s that kinaesthetic relationship of knowing how to work with your body and understanding the material and understanding your tools.” These descriptions tell us a story of how a woodcarver connects with the tools and materials that they are carving and how they bond with their environment and the artwork they are creating. The separation between the individual, the tools and the artwork are blurred. This brings us to the next portion of our research.
4.5. Carving Space

4.5.1. Carving as a Creative Endeavour, is in and of Itself Therapeutic

Following the work of the Art Therapists such as Sentence (2009), Ullman (1975) and McNiff (1992, 2004), I am making the assumption that creative expression has inherent therapeutic benefits. It is important to clarify this point at this time because during the course of the interviews not all participants explicitly stated that engaging in the artistic and creative endeavour of carving was specifically therapeutic. For the sake of this research, the therapeutic and life-enhancing benefits of creative expression in and of itself will not be given an inordinate amount of attention, simply because this area of research has been well documented (McNiff, 1992, 2004; Malchiodi, 2003; Malzoomian & Brooke, 2006). However, in order to contextualize the lived experience of the participants of this study, it should be noted that most of the woodcarvers interviewed in this research would generally be considered artistic or creative individuals and that woodcarving helps to fulfill their inner drive to be creative.

All but one of the participants identified themselves as having creative personalities or having an innate need to use their hands to create things. The one participant who identified himself as not being creative, said that he was not very mechanically inclined and had not had many creative outlets in his life before starting woodcarving. He had been looking for a hobby to engage in after retirement when he met members of a local carving club who encouraged him to try it out. The four non-Indigenous participants of this study are all members of the same carving club that meets one night a week during ten months of the year. Once a year this club puts on a public display of their work at a local festival to help promote what they do and encourage members of the public to join their club.

As shown in the literature review, creative and artistic activities are inherently therapeutic (Mazloomian & Brooke, 2006; Malchiodi 2003; Ullman, 1975; McNiff 1992, 2004; Dewey, 1934). Although not all participants directly stated that the creative process of woodcarving was life-enhancing, we will safely assume that this is indeed the case. Aaron describes the role of creativity in people’s lives the following way:
I’ve heard someone define creativity as constantly dancing with disaster and mistakes, and you can’t truly be creative unless you’re doing something completely new, and you don’t know if it’s going to work or not because it’s completely new. So being creative is embracing this uncertainty...people are really scared of it. In woodworking maybe more-so than in other [mediums].

In the preceding quote Aaron is describing the creative dance of artistry. When people do not have creative outlets in their lives, they are missing out on the opportunity to experience this thrilling dance that nourishes ones psyche. In his clinical practice Dr. France has had many clients state to him that they are not creative. He will encourage these clients by telling them that they are indeed creative, but that they may just not be in touch with this part of themselves. He agrees with my proposition that craft activities such as woodcarving hold much therapeutic potential for individuals in post-industrial modern society.

Dr. France also states that, “Art is your projection. It is a projection of what you feel and what you think.” So we can see woodcarving as a means to articulate one’s emotional landscape outside of themselves as an external object. This is why we are discussing the therapeutic benefits of creative expression within the Carving Space of this paper. Xwa-Lack-Tun describes an experience carving a self portrait of himself during a time of transformation, personal change and healing in the following quote.

Well, I did a piece one time. I think it would be like a writer when they write their stuff down into a journal or something. But I put mine in the form of a woodcarving. When I carve it kind of reminds me of where I was at the time and where I wanted to be. It was like I was having a rebirth, I was becoming a new person. I’m coming out of a spiritual movement in my life, I don’t need to practice the spirits that are even more powerful than the ones I was practicing. Right? That’s probably why they called the hard liquor spirits. I was practicing a different spirit now, I woke up. I realized who I wanted to be. I saw the light because I had been reborn and looking out with that, what kind of brought me forward is because I felt like I was on top of the world. So I carved half a sphere that was on top of coming out. I had these three stumps coming up, trees, representing my mind, body and spirit. Then it branched off to four to represent my lifeline. In youth.....elder (a plane flying over disrupts the recording) branch out to these areas to become a whole person. To be my whole person. To be able to survive to become one of those elders. Because those elders you know, I respect my elders cause we’ve got a lot to learn from them. They got a lot to learn from us too, right?
In this rich description, Xwa-Lack-Tun alludes to the fact that in the past he had challenges with alcohol. We can see that woodcarving provided a means to get in touch with his cultural heritage, provided a means for personal, spiritual and emotional healing as well as creating meaning and purpose in his life. Woodcarving helped him to wake up and realize who he wanted to be. This evocative story of meaning-making and personal transformation illustrates how the process of creating a work of art facilitates healing and growth within the individual. The carving seems to be a testament and documentation of his healing journey.

4.5.2. **Woodcarving Fosters a Connection to Nature**

Wood is a natural organic material that can be a pleasure to work with and tantalizes the senses. In the following quote Elaine tells us that she believes the world would be a better place if there was time dedicated to arts and crafts in our everyday lives; “[When] you’re sitting there carving it’s sort of a natural process...if people focus more on the creative stuff there would be less wars.”

To a greater or lesser degree woodcarving creates a bond between the carver and the natural world. For some hobbyists, this might not be a very strong connection, but the fact that they are carving a bird or a fish there is a personal connection to the natural world. Xwa-Lack-Tun states that, “When people do carve they are basically mostly carving animals right? So you are thinking about nature, natural things.” Many of the subjects that are carved by hobbyist woodcarvers have some plant or animal as a subject or some sort of natural motif as a theme of the art piece. As carvers become more proficient in the craft they learn more about wood species and the qualities of different woods. With this knowledge comes an appreciation for the forests from which the wood comes and an appreciation for the conservation of such natural habitats. Some carvers will harvest their own wood or try to use wood that has becomes available in their own neighbourhood. This type of activity develops an appreciation for what dr. Ross calls the “spirit of the place” where people live (see page p.29).
Figure 4.2. Carving natural subjects can foster a connection with nature as illustrated by this carving of a cutthroat trout by one of the participants.


The above photograph depicts a trout swimming underwater. Edward, who created this carving, is also a fly-fisherman. When asked how carving a fish or other subjects helps to create a deeper relationship with the natural world he had an interesting response. He rhetorically asked if the interest in nature derived from the carving or whether the carving subject derived from pre-existing interest and connection to nature. In a sense he was testing this theory, and was not yet convinced that woodcarving can connect people with nature. However, upon further discussion he agreed. We talked about how using natural materials and how gathering these materials can connect one to nature and he conceded that he believed this to be true.

Interviews with the Indigenous participants in this study revealed deep appreciation and connection to the natural world. Although this might seem self evident to some readers, it should be pointed out that this correlation between the Indigenous carvers and their personal connection to the natural world helped to inform this research in a very intimate way with how woodcarving can be a therapeutic pursuit to non-native carvers as well. As was discussed in the Literature review, an Indigenous perspective pertaining to environmental ethics and the natural world offers much to non-Indigenous woodcarvers.
From personal experience I can also attest to the therapeutic benefits of being connected to the natural world through woodcarving. On a number of occasions I have carved pieces of wood that I have found on the forest floor or on the beach. There is something very satisfying about this practice. Dr. France also looks for wood to carve when he is walking in the forest or along the beach. The photo below is of one of his carvings from a piece of driftwood. He values the natural edges of the wood and tries to incorporate this into the carving.

![Photo of a wood carving](image)

**Figure 4.3.** Another example of how carving can connect the carver to nature; this carving of a raven is made from a piece of driftwood found on a beach.

Note: Photo by Dr. France (2015). Reprinted with permission.

4.6. Carving Relations

Within this final section of this chapter, we will be concerning ourselves with two aspects of the lived relations of woodcarving; the social and cultural aspects of this phenomenon. When articulating the themes of this research I struggled with whether to separate these two themes or to keep them as one. In the end it was decided that they should be kept as one meta-theme, if only to highlight that the social and cultural elements of this phenomenon or so infused with each other, that they are indeed not separate. However, they do have their own characteristic elements and will be addressed separately.
In addition to this, we will be examining both the 1) therapeutic and 2) life-enhancing benefits of woodcarving. Again, we are using the Oxford definition of therapeutic “Having good effect on the body or mind; contributing to a sense of well-being” (Simpson & Weiner, 1989). I define life-enhancing benefits as a) creating meaning in one’s life or b) providing lessons that are applicable in other facets of life besides woodcarving. For example, developing the ability to plan and execute and carving has been identified by participants as a beneficial by-product of becoming proficient in woodcarving. This life lesson or life skill can be applied in other facets of life, and although it may be accompanied by a sense of well-being, it is more than just a therapeutic benefit. Therefore, we will be using the term ‘life-enhancing’ when the benefits of woodcarving have been found to hold such a quality. This is not to say that these are exclusive to having therapeutic benefits as well.

4.6.1. Cultural Benefits of Woodcarving

Let us revisit what Annie Ross tells us about the ‘unbroken’ and ‘mended’ chain of Indigenous craft practices and cultural traditions. According to Dr. Ross’ metaphor of Indigenous craft practice, we are concerning ourselves with the mended chain of traditional Coast Salish woodcarving practices within this cultural epistemology. As Aaron stated, “there is a whole bunch of context around the teachings.” I would also propose that participants from the carving club are also engaged in a mended chain of craft tradition in that none of the participants were taught woodcarving from a young age within any cultural tradition or context. Therefore they too are engaged in a process of remediation and reconnecting with a crafts tradition at some level. For example, one of Edwards’ carving projects was to carve a relief drawing of the ‘Green Man’. According to writer and mythological historian Joseph Campbell, the Green Man is a mythical figure that has been depicted in Christian motifs, such as in church stonework, but is thought to have pre-Christian origins (Campbell, 1991). In addition to these cultural aspects of this phenomenon, woodcarving seems to have a deep draw for people. In a follow up interview Edward declared that people seem to have, “a universal desire to try carving.” During the process of this research I came to see that woodcarving provided an opportunity for individuals to reconnect with cultural traditions that seem to have been
displaced by industrialization. In addition to this, carvers engage in using hand tools in a capacity that is rarely used within industrialized societies.

Participants confirmed that people seem to have an innate desire to try woodcarving. Dr. France told me that he often carves in campgrounds where other people are camping. Inevitably people will either come up to him to ask questions or study him from afar if they are too shy. He stated that he will often strike up conversations with people whom he may have not talked with otherwise. (personal communication, March, 2015). Aaron said that when he is carving in public, people are drawn in by the carving activity. People have a deep curiosity and connection to woodcarving that seems to transcend cultural boundaries. During the course of our interview, Xwa-Lack-Tun shared a number of experiences when he was carving in Scotland (Appendix C). He said that the interest in woodcarving transcended cultural boundaries and that a wide cross-section of Scottish society engaged in conversation and dialogue. All three of the Coast Salish participants in this study have travelled to Scotland to participate in a cultural and carving exchange program that has proved to be very successful and embraced by many Scottish communities. This cultural exchange program is a testament to how woodcarving can bring people together.

So let us start with a cultural examination of the phenomenon of woodcarving. First we will examine the cultural experience of our Indigenous participants. Three cultural themes came to light through their interviews: Environmentalism, Spiritual Practice, Lessons for Life

4.6.2. The Lived Cultural Experience of Woodcarving: Indigenous Perspectives

Again, one of the unique aspects of this research has been the Coast Salish Indigenous perspective that was provided by three of the participants in this study. Therefore, let us begin with their experience and see how it helped to inform the research. In my interview with Aaron he shared with me that when he was younger he wanted to get in touch with his Coast Salish ancestry more, to do this he thought learning woodcarving would be a good way to achieve this. He went on to explain that within the Squamish culture is based upon oral traditions and with this comes a way of
teaching in which, “someone shows you something, you know? Someone brings you along in your teaching and looks out for you. I think it is really important in learning and teaching.” He goes on to say, “There is a whole bunch of context around the teachings.”

Aaron described how woodcarving was emotionally healing for him and helped him to resolve personal issues from his past. He stated that, “when I went to school and people found out I was Native I got beat up.” Then he went on to explain that as an adult, he saw his carving teacher and mentor go into schools where, “people loved him. I think it was really healing for me to go along with him and to see how much people appreciated working on a big carving with him.” In the Carving Relations area of this chapter I will discuss the topic more in depth regarding the cultural benefits of woodcarving, but at this point it is appropriate to point out that learning traditional woodcarving can do a great deal to facilitate emotional integration and healing regarding past and ongoing racial discrimination, trauma and stigmatism. When interviewing this participant I was deeply moved by this man’s compassion and gratitude for his teacher and his ancestors. He demonstrates pride and humility at the same time.

I found that the Coast Salish participants provided rich and meaningful metaphors and allegories when they were interviewed. These were meant to outline how things were to be “Done in a good way.” This meant that traditions were practiced respectfully and in accordance with ancestral values and beliefs. We did not discuss particulars about ceremonial practices, but the following quote from Aaron illustrates well this belief and value system. He starts by referring to Bill Reid and this famous artists’ struggle to come to terms with his Haida identity. He then describes how he believes wood as a natural material has its’ own spirit and energy and can soak up the energy of those who interact with it.

Bill Reid was kind of funny, he was raised to stay away from his native culture, and he was drawn back to it with this fantastic level of artwork. And he was always kind of ambivalent about it [his ancestry], he was always a little bit at war with himself and he would laugh at himself, and tease himself, and he was kind of funny to listen to. He said once he started to feel like the bear he was carving had brushed up against the log or the eagle he was carving had landed on its branches and he would start to feel – there are stories up and down the coast about cedar just soaking up the spirit around it. And he started to feel a connection to those spirits and he said he is just kind
of uncovering them. He said “There are all these spirits in the world around” and I guess he got clear enough at some point that he could see them and in his work just released them, or just shared them with the rest of us. And someone at that level, when he is talking about stuff, I listened very closely, because I really admire his work.

I think I know what he means, within these logs there is a lot of stuff that is absorbed over the years. I try to make a log do what I want and it just fights back, I never win a battle with the carving. So I compromise, I work with it, I try to show respect for the cedar itself or other woods I use and not try to bully them into what I want. And it seems to work better that way, and you know, I feel happier doing it that way and I also think it works better.

We go through a number of ceremonies, especially on a public pieces before we start carving, before we take the log down. Anytime we start to feel grouchy or irritable or someone comes around, and sometimes people come around and put a case of beer on top of my totem pole, you know, and offer to give you drugs – and in my mind quite negative things, and we will just stop and do a little bit of ceremony or just sing a song to like brush it off. At the very end we will ask the women in our community to come out, and with fresh stream water and cedar bows, to brush it off one more time. Xwa-Lack-Tun always said, you know, if a little kid comes up and touches one of his carvings, and it’s absorbed some swear word and negativity, he doesn’t want that kid to feel it. He wants to brush it off one more time. You know we put it out in the world – we want to do things the best way we can. And you know whether it is wood or clay or paint or anything else, people are drawn to different media, and you know maybe there is something healing in the process for the.

At the end of this quote Aaron says that, “Maybe there is something healing in the process for them.” When I first read this I assumed he was referring to the artist. However, upon further reflection I have come to think that perhaps he was also referring to the viewer. I can attest to this experience myself. As I mentioned in the introduction of this paper, I have spent much time in the Museum of Anthropology located at the University of British Columbia. These works art have touched me emotionally and at some level have influenced who I have become. I have spent hours at the museum just witnessing the artwork and carvings of West Coast Indigenous peoples, including some works by Bill Reid.
Environmental Awareness and Connection

Xwa-Lack-Tun also talked about the sacredness of a trees’ life and how ceremony plays a role in “Doing things in a good way.” He states,

Because with our old ways, you know like when they took a tree’s life, they know that they have taken a life away from a tree, they gave offerings and prayers and ceremonies around it – they take it’s life away but then we give it new life and we still do ceremony before we even carve it and the there is ceremony after we finish carving it. Another ceremony to raise it and give it life and women had the power to give life; woman would brush it with cedar bows and water. Water is the giver of life, so it was woken up into a new life form.

These quotes give us some insight into an Indigenous environmental belief system which has much to offer post-industrial society. As was discussed in the second chapter, many scholars believe Indigenous environmental perspectives can provide a sustainable vision for the planet (Verbos & Williams, 2013; Beckford, Williams & Nahdee, 2010; Cajete, 2000.)

Teaching woodcarving provides an opportunity to teach cultural values and promote discussion about environmental conservation. Again Aaron provides us with an example of how woodcarving can be used as tool for teaching other lessons.

There is a lot of conversations that you can have around the pole. You know, kids see deforestation, they know that there are fewer logs around than there used to be. We talk about some of the big ones we used to see and we have this crummy little log we are working on at school. It is an interesting conversation. To create a pole is extremely expensive: A lot of time, you need a lot of help, you have to move it around, you have to put it up, you have to care for it, and yet you need this forest to support it.

You need to keep this forest alive in order to have a log that is worth carving. You have to keep an entire culture around, you have to create all of these tools. You know, it is really involved to put up a pole. To do it at school, even more so. The school stuff, you know, we are completely backwards to what they are doing, we work exactly the opposite way.
The last sentence refers to how Indigenous teachings are learned in a hands on manner that is very different to academic book learning and the ‘western’ academic model.

Environmental awareness and engagement is very real when one is exposed in such a hands-on way to nature, as my research reveals. Although not the main focus of this work, it would prove a worthy research topic in the future. An Indigenous cultural framework, especially in regards to craft making, can and for some does promote a more sustainable environmental ethic within an individuals’ life and the natural environment in which they live. As Aaron states in the previous quote, one can have a lot of conversations about the environment and sustainable living practices with young people while carving. Many school boards are starting to implement aboriginal education enhancement agreements, and one of the benefits of these programs is more environmental awareness within classrooms in British Columbia.

**Carving as a Spiritual Practice**

As outlined in quotes from the previous section, we can clearly see how ceremony can be integrated into woodcarving practice so that the carving being worked on is cleansed and purified. Becoming a master woodcarver has been a spiritual journey for Xwalcktun. He is describing a personal catharsis that happened while he was becoming a woodcarver and learning about his Coast Salish traditions and culture. This is the second time this quote is being used, but because of it’s rich content I decided to use it again. I have included my initial question to help give context to the quotation.

Graeme: Has woodcarving helped you in any other personal ways kind of get through personal stuff or being there, something to go back to when you’re having a hard time in life or anything like that?

Xwa-Lack-Tun: Well, I did a piece one time. I think it would be like a writer when they write their stuff down into a journal or something. But I put mine in the form of a woodcarving. When I carve it kind of reminds me of where I was at the time and where I wanted to be. It was like I was having a rebirth, I was becoming a new person. I [was] coming out of a spiritual movement in my life; I need to practice the spirits that are even more powerful than the ones I was practicing. Right? That’s probably why they called the hard liquor spirits.
Graeme: Right *(laughing together)*

Xwa-Lack-Tun: I was practicing a different spirit now, I woke up. I realized who I wanted to be. I saw the light because I had been reborn and looking out with that, what kind of brought me forward is because I felt like I was on top of the world. So I carved half a sphere that was on top of coming out. I had these three stumps coming up, trees, representing my mind, body and spirit. Then it branched off to four to represent my lifeline. In youth ......elder... (plane flying over) branch out to these areas to become a whole person. To be my whole person. To be able to survive to become one of those elders. Because those elders you know, I respect my elders cause we’ve got a lot to learn from them. They got a lot to learn from us too, right?

In this quote we are able to see that woodcarving is practiced within a cultural and spiritual context. Xwa-Lack-Tun is talking about Elders in this quote. There is much meaning and importance that is put on intergenerational connection and the importance of ancestors. We will see later on that woodcarving provides intergenerational connection and meaning for other participants of this study as well. In addition to this, woodcarving can produce generative meaning and purpose and a sense of hope for the future. This generative aspect of Xwa-Lack-Tuns’ carving practice is indeed spiritual in nature and is deeply important to him. He also described in a general way about ceremonial practices that were an integral part of the carving process, such as cleansing the finished carving. The Indigenous participants explained to me that carving can be a spiritual practice that connects the mind, body and spirit.

Xwa-Lack-Tuns’ son James also helps us to appreciate the spiritual aspects of woodcarving when he says it, “is sort of a medicine in itself.” He goes on to say, “I think on some levels it passes through, the art form, and that mental kind of awareness of it passes through the generations. And First Nations spirituality really connects to that too.” This Indigenous perspective seems to speak to a collective awareness of humankind and the planet, which is congruent with the environmentalism we discussed earlier. Xwalcktun states that we must, “Respect where the wood is coming from.” And that in the past his people only “took what we needed.” As was inferred in one of the quotes from previous section, the Coast Salish participants attribute the trees being carved has a spirit and living essence that should be respected. Their cultural values
and beliefs are imbued with a connection and respect for the natural world which I found myself to be attracted to and respectful of.

As I mentioned earlier in the paper, all three Coast Salish participants made a deep impression on me. They came across as spiritual and thoughtful people, full of compassion and understanding. In addition to this they were also pragmatic and practical in their approach to woodcarving. Which brings us to the next section, a discussion of how woodcarving can teach lessons for life.

*Lessons for Life: An Indigenous Perspective*

In this section we will be examining the life-enhancing benefits of woodcarving from an Indigenous perspective. Most of these lessons, or benefits, will be duplicated in section 4.7.5. and will be categorized therein. I have chosen to present the benefits in this section in a more narrative format so that we can see them within a more holistic context. Woodcarving can change peoples lives for the better and can be taught in a powerful way that empowers the individual. When I visited Aaron for our initial interview, a very moving and sad thing occurred. When he was seeing me to his front door at the end of our time together, he picked up a letter that had been left outside. It was a notification to the community that a young person had died, he said that he, “gets these notifications too often, sometimes once a month”. This was a clear example of how young Indigenous people are at greater risk of early death that the general population. I am not sure whether it was alcohol or drug related, suicide or perhaps accidental. Regardless, it left a deep impression on me and highlighted the significance of why teaching traditional crafts within a cultural context is so important in communities like Aarons, and in any community where suffering and self-harm are issues.

Both Aaron and Xwa-Lack-Tun talked in their interviews about how woodcarving had changed their lives for the better. Earlier we discussed how this was achieved within a cultural context, now see how this happened through learning valuable ‘life lessons’.

You work with this wood for this reason and that wood for that reason and things are all done by design, and that is an interesting lesson. It is not haphazard, like we will end up with something, you know, we have a place for spirituality and a place for emotion but every carver I
know is pretty methodical and almost linear sometimes. You do this step and then this step and then you make room for your artistic expression, but you know, it’s amazing how organized some of the carvers are. - Aaron

Later in the interview Aaron discusses how he saw himself change as he became a more proficient carver. He became a more balanced and grounded individual. He learned practical lessons that he was able to transfer into other areas of his life. When asked about the lessons learned from woodcarving he states:

So I guess, the idea of having a plan, you know methodically working towards it, and looking at things in a different way. Those were all invaluable to me, you know, I was stuck in my own perspective a lot. Stuck at one way of looking at it. Having a problem and trying to solve it my way...I was just looking at it one way. Especially on a monumental piece, you know, it is really hard to get perspective on it. Seeing all of these tricks, all of these other ways of looking at things, it gets transferred into my life. I think I look at things differently afterwards, a number of different ways. If it didn’t look good this way, I would look at it another way, those kinds of lessons are hard to learn any other way. Like, it’s easier to teach kids fractions with a ruler in the wood shop than it is in the math class. Kids never get fractions, and you know, woodwork teachers it takes 15 minutes to teach them fractions and it’s the easiest way to learn it

“Those lessons are hard to learn any other way.” This is an important statement because it is connected to the Indigenous teaching approach I referred to earlier. Xwa-Lack-Tun uses woodcarving as metaphor for life and approaching the challenges of life. I will once again use one of his euphemisms to illustrate this point: “Look after the tools and they will look after you.” Aaron states that, “It is the teachings behind the activity that is really important.”

The following is an in depth description of how Xwa-Lack-Tun teaches his students how to carve, but I would also suggest that it aptly describes an Indigenous pedagogical approach that illustrates the ‘teachings behind the activity’.

Your teachings are tools and he said "they can’t just do anything by themselves, you have to pick them up and you have to have a plan and do a bunch of hard work. And he said "you have to stop every once in a while and sharpen your tools – you have to hone them" and he said “that is what school is – it is one of your tools – your parents give you some and your friends give you some and you find some
along the way” and he had this really interesting analogy around some of his tools.

But what I liked best about what he said was he said “they don’t do anything by themselves” a big box of tools, the best tools, don’t make a carving, he said “you make the carving” and he used every tool he had. And he said “when you only have one you can still make a lot, and when you have 2 you can make quite a bit more” and he said that eventually you have a big bag of tools.

But the kids were just riveted and they saw why he went about things the way he did. It can’t help but influence the things I do. You know, keeping carving tools sharp and dry, and you know, rust free. That is actually quite an endeavour, so I have to be more organized in my life. You throw me the bag and reach in and you cut yourself with the knife once, and you realized that you need to get more organized. So I found that the way I approach my carving is the way that I care for my tools, it just spilled over into the rest of my life, you know? I started to think about some of the tools I have like a song or a story or something else – but I have to do something with them right? I have to put them together in certain way.

It is just an interesting way of looking at teachings. You know, rather than saying, “I have a diploma and I have a certificate and I am jumping through hoops” You know? I don’t want to do this but I need it for my paper [certification or degree]. You know? That is indirectly how I think I learned in school. You jump through the hoops and your teacher yells at you so you do it and you don’t know why. You don’t know what it applies to and when you will need it. It was really fragmented – but to start a project and see it all of the way to the end! You know finish a totem pole with a group of kids by the end of the school year. Have them bring their kids back 20 years later – it is fascinating.

After reading and re-reading this passage it made a deep impression on me as a teacher. It got me to question some of my past teaching practices and personal learning experiences as a student. It is my contention that learning and teaching crafts could and does have significant therapeutic and life-enhancing benefits because it is an applied skill and offers a means to share cultural meaning and values with other individuals.

In my follow up interview with Aaron he describes this process of teaching and mentoring in the following statement:

That’s one of the things we’re trying to share with you. Yeah it could be just a crafty activity or it could be something profoundly meaningful, depending on how it’s done and how it’s set up. Like, if
you tell a youth, ‘By finishing this mask, you’re going to know how to change your life. At the end of this, [it’s] you’re decision about what you’ll do with this knowledge, but you’ll never be able to say, ‘I didn’t know any better.’ You [won’t be able to say] ‘I can’t’ anymore. If you set up the activity like that, then all these skills you’re talking about here, become a part of the healing process: I do need to organize my time better. I do need to let go of this anger. I do need to stop...and look at my carving [and life’s challenges] differently.

This passage summarizes how the Indigenous perspective of these participants was able to inform this research in a very deep and meaningful way and give us insight into how woodcarving might be used in a structured therapeutic manner. It also helps to illustrate how woodcarving has been a ‘profoundly meaningful’ therapeutic tool in these individuals’ lives. When I interviewed James, I found him to be an extremely well adjusted and thoughtful person for someone who was in his mid twenties. It is hard to say how much of a role woodcarving has played in his personal development and his psychological wellbeing, but I would venture to guess that is has been significant.

Xwa-Lack-Tun talked about how he works on his carvings in an intentional way. Although there is cultural context around how he does this, I found that the following quote illuminates how he approaches life in general and how woodcarving has helped him to live a more intentional and meaningful life.

Yeah, what’s the intention of doing the piece of art work? And making sure everything is in a sense to me you are carrying out from the beginning you know, and in taking the life of a tree, showing respect to the earth, Mother Earth. To the earth, to the tree, to the land. In our teachings we are all connected, we are all part of one and we need to focus on that cause you know we need to carry on that. We need to have others have what we have. Because you know I’ve heard some teachings saying what we have now, seven generations from now should have the same. So in a good way meaning, let’s keep those things in mind when we’re moving ahead with our own work

Aaron describes his first attempts at woodcarving the following way:

As a young man, doing things in a methodical way, in a patient way was a big challenge for me, so I struggled with it at first. You know, I see the youth we have struggle with it also, they want to get it done right away. They don’t understand [it is a] step by step process, you know the planning. There is a bunch of lessons within the process,
[that] I think are useful for anyone, but for kids and teenagers I think it is invaluable.

The following narrative is a powerful example of how learning carving can have a positive impact on a young person. This story was shared with me by Aaron from when he and Xwa-Lack-Tun were teaching carving to a group of young people. They were carving a spindle whorl.

[The spindle whorl] is a tool that is used for spinning wool, and it’s the kind of thing that a guy would usually make for a woman. Give it to his niece, give it to his wife, his sweetheart, whatever, but some of the finest Salish art is on this disk, this spindle whirl. So we do a project with some youth and we said “we aren’t just making art here we are going to make a real spindle whorl” and hopefully someone could use it if they wanted to but even if they don’t we are going to make it properly. So we asked them to think of a woman in their life that they wanted to express gratitude towards, so all these youth worked on this spindle whorl and we said you are going to make this thing and you are going to invite them to our class and you are going to give it to them and you are going to stand up and speak to them and tell them why you are giving it to them. And, this one guy, who had been abandoned by his mother, struggled with teachers, and had this kind of hate on for women, like anger and hatred, was super mad and didn’t want to do it, but he wanted to learn to carve. And we said “we are going to make stuff, you have to make stuff, we aren’t Native people pretending to have culture. This is what it is” and there has got to be some woman, so while you are working on it, think about it and you don’t have to know right now but just think about it.

About half way through he started to think of this grade 5 teacher, and this is a grade 11 or 12 student and he starts to think about his grade 5 teacher, the only one he ever felt was respectful and kind to him, so then his attitude really changed like, “Hey, there really was a woman [who cared].” So he started to make this thing for her and then he called her in, and it has been years you know. [As a teacher] you see them for like a year and you don’t know if what you said had any effect. She gets this kid call her up years later saying she made a tremendous difference in this young man’s life and he can’t say all women treated him like crap you know, he gets to say if I had this relationship with this one beautiful teacher, I know there are other relationships I can have that are healthy, respectful and good.

The shift in this young man, so he gave her this whorl and had made it for her himself, and he was proud, really proud and happy, I think. And it was only because he really wanted to carve that he stuck it out. And if he wasn't really motivated to carve he wouldn't have stuck with it and delved that deep (emotionally), but he wanted to make a carving and it turned out really well. That doesn’t happen everyday.
and it doesn’t happen with everyone but it happens more often than you think. That was one of the people in Xwa-Lack-Tuns’ classes. I don’t know if he realizes the stuff he says, how profound it is but – you know there is a whole trail of people he has left behind who are happier and more respectful and better informed and just feel better. Anyways, I get to be a part of that sometimes and I am pretty happy with that.

Although this narrative does not illustrate any of the shared ‘life lessons’ that we will be presenting later in this chapter, it does demonstrate the practicality of woodcarving and how it can be used as a therapeutic tool and medium. Woodcarving provided a means for engagement through which the young man was able to move past some of his personal adversity. This is a power example of the transformative potential of woodcarving especially within the cultural context and teachings described therein.

An Indigenous Clinicians’ Perspective

Dr. France has used woodcarving in his clinical practice as a counselling psychologist and has found it to be an extremely therapeutic practice. When checking the trustworthiness of my findings, he was a very helpful resource in helping to articulate the themes presented in this research. When I conducted a follow up interview with Dr. France, he informed me that he would be teaching a class on creative arts therapy and would be dedicating some of the class to woodcarving in particular. He finds woodcarving to be a dynamic therapeutic tool which provides a means for clients to achieve positive change in their lives.

Much of the work Dr. France has done using woodcarving was in a group therapy format. He also mentioned that certain Indigenous communities near where he lives have been engaged in “woodcarving therapy” for quite some time. I did not find this fact surprising. He provided two examples of how woodcarving projects were used with a therapeutic focus. The first was carving a paddle. Members of the therapy group each carved their own paddle, which symbolized their journey through life and their journey of healing. One such group was comprised of residential school survivors. Each paddle had traditional cultural symbols carved into them which had significance to the individuals and were imbued with meaning. During each session the group members would carve and relax and become comfortable with each other during the session.
Woodcarving was used to help facilitate therapeutic discussion. By having a focus on woodcarving, individuals found it easier to talk about their personal trauma psychological distress.

![Figure 4.4. The paddle that Dr. France carved while working in group therapy with residential school survivors.](image)

Note: Dr. France took this photo to be used in this thesis.

4.6.3. The Lived Cultural Experience of Woodcarving: The non-Indigenous Experience

Again I would like to present the argument that non-Indigenous carvers are also involved in a process of cultural reclamation through woodcarving. Learning woodcarving or other traditional craft practices provides an opportunity to counter some of the social isolation of modern living. Using ones’ hands to create and re-claiming craft practices can be a form of activism in modern life. Finding a community to carve with can provide a place where people can achieve recognition and belonging.

The shared esoteric knowledge of woodcarving exists within a cultural context. Woodcarvers understand each other on certain levels and share common language or terminology. When participants described a carving tool as ‘singing’, I knew exactly what they meant. A tool ‘sings’ when it is both sharp and engaging the wood properly and the shavings seem to come off of the wood almost effortlessly. Someone who does not have much experience woodworking or carving
What became apparent in this research is that there is actually a carving culture that exists within the carving club, and many of these ‘cultural traits’ are shared with woodcarvers outside of the club. There seems to be a comraderie amongst members of the carving club, they tend to joke and have fun with one another. Edward says, “It’s always nice to have someone to critique the work.” He is able to ask for opinions and suggestions from other members and he finds that this type of interaction help to form social bonds, which in turn creates a “culture of carving; working towards common goals.”

I also found that members of the carving club would become excited and animated when talking about technical things that would mean little to someone who wasn’t a carver. I remarked one evening in my journal that I witnessed an interesting interaction between three club members. One member was recounting to the other two how his honing technique had reached a new level of ability. He was describing how he could now get his gouges razor sharp, and these are difficult tools to sharpen. He was saying something to the effect that, “I had never been able to do it before but it finally clicked! It wasn’t so much looking at what I was doing as feeling it. I could feel the edge being polished.” What he was describing to the other members was a sort of eureka moment, when he finally understood what people had been telling him. To an average layperson, this dialogue would have little emotional impact, but to another woodcarver, it means that this carver has arrived at another higher level of ability. This skill has meaning and value to other woodcarvers, and significance in the ‘woodcarving culture’.

What is most significant about the cultural benefits of woodcarving to non-Indigenous participants is the remediation that occurs between art and technology, that of which we talked about earlier in this paper. Let us again revisit what Crawford (2009) extols about the importance of the manual arts, “A decline in tool use would seem to betoken a shift in our relationship to our own stuff: more passive and more dependent” (p.2). Therefore we can conclude that developing expertise in woodcarving, other crafts, or other manual competencies can help people develop a greater sense of efficacy in their lives. It was difficult to check the accuracy of this proposition with participants of the study, as it is somewhat difficult to articulate. However, after citing the literature and using authors such as Crawford to situate this idea, participants did tend to agree in
differing ways. It was stated that being able to actual ‘do’ and create something with their own hands seemed to have a validating and life affirming effect on individuals. The idea that participants realized, “I can do that, I can make that!” seemed to have a profound effect on how they see themselves and how they interact in the world around them.

4.6.4. The Lived Social Experience of Woodcarving

Woodcarving provides an opportunity for individuals to share a common pastime and pursuit with the potential of enhancing psychological well-being. Dr. Stephen Wright, a Canadian Research Chair in Social Psychology at Simon Fraser University, states that being a part of carving community in itself provides therapeutic benefits to an individuals. By being a part of a group of carvers, an individual can derive meaning, purpose and gain a source of self-definition and social identity. He states that woodcarving within a social context also offers an opportunity to instantiate and demonstrate this identity. As described in the previous section, this purpose and meaning derived from woodcarving can have deep spiritual significance, or it can be of a more recreational variety. With the case of our Indigenous participants, woodcarving can be seen as a form of social protest and resistance. It plays a vital role in the maintenance of the Coast Salish culture and in turn promotes psychological health within the community.

When discussing this work with Dr. Wright, he helped to articulate some of the therapeutic benefits that can be derived from what is called intergroup relations in the field of Social Psychology. The subfield of intergroup relations is concerned with how membership in a group affects the thoughts, emotions and actions of an individual. Although the effects of intergroup relations within a carving group could become a study in and of itself, we will not dedicate an inordinate amount of space to this particular topic. Suffice to say that there has been research dedicated to the therapeutic benefits of group membership and that these benefits have been documented by experts in this area of study. (Jetten et al, 2014; Crisp & Hewstone, 2007)
In her text, *Craft and Social Identity* (1998), anthropologist Cathy Costin has some interesting things to say about the role of crafts in society which are relevant to our discussion of the life-enhancing benefits of woodcarving. She states:

Crafting and craft objects intersect with all cultural domains: economic, social, political and ritual. Craft goods are social objects that assume an importance beyond household maintenance and reproduction. They signify and legitimize group membership and social roles, and become reserves of wealth, storing intrinsically valuable materials and the labour invested in their manufacture. (p. 3)

She goes on to state that, “through crafts and crafting we can see the formation and expression of identity across a broad spectrum of social phenomenon.” These are important considerations when we examine the following social benefits of woodcarving.

The following is not an exhaustive list of all the therapeutic benefits derived from the intergroup relations of woodcarving. It is a summary of the themes that became apparent during the interviews and which were considered to be shared by all participants to greater or lesser degree.

**4.6.5. Social Therapeutic Benefits**

In this section we will explore the shared social benefits of woodcarving that were articulated by the participants of this study. Five themes related to the social benefits of woodcarving revealed themselves in this study. 1) Woodcarving provided social engagement. 2) Carvers shared resources and ideas with one another. 3) Mentoring plays a vital role in woodcarving. 4) The act of woodcarving provides space and opportunity to express emotions with others. 5) Woodcarving provides an opportunity for intergenerational connection and engagement. In order to illustrate these themes I will draw from the interviews of all participants. These benefits seemed to be consistent with all participants to varying degrees.

**Social Engagement**

Rob stated that the “social aspect is good” when he participates in the carving club. After observing him at the club and talking to other members, it became clear that
for him this was perhaps the most important aspect of woodcarving; connecting with others. By his own admission, he does more carving on his own than when he is at the club. I saw Rob walk around and socialize with others, engaging with younger members and joking around. Considering that his wife was ill with cancer when the interviews took place, I could imagine that these social interactions helped to take his mind off the troubles going on at home.

Elaine said that she “gets inspiration from others” and that she has “come across a whole network of people…and gets a lot of feedback from them.” For someone who is retired these are important benefits to consider. She said you can, “take it further and make it a social thing as well.” She went on to say that it is important to keep these crafts alive and share them with the next generation. She hopes that crafts like woodcarving can help “get kids off the internet.” She sees woodcarving and other crafts as having a very important social role in keeping communities together and to promote positive interactions with individuals within the community.

Another interesting aspect of the carving club was that a diverse cross-section of society was represented there. I believe this also carried with it potential benefits. I noticed some members engaging in companionable co-existence that perhaps would not do so elsewhere. There seems to be an acceptance of each other within the club. In particular, there was a wide range of cultural backgrounds and some members had different political views and beliefs. During the time of some of my interviews there happened to be a teachers strike going on, and although some of the members of the club had clearly opposite political views, there seemed to be a tolerance and acceptance of these views that was encouraging to see. This is an example of what social psychologists have called cross-cutting categorizations where people from very different groups come in to contact with each other and learn more tolerance and acceptance of the other because they share another group membership that cuts across the initial group boundaries (Crisp & Hewstone, 2007)

Within his group therapy work, Dr. France noted that woodcarving helped to develop a sense of “cohesion” within the group. The members of the therapy group
would become more open and relaxed after woodcarving and would inevitably be more apt to share emotional content and to become more vulnerable with each other.

It has become apparent that there exists a fraternity of woodcarvers; a brotherhood and sisterhood of people who carve and understand each other. To become one of the “in-group” as Dr. Wright calls it, has its own therapeutic benefits. Members of this social group show each other respect and understanding and feel a sense of belonging and pride. The group membership itself (being a carver) can be called upon as a source of support and meaning, but also the other members, individually or as a group, can offer a sense of security and support, either explicitly or simply through the positive social engagement they offer.

**Sharing Resources and Ideas – “Instrumental Social Support”**

Upon conferring with Dr. Wright again about this work he informed me that “instrumental social support”, where people offer assistance and resources to others is a current area of study for psychologists in which many benefits are derived for both those offering and those receiving social support (Santini *et al*, 2015).

While observing at the carving club, I was surprised how forthcoming and willing to aid each other people were. Members offered to lend each other tools and advice whenever it seemed appropriate. While I was working on my own carving one night, another member offered me the use of a specialty gauge that he owned. It made the task at hand much easier. He stated that it was, “good to see it put to use. I haven’t had a need to use it in months.”

One night a member of the club made an announcement near the end of the evening. “If any of you would like some Cherry wood, a neighbour of mine had a tree come down in their yard and we are cutting it up next week. Come talk to me and we will set you up.” Peter stated that he has not had to purchase wood for carving for years, he has a garage full of wood that was all gifted to him and he in turn gives it away to others.
Rob said that, “You’re sharing things with people. It’s not a matter of money changing hands either, because ninety percent of the wood that gets given to [us is from] other carvers or people up country.” I witnessed firsthand how participation in the carving club was about pooling resources for the benefit of all. It was interesting to see a group of people working in an altruistic manner to promote the craft and sharing the enjoyment of this pastime.

I noticed the same attitude with the Coast Salish participants. Both Xwa-Lack-Tun and Aaron cherished the opportunities they have had to share their carving practice and stories with others; Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. They did not come across as proprietary or secretive about their craft and traditions, in fact quite the opposite. Aaron summarized their attitudes well when he said,

You know, I think it is a lot of fun and I think it shows that I am not trying to make a bunch of Squamish people or First Nations artists. What we are sharing is a bit more universal than that. We have our own tradition that we start from, but I think there is a lot of inclusion in it. I think those are pretty good goals! (we both start laughing)...I don’t think that culture necessarily separates us...we really value the difference

**Mentoring**

Rob states that, “There is nobody in the club that is not willing to give you some guidance...nobody is secretive or highly competitive or anything. There is none of that.” When I was conducting my interviews at the local carving club and taking field notes, I was struck by what a positive and engaging collective atmosphere there was. People were very welcoming and good-natured. Whether this was because everyone was engaged in woodcarving or because the woodcarvers tended to be good-natured people is hard to say.

I will use a quote from Xwa-Lack-Tun again at this point in relation to how he has mentored other carvers. “Yes, I’ve taught them how to carve, how to tool sharpen, design, and even how to move it (the carving in a proper way) and how to talk and how to share (about the carvings and the cultural contexts surrounding them).” Xwa-Lack-Tun is talking about a few different facets of woodcarving here; cultural, technical and
artistic. It is difficult to gauge how many people he has impacted on a personal level with his woodcarving. During the course of the interviews I discovered that he has been to Scotland over twenty times to share woodcarving practices and to carve totem poles with other Indigenous carvers and Scottish locals (Appendix A). He has taught carving to innumerable school children and young Coast Salish people wanting to get in touch with their cultural heritage.

In turn, Xwa-Lack-Tuns’ students are now in a position to share their knowledge and experience with others, as we can see with his student Aaron and his son James. Both of these carvers have gone on to emulate their mentor and to share the benefits of woodcarving with others.

Expressing Emotions

Although this was not a common theme in many of the interviews, I thought it important to include it here because of the potential value to clinical counselling practice. Elaine states that, “I know a lot of people in the club have confided in me things that they may not tell their spouse or whatever. It’s just a kind of letting loose, it’s fine.” I found this to be a very poignant statement. For I have found that in both my counselling and teaching practice, that when people are engaged in working with their hands, they are more apt to talk about their emotions, I have found this especially true for young men and boys. The kinaesthetic act of working with one’s hands or walking can help facilitate talking about one’s emotions. This was corroborated by retired high school counsellor and my Simon Fraser clinical supervisor, Dr. Mel Loncaric, who also attested to this phenomenon (personal communication, November 2013.)

Dr. France also describes this phenomenon within his clinical practice. Dr. France uses carving in therapy and agrees that working with the hands can help free up emotional content and make it easier for individuals to articulate and share their feelings with others (personal communication, March 2015). So although not all participants stated that this active engagement in woodcarving helped individuals to open up and share with others, I propose that this is indeed the case with most people at different times.
Intergenerational Connection & Engagement

As was stated earlier, woodcarving provides an excellent opportunity for people of different ages to interact and engage. This was found to be the case with five of the eight participants of this study. As was also stated, it is my opinion that there seems to be less and less opportunity for this type of social engagement amongst different generations within post-industrial society. Referencing the study of cross-cutting categorizations mentioned earlier (Crisp & Hewstone, 2007), we can infer that this type of activity could help promote compassion and understanding for people of different ages. Elaine tells us that woodcarving provides an excellent opportunity for this type of engagement.

Well it’s getting me closer to my great niece, I mean I’ve always been close to her but it’s getting me closer to her because I’ve got her involved in the carving as well. Like just watching me she’s gotten interested, and she’s creative herself. So it’s enabled me to help her explore her own creativity and kind of give her different options...

This type of situation also gives an opportunity for mentoring the younger generation as well and providing an opportunity for sharing cultural values and beliefs, as was discussed previously. Rob provides us with a similar example:

I get a kick out of doing that with the boys, one of the boys is very creative. He just turned eight, he is going to nine in August, and um, he loves watching me work with the wood. And the middle boy, he is seven, and he does as well. He can just sit there, he will sit there with a piece of sand paper for me, and you know, it has got to be as smooth as a baby’s bum – and he will just keep going.

When Rob described the situation above, he actually became somewhat emotional. I could tell how much it meant to him to be able to spend this time with his grandsons and to share an activity with them. It was obvious that he greatly valued the opportunity to share this experience with them. We are also reminded about the bond that occurred between Xwa-Lack-Tun and his son James who grew up around woodcarving from a very young age. James states,

I’ve been immersed in it my whole life, because of him (points to his dad) I’ve just been watching him my whole life, like a little baby pretty much, so it’s almost like it’s second nature to me. It’s like part of who
I am...some people might not have that same understanding. It’s hard to put myself in other people’s shoes who don’t understand it, cause it’s just like I’ve known it my whole life.

When I interviewed Xwa-Lack-Tun and his son James, I could tell that they had a very special connection and healthy attachment to one another. It was a pleasure to see a father and son get along so well and demonstrate mutual respect towards one another.

Edward also has shared woodcarving with his son and it has provided them with an opportunity for bonding. He states, “He’s quite enjoyed the process and actually socially it’s been good and the guys actually like him and he really likes the guys and he has a good chat with them. So yeah, they’re interested in what he’s doing.” There seems to be less and less opportunity for different generations to interact and share with each other their thoughts and values in post-industrial society. I propose that craft activities offer a unique opportunity for this to occur.

4.6.6. The Lived Social Experience of Woodcarving: Life Lessons

This section overlaps with section 4.7.1 and involves benefits that could be considered life lessons. We are concerned with the benefits garnered from the practice of woodcarving that are not necessarily therapeutic in nature, and that enhance and improve ones’ life. Lessons learned from woodcarving did vary from individual to individual, and it was challenging to articulate these lessons. However, the following is a comprehensive list of the lessons learned that were shared by all participants, which are: 1) Patience, 2) Organization, 3) Perseverance, 4) Autonomy & Confidence, 5) Responsibility.

**Patience**

Patience was a common theme articulated in the interviews and it seems to be closely linked to the therapeutic benefit of mindfulness. Several participants said something to the effect that, “Woodcarving teaches you patience” and did not elaborate further, as it may have seemed like a self-evident reality. I did not question participant further on how this actually occurred, but it might be something to consider for future
research. When woodcarving, it does not pay to rush. Dr. France describes the process as follows:

So you learn the patience as well, those characteristics *(the many details of a carving)*, you are not going to be finished in a day. Certainly not in a couple of hours, so things take time and you take your time to work with the wood, and you let the wood – you don’t fight the wood. You go with the way the wood is and you don’t carve against the wood, you have to carve with the wood.

This quote from Dr. France reminds me of a metaphor for life I learned from one of my best friends’ father when he was teaching me how to white-water kayak. He said, “Graeme, do not fight the river – it will win.” This is such a practical lesson that can only be learned through experience but can be applied to so many facets of life.

Peter elaborated on this concept more fully. He states, “It teaches you patience in a lot of ways cause of the amount of variables in everything you do, from the sharpness of the chisel to the grain of the wood, the design that your trying to put in it. You’ve got to sit back and let things happen, there’s the patience in it.” The way Peter describes the carving process, it reminds me that life is a journey not the destination. He used phrases like, “Stopping to smell the roses” to emphasize that is was not the final product or carving that was as important as how one gets there. In the following quote Peter describes how woodcarving can help young people develop more patience and the ability to take on larger projects.

Well, let’s talk about kids. Kids want instant gratification. “I want to have it done now!” Give them little projects. Projects that can be completed in a relatively short period of time. But as you grow older, those projects can take on a larger scope. More difficulty in a lot of different areas.

Learning how to develop patience is a valuable lesson to anyone living in the face paced lifestyle of modern society. From personal experience I can attest to the fact that when I am rushing through the paces of a hectic day I will often miss the simple pleasures in life. One night after carving for half an hour, I noticed I was much more present and aware for my family and that I was able to be more patient with my two year old daughter. Carving helps me to slow down and not try to rush things.
**Organization**

We have already read an example of how woodcarving helped Aaron become more organized in his personal life, as well as how he has seen this benefit young people in their lives. Drawing a plan or design is a form of visualization and a skill. James stated in his interview that the skills learned in woodcarving can be translated into careers such as carpentry. More elaborate woodcarvings require several stages which must be planned and executed with attention to care and detail. It is not a purely creative process, it requires sequential reasoning and planning. These are useful skills in life.

Aaron provides us with a somewhat humorous story of how he learned to use an architectural ruler while being mentored by Xwa-Lack-Tun. It is an excellent example of how larger carving projects require in-depth planning and organization. Before embarking on a large sculpture, artists will often carve a miniature sculpture to help them visualize the process.

I remember having the chance to take drafting in school. I am not much of a numbers guy, so it kind of made me afraid. I think I went into cooking instead because I like food better than numbers. When I started working with Xwa-Lack-Tun he handed me an architects ruler and a scaled drawing and said “scale up the drawing, draw that side of the totem pole” and he went for lunch or something. You know, I am looking at this ruler and there was all these numbers on it and I couldn’t figure out what the heck they were so he showed me how to do scaled drawings and how he works. He does scaled carvings and scaled drawings and we work from those. And I would run into trouble and I would walk over and before I could even ask for his help he would say “is there a center line on your work?” Because we base everything off of a central line, and I would look at it and there wasn’t and he would say “I won’t even talk to you until you put a center line on it” so I would walk over and measure it and put a centerline on it. And usually when I did that what was wrong with it was kind of apparent so I wouldn’t always need his help but he wouldn’t answer anything until (laughter) I put some sort of reference line on it.

In the preceding example Aaron is describing how he learned to engage in the design process or carving. Designing a project, especially larger scale ones such as poles or house posts, require a methodical approach and much careful thought and consideration. Often carvers will create scaled prototypes and drawings that need to be
scaled to size. During this design process, the carver is constantly making technical decisions or anticipating challenges. What is important to recognize about the ability to organize a carving project is that it can help people become more successful in their life and have more positive engagement socially. Both Aaron and Xwa-Lack-Tun offered examples of when past students were able to apply these skills in their everyday lives and have success in different areas, such as at school or in the workplace. Therefore we can see that developing organizational skills through woodcarving can have applicability with the field of counselling psychology.

**Perseverance**

We have already been presented with a number of examples of how woodcarving can help individuals develop perseverance and a willingness to see a project through to the end. Xwa-Lack-Tun sees this as a very important quality for his students to have when woodcarving and in life.

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What I want to do is just focus on finishing that piece. Right? Let’s get that piece finished, because you don’t want it to sit around unfinished. Cause, then it reflects a bit on your own life doesn’t it? Like, if I don’t finish that, then something down the road is a struggle then I might not finish it. And it’s stuck there; you don’t want to have your energy stuck there. You want to go back and just see it through; and once it is through you are going to say “wow, I did finish it – I’m done” then I can move on to something else. So that’s what I kind of focus on, is to make sure that they get the piece done and they feel good about it.
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Woodcarving can also teach people how to be adaptable. A woodcarver inevitably encounters challenges or make mistakes that need to be accommodated for. When adjusting to these circumstances the carver learns to be adaptable and come up with creative solutions. When this happens to members of the carving club, Peter will encourage them by saying, “What will you do with it?” Meaning, how can that be worked into your design. More often than not, another member of the club has been through the same challenge or something very similar and can help with some advice.

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There’s always something that is going to end up wrong and you’ve got to not get overly upset by that because it’s another process that your going to learn to resolve as you’re going through it. A piece of wood chips out you got to figure out how your going to replace it,
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rather than throwing it against the wall and giving up. Or you start over. I think it teaches you a lot of resilience. Just to work with different kinds of wood, every wood has its own character, and you got to figure out how to work with it. - Peter

**Agency & Confidence**

Having success with woodcarving can also help to build self-confidence and a sense of agency; “I can do that!” Developing competence with hand tools can be very empowering. Knowing how to sharpen, hone and care for the blade of a tool is a very empowering and life affirming skill to learn at a very fundamental level. Aaron describes this well when he said, “I think we see a lot of manufactured stuff elsewhere and I think the idea that you can do something yourself is extremely important.” Aaron has taught woodcarving to all types of students, from juvenile detention halls to private schools, and he says, “it seems relevant to them all.”

In a very pragmatic way Elaine tells her niece and nephew, “Learn as many skills as you possibly can and you will never be out of a job.” We were discussing how craft based skills can be useful and relevant in peoples lives. She went on to state, “You can just go create your own work, you just find an outlet. There’s so many outlets, like with Etsy and Ebay. With craft shows there are so may outlets with which you can sell your stuff.” Although not all hobby woodcarvers might be able to make a living off selling their woodcarvings, Elaine is making a valid point. These are practical skills which are of use and of value to people and to society, and developing these skills can help develop a sense of agency within individuals’ lives. The value of these skills goes beyond just monetary value. Elaine also indicated that when she gives her carvings as gifts they are greatly appreciated by the recipients and have more than just monetary worth.

In a follow up conversation with Edward, he commented that activities like woodcarving involve an element of risk, which can be empowering and beneficial for participants, especially young people. He commented that young people today are not afforded many opportunities to take risks and are often live “bubble wrapped” lives, meaning they are protected from failure and learning through adversity. He believes that opportunities to learn through challenge and adversity are critical to healthy development and to becoming a well-adjusted adult. Woodworking and woodcarving inevitably
involves getting some cuts and blisters; this is how one develops calluses and builds strength and acuity. The same could be said for learning guitar or any number of other skills, one has to toughen up their finger tips, develop flexibility and strength in the fingers in order to become more proficient.

Not only is this risk a physical one, it is emotional as well. Woodcarving involves risking getting something wrong or perhaps ‘looking foolish’ in the eyes of others. Learning a new skill or craft involves frustration; it is part of the journey. And through this journey, often people will develop a sense of humility and appreciation for the art form or craft in which they are engaged. Finally I would propose that learning to ask for help is a form of developing autonomy. Let us now resume the story that Aaron provided for us about the girl who was struggling at high school, and learned to carve with Xwa-Lack-Tun and Aaron.

But historically kids relied on the adults for a lot and they had to rely on positive relationships with the adults around them, quite a bit. So, this girl wanted to carve with no success doing it her own way, what-so-ever, and rather than telling her what to do we waited for her to ask for help. ...That moment, when she asked an adult for help, is very important for youth, you know, and to get a patient answer. A positive respectful answer when they reach out for help. So she learned that she could trust us and we knew things that she didn’t know. That we could help her succeed and it was actually worth her time to listen to us. I can’t help but think that relationship will transfer over when she returns to class. She will be, maybe, looking at her teacher totally differently, like maybe adults do know some stuff that I need, maybe they can help me with some stuff when I get stuck. I think that is an important moment in what we do, and you can’t just pick up one of our tools and understand how it works, right? Unless you are a woodworker most people don’t know what the heck we are doing and they try to use force or take too much off, it is the rare kid that really kind of gets it. They actually have to ask for help, and if they don’t they cut themselves, it is pretty immediate feedback.

**Responsibility**

"Look after the tools and the tools will look after you." - Xwa-Lack-Tun

When learning a craft, one must also learn a sense of responsibility. Being responsible for the tools, the materials and to the finished object. The following is what Dr. France has to say on this subject:
I believe that the tools, they are really important; sometimes I will bring my tools to therapy. You know, because it is a reminder to people, that the tools of this creativity are just as important as what comes out. And you need to take care of them and are responsible for those – and you can easily cut yourself – they are so sharp. So, I think it teaches you a kind of responsibility. It is sort of like when I was little, I was taught, whatever it was, I was taught how to do electrical work when I was I kid. I had to do that, and um, in the beginning – the clean up was a really important part of that. When you are carving you can’t leave shavings all over, everyone takes part in cleaning it up. So, the whole process is really important. The clean up, the preparation, working with [the materials]...

It is not difficult to see how these lessons in responsibility can translate into different aspects of one’s life. I recall as a young man hearing the saying, “If it’s worth doing, it’s worth doing right.” Learning a craft can help individuals develop a sense of ownership, which I believe in turn creates meaning and can provide personal fulfillment.

**Final Thoughts Pertaining to the Results**

During the course of this research I struggled whether or not to include these five life lessons as part of the results of this study. It meant broadening the scope of the research even more: From a study of ‘the therapeutic benefits of woodcarving’ to a study of ‘the therapeutic and life-enhancing benefits of woodcarving’. I hope the reader appreciates the rationale behind expanding the scope of this research even more and why. In addition to this consideration, I would like to provide a brief summary of my personal experience that helped to articulate the research findings.

While conducting this study, I chose to carve a spoon out of Black Walnut. This is not a very onerous project and one that I was sure to have some success with. Since the amount of time I was able to put aside for actual carving was quite limited, I decided this would be a good starting project for someone with woodworking experience but little carving experience. While I was carving this project I took notes and made time to reflect on the process. I found that these notes helped me to articulate the themes of this research. For example, one night I found that I wanted to rush the process and I was feeling anxious. I wrote the following:

Tonight I caught myself starting to rush. I wanted to finish the spoon in one night – two hours. I knew that if I didn’t slow down I’d
probably cut myself, and that would have been embarrassing! It’s interesting how the ego can get involved, as if I had something to prove. I took a walk and got some fresh air then socialized with others. During this time I noticed that I will have a blister on my thumb tomorrow. It’s a familiar feeling that I haven’t had in a long time since I’m no longer teaching shop. It’s interesting how this little ‘incident’ got me reflecting on other aspects of my life. Like how busy I am. How much I miss working with my hands. How self-conscious I can still get around others that I don’t know all that well...

The bowl of the spoon is quite steep and afforded some challenge. I have always enjoyed working with Black Walnut and love the texture and grain of this wood. But for practical reasons I would choose a tighter grained wood in the future. Carving a spoon was an appropriate choice of project. However, in retrospect I wish I had planned it a bit better. I rushed this process one afternoon in anticipation of attending the carving club that evening. In retrospect I would have carved a shallower, more practical design of spoon, which would have been useful in the kitchen or camping. As well I would have used Maple, which is a much tougher and more durable wood than Black Walnut. That being said, the process was more important that the final product, and I learned much from this process. In particular I gained greater insight regarding this research, and I discovered that I would like to engage in woodcarving at a much more involved level in the future.
Now that we have made an extensive and comprehensive examination of the results of this research, let us finish with a discussion of what we have learned in more general terms and see where this may take us in the future.
Chapter 5.

Discussion

5.1. Goals of this Research

Let us revisit what the goal of this research endeavour has been. Van Manen (1990) sets a clear goal for hermeneutic phenomenological research, we study: “What is the nature of the phenomenon as an essentially human experience?” (p.62)

This has been our endeavour from the start and I hope that the reader will agree that we have been able to achieve this in a robust and descriptive manner. This research was situated within the field of counselling psychology but also within the socio-cultural context of which the phenomenon, woodcarving, exists and is practiced. The existential concepts of Carving Body, Carving Space, Carving Time and Carving Relations have provided us with a means with which to deeply comprehend and interpret the lived experience of woodcarving. By using this approach we have made the mystery of woodcarving and its' benefits more knowable. It is my hope that the reader has been able to, “grasp the very nature of the thing.” (van Manen, 1990, p.177)

5.1.1. Arriving at this Research

I came to be interested in this research topic through my professional background as a high school Technology Education teacher and through personal interest and experience in the therapeutic benefits of working with my hands. I made a search of the literature concerning the therapeutic benefits of crafts and woodcarving in particular and found it to be exceptionally sparse, convincing me that this was an area of research that was worthy of attention. Researching the literature was a challenging exercise that took what seemed to be a great deal of time. By necessity, the literature
review for this research was far reaching and took a very inter-disciplinary approach. Although this was invigorating at times, it could also be frustrating when I found myself spending hours reading text that proved to be inappropriate or outside of the scope of this work. It took me almost a year to decide on a methodological structure for the study and a focus population to work with.

It should be noted that there were some challenges regarding the ethics approval process. My first intention was to interview a group of young Indigenous people involved with a canoe carving project at a local high school. Due to cultural intellectual property concerns, this particular study was not approved. I therefore shifted to focus of the study to its' current focus. With the encouragement and guidance of my supervisor, I made sure that there was a significant Indigenous population represented in this study. Since the study no longer was concerned with the carving of artifacts that could cause concerns regarding the cultural intellectual property of any one group, we proceeded with the research. Examples of intellectual property are the designs of canoes or totem poles and the stories and mythology attached to these objects within the cultural context. It is important to note that many Indigenous groups throughout North America have had their customs, knowledge, or other cultural intellectual property appropriated by others without due consultation or appropriate compensation. I can appreciate this dilemma and hope that I have been sensitive and respectful of this reality within the course of my research. I made it clear to all Coast Salish participants during the course of this study that I wanted to do my research in an appropriate respectful manner. I am pleased to report that this research was conducted in a manner which Aaron stated was, "nothing but respectful."

Next was the ethics approval process which was at times detailed due to the reasons mentioned in the previous paragraph. After receiving approval, I began conducting interviews with the participants. While transcribing all eight interviews I read and reread them for some weeks. I took my time to absorb the depth and meaning of the text. I also took notes in a journal that included field notes taken during the interview process. These notes included impressions, body language and other nuances that were not documented by the audio recordings. I coded the transcriptions by hand, using
a highlighter and pencil to search out common descriptions, words or notions that arose from the interviews.

During this time of reflection and contemplation of the data, I was able to arrive at the themes presented in this paper. I organized them in a manner that was congruent van Manens’ format of describing the lived experience of a phenomenon using the four different life-worlds of lived time, lived body, lived space and lived relations. I found this process to be very rewarding and enlightening. Although many themes seemed to cross over between the different life-worlds, this approach to interpreting the participants’ lived experience of the woodcarving phenomenon enabled me to provide what I hope is a rich and vibrant picture of this therapeutic and life-enhancing endeavour.

Again I point out that this research has used somewhat of a hybrid approach to phenomenological research. In accordance with Mustakis’ transcendental phenomenological research, we have been looking to reveal common themes that are shared by all participants. Yet as a researcher I was unable and unwilling to put aside or *bracket* my personal experience as a woodworker which is what Mustakis also calls for. Indeed I chose to embrace my personal experience as a woodworker and therefore chose to use van Manens’ hermeneutic or interpretive approach to phenomenological research. Let us now identify the themes of this research.

The themes that made themselves apparent were as follows: 1) Woodcarving is conducive to flow and mindfulness. 2) Carving reduces stress and promotes positive emotionality. 3) Woodcarving helps with emotional integration. 4) As an artistic endeavour, carving is inherently therapeutic. 5) Woodcarving fosters a connection to nature. 6) It provides social engagement and cultural meaning in one’s life. As I have mentioned before, it would have been possible to focus this research on a specific aspect of this such as how woodcarving is conducive to the flow experience, and this is perhaps a way to go about further research in the future. But for an initial exploration of the therapeutic *and* life-enhancing benefits of woodcarving, I am satisfied with the choice of methodology, approach and content.
**Researcher and Participant**

As was mentioned, I did not attempt to remove myself from the research so I instead embraced my personal experience. Woodworking and now woodcarving have become important parts of my life. Indeed since embarking on this research I am now looking forward to being able to set aside time to engage in woodcarving in a more therapeutic and meaningful way. Since starting this research I have noticed that my relationship with woodworking and woodcarving has changed. I have developed a deeper appreciation for lessons this craft has to offer, both to myself and to future students. I have learned much from Xwa-Lack-Tun and Aaron Nelson Moody about how woodcarving can be a means to teach meaningful lessons concerning character development and values. As well I have learned to practice being more present while woodworking; how this craft offers an opportunity to practice mindfulness and meditation in a much more deliberate way than I have done so before.

Indeed all of the themes that have been covered in this research have greater meaning to me now. But was is most poignant is that I have gained a deeper appreciation for the craft of woodcarving and to those teachers that have shared the lessons of this craft with me.

**5.2. Contributions to the Literature & Future Research**

As has been mentioned, there is very little in the literature that pertains to the therapeutic benefits of crafts, and nothing regarding woodcarving in particular. It is my contention that the field of counselling psychology is in great need of such work, especially when considering how woodcarving holds such potential therapeutic value for working with Indigenous populations in particular. I humbly offer this work as a starting point for further research. This research is the first of its’ kind to provide a broad and encompassing survey of the therapeutic and life-enhancing benefits of woodcarving. I would propose that each of the themes I have presented could be worthy of further study in a more focussed and specific way. That is not to say this has been a cursory study, but rather a broad and all encompassing one.
The creative process: craft, art, etc. is change. My creative process of constantly rebuilding myself as an emotionally grounded person living ‘the good life’ is an artistic and creative process – a process of rounding my character. It is a process of taking that which already exists and pulling together pieces to (re)create a new whole. It is not unlike the process of building a canoe and a process that happens again and again. It is just the same for the craftsman. This emotional relationship that binds my craft to change feels like an unassailable and absolute truth.”
(Rory Brown p. 31)

Rory Brown is a fellow Technology Studies teacher from Vancouver. The preceding quote is an excerpt from his Masters Thesis, Building the Prospector Canoe: Narrative Inquiry in a Life of Craft (2007). When I first started this research journey I sought out his experience and insight to help me find direction. Rory has taught woodcarving amongst other high school technology studies courses and was able to attest to the benefits of learning woodcarving. He shared with me a story of one of his previous students whom woodcarving had helped. The young man had been considered at-risk and was not very engaged with school. After taking woodcarving he began to find some purpose in his life and at school. Eventually this student went on to become a metal fabricator and has since led a productive and socially engaged life. I think the preceding quote summarizes well how crafts can play a role in helping an individual create meaning and direction in their life; a form of hands on existential therapy.

In this research we have reached deeply into the lived experience of woodcarving to discover what inherent benefits are derived from this practice. We have been concerned with both the therapeutic and life-enhancing benefits of woodcarving. Therapeutic is defined as, “Having a good effect on the body or mind; contributing to a sense of well-being” (Simpson & Weiner, 1989). We have defined a life-enhancing benefit as a) creating meaning in one’s life or b) providing lessons that are applicable in other facets of life besides woodcarving. In order to fully appreciate these benefits we needed to situate the practice of woodcarving within a historical and socio-cultural context.

It was determined that woodcarving is a most ancient practice that has been shared historically by most cultures (Durst, 1939; Oughton, 1976). The development
and use of our hands has been intrinsically linked with human development (Wilson, 1999). We seem to have an innate need to create things with our hands (ibid). We determined that in post-industrial society many people seem to be disconnected to the world in which they live in several ways; social & cultural traditions (Abbot, 2009; Pirsig, 1974; Duran, 2006; Campbell, 1991) technologically (Pirsig, 1974; Crawford, 2001; Wilson, 1999), environmentally (Cajete, 2000; Verbos & Humphries, 2013; Ausubel, 2008), and spiritually (Hanh, 1991, 2010. Kabat-Zinn, 1994, 2005; Duran, 2006). We have determined that woodcarving can help individuals reconnect in all of these areas. As well, we have determined that woodcarving can be a way to re-introduce artistic and creative expression into regular peoples lives. Something that has not been the norm in post-industrial society since the 1700’s (McNiff, 1992, 2004; Shiner, 2001). We have been studying woodcarving as a form of remediation; ‘mending the chain’ of traditional craft practice that creates meaning and promotes emotional, artistic and spiritual wellness and healing. Aaron tells us that, “We gravitate to materials and processes that are healing to us. We may not be conscious of how they are healing us [but we are aware of the benefits]”. Woodcarving may not be ideal for everyone, but for those who do flourish with this craft, it is very beneficial. Dr. Sharalyn Jordan, one of the supervisors for this project, summarized the status of crafts in post-industrial society as follows: “These [craft] practices have been missing from our daily lives for so long, we don’t even know they are missing.”

Let us now summarize the benefits that we have outlined within the frame of reference of van Manens’ four lifeworlds of lived experience.

5.2.1. Carving Time

How participants perceived time while woodcarving has been a compelling facet of this study. The work of the eminent psychologist Csikszentmihalyi has been repeatedly cited within this research. His theory of flow provides a very robust explanation for many of the therapeutic benefits of woodcarving. In particular, the work of Chilton provides us with very apt discussion of how the theory of flow can be utilized within the field of Art Therapy. In her article, Art Therapy and Flow: A Review of the Literature and Applications (2013) we are provided with a comprehensive picture of how
Csikszentmihalyis’ theory of flow has been utilized in this field. The flow experience was a common theme in the interviews. Participants described getting “lost” in carving and would often lose track of time. In her interview Elaine provided quintessential descriptions of this experience: “I'm not generally conscious of time [when woodcarving].” “I can get totally lost...then as I say, hours can pass. Absolutely hours.” “I don’t even notice time passing.” The research demonstrated that woodcarving provides an excellent opportunity for individuals to achieve the flow experience.

Closely related to the theoretical concept of flow is mindfulness. The theoretical can be a spiritual practice. Within the context of this research we have been using a specific definition of spirituality. Although the individual lived experience of woodcarving varies for each individual, what is important to outline is that woodcarving can be a spiritual practice if one chooses to make it so. That is not to say it necessarily is for all carvers.

Woodcarving provided an opportunity for participants to experience mindfulness and being fully present in their lives. Compton & Hoffman (2013) describe mindfulness as, “paying attention to one’s own ongoing experience in a way that allows openness and flexibility. It is being fully present and aware during our daily activities.” The benefits of mindfulness have been scientifically examined and documented, it helps to reduce stress and promotes physical wellness (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, 2005). As with the benefits of the flow experience, the benefits of mindfulness seem to last beyond the activity of woodcarving. Aaron stated that carving “is a sort of meditation, cause your mind is totally focused on what you are doing.”

5.2.2. Carving Body

Woodcarving can be a relaxing activity that promotes positive emotionality and helps with emotional integration. Participants used descriptive words such as “satisfying”, “enjoyable”, “contentment” and “happy” to describe how they felt during and after woodcarving. These emotions had a lasting effect and were experienced beyond the carving sessions. Edward described how he slept better on Wednesday evenings, after attending the carving club. The physical and kinaesthetic act of woodcarving also
seems to help with emotional integration. Participants described how they were able to work through the emotional content of their daily lives. Pressing issues and daily challenges sometimes were resolved when participants were carving. It seems that being engaged in woodcarving somehow frees up the mind and allows for psychological resolution.

[Woodcarving] really helps to be able to take a step back and get involved in the carving. Then you can take a fresh look at what the issues are going on outside and either make a solution for it or walk away from it or whatever. You know?  

- Elaine

5.2.3. Carving Space

Woodcarving is an activity where an individual is creating an artistic sculpture using natural materials; an exercise involving the lived space of ones' world. In the Literature Review we determined that creative and artistic activities are inherently therapeutic (Mazloomian & Brooke, 2006; Malchiodi 2003; Ullman, 1975; McNiff 1992, 2004; Dewey, 1934). In the course of this research we have also determined that creative arts and crafts practices used to be a regular aspect of peoples daily lives (Shiner, 2001; McNiff, 1992, 2004). It was discussed that although participants did not overtly describe how the creative process of woodcarving was therapeutic and life-enhancing in their lives, this theme seems to have been implicit and assumed by the participants. This was verified in follow up interviews.

What was also verified in follow up interviews is that woodcarving helps to foster a connection with nature. This is achieved either through the content of the carving subject matter, or by the use of natural materials. For example, many carvers will choose to carve animals, such as birds or fish. In doing so, the carver is demonstrating a relationship with these animals. Conveying a sense of caring for them and ascribing some sort of meaning to the carving subject. Many of the participants also found the process of sourcing materials therapeutic in that it connected them to nature and the life cycle of the tree. Participants located wood to carve by walking in the woods or on the beach. After becoming proficient in woodcarving, participants gain a deeper appreciation for and connection to the trees around them.
5.2.4. Woodcarving Relations

The social and cultural aspects of this research provided the most far-reaching and unforeseen insights. I started this research with an inkling that practicing crafts could play a therapeutic role in modern life. As discussed earlier in this chapter, this was an elusive idea that involved making far-reaching connections between various areas of study and linking these to the field of counselling psychology. What was found to be the most enlightening aspect of this research project, and what helped to articulate this particular idea and other themes as well, was the ability to compare two epistemologies of the lived experience of woodcarving: That of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants. The Coast Salish participants in this study were able to provide a unique perspective on woodcarving. Although the practice of traditional woodcarving did cease in their community for a couple of generations, the stories about these traditions are still talked about and exist in their collective consciousness. Little over a hundred years ago, their people were living in a way in which art and technology were not divorced from each other. The following story shared by Aaron help to illustrate this point.

I get these little teeny stories from people that know nothing about carving but they were talking to their grandfather while their grandfather was carving and I find a little gem in their story and they don’t even know what it is but they are talking about. Like my cousin used to go and sit and talk with his grandfather, and it would look like he was resting. He was waiting around noon, and have his lunch and he would be sitting by his canoe and talking with his grandson - then he would just jump up and work furiously and then sit back down and start relaxing. One time he asked his grandfather "Why do you do it like this?" "Why is there is a flurry of activity, and then why are you waiting around?" This is while ago right? "I am waiting for the sun to come down at this certain angle you know, my canoe shows me what is level and what is flush where the bumps are. Just the raking [sun] light with no electric light at the time. The very finishing work he had to wait until the light was coming at just the right angle. So he is out there waiting for the light (laughter) and then worked as fast as he could. So he mentioned this and it was just a funny story about his grandfather but for me, you know [It had more significance]. It’s another way to look at a canoe when I am carving, and see it completely differently.

The Indigenous participants all have a very special relationship with woodcarving. To them, woodcarving not only offers a means to celebrate and learn about their cultural heritage, it is "medicine" and is a deeply spiritual practice. It is now
acknowledged within the academic literature that practicing traditional cultural practices can help Indigenous peoples heal from the devastating effects of colonization (Kirmayer et al, 2011; Pearce, 2014; Korhonen, 2006; Jelik, 1974). It was also pointed out that the experience of Indigenous participants might also help to illuminate how reintroducing traditional crafts could be beneficial to non-Indigenous populations. I propose that similar benefits could be available to non-Indigenous carvers as well, if they chose to engage in it as a holistic practice that was focussed on meaningful engagement or as Xwa-Lack-Tun says, “Doing it in a good way.” Or as Thich Nhat Hanh says, “No matter what you’re doing, you can choose to do it with your full presence, with mindfulness and concentration; and your action becomes a spiritual practice.” (2011, p.5)

It was also determined that members of the carving club seem to share a “culture of carving” and that whether carvers were Indigenous or non-Indigenous, they shared common beliefs and values:. For a further explanation, refer to following outline of the social and life-enhancing benefits of woodcarving. Quoting Aaron again, he speaks to a shared culture of woodcarving and craft that seems to go beyond whether someone is Coast Salish or not.

You know, I think it is a lot of fun and I think it shows that I am not trying to make a bunch of Squamish people or First Nations artists. What we are sharing is a bit more universal than that. We have our own tradition that we start from, but I think there is a lot of inclusion in it. I think those are pretty good goals! (we both start laughing)...I don’t think that [Indigenous & non-Indigenous] culture necessarily separates us, we really value the difference.

Woodcarving also provides a number of life-enhancing benefits as well. These can be seen as life lessons that are learned from woodcarving and could be considered part of the ‘woodcarving culture’ we have been talking about. I propose that these life-enhancing benefits that could be obtained from other craft practices as well. They are: 1) Patience, 2) Organization, 3) Perseverance, 4) Autonomy & Confidence, 5) Responsibility. For a detailed examination of these benefits refer to the results chapter of this paper.

There were also five themes that applied to all participants within the social context of woodcarving. These five themes that revealed themselves through the
interviews, personal experience and observations. 1) Woodcarving provided social engagement. 2) Carvers shared resources and ideas with one another. 3) Mentoring plays a vital role in woodcarving. 4) The act of woodcarving provides space and opportunity to express emotions with others. 5) Woodcarving provides an opportunity for intergenerational connection and engagement. A discussion of these five themes provided a rich and textured picture of how the social aspects of woodcarving provides therapeutic and meaningful benefits to the participants' lives.

Finally I would like to acknowledge that each carving will often hold meaning for the artist. The symbolism of a carving may have cultural significance or it may be personal. This was not discussed much in the interviews, other than the Coast Salish participants acknowledging that there is a “lot of context around the teachings.” We did not discuss specific stories or about the significance of Coast Salish mythology and lore. Neither did I ask the non-Indigenous participants about any symbolic significance that was inherent in their carvings. However, I would propose that perhaps this could be a topic of future research, for indeed artwork does involve a process of meaning making for both the artist and viewer (Mazloomian & Brooke, 2006; Rubin, 2005; McNiff, 1992, 2004; Ullman, 1975). Indeed the process of creative expression is one of the methods in which humankind is able to make sense out of the universe and create purpose in our lives (ibid). As well, McNiff tells us that, “Art heals by accepting the pain and doing something with it.” (2004, cover page). Xwa-Lack-Tun did have something to say about this topic that is pertinent about the meaning attributed to a carving, he says:

I think because we were oral history people, everything was passed on to us orally so like they say, a picture can say a thousand words right? So the same as a carving. You can do a carving and you can tell a story with that carving. Why did this certain thing and that certain thing and tie it all together with the story, just trying to give it life that way. It’s not just something beautiful sitting on the wall...

If, say someone commissioned a piece of art work, [the] first [thing] I ask [is], “What are you looking for?” “Do you want something like a house post, a totem pole?” “What I need is more input because this is about you, or your family or whatever you want to talk about. And then I can come up with a design but the story is yours. Because you just commissioned me as an artist to create this, but it’s your words.” And that way it gives it life, and it’s not about me it’s about them. So when someone comes to their home and says, “Hey what’s this?” They’re going to talk about it. And there will also be some learning
tool there for the family to hold for themselves. To carry on in their own family. To carry themselves in a good way, because it was all done in a good way.

We can see that the story attached to a sculpture and the meaning attributed to this story is very important to the artist. This aspect meaning making in the creative process is important to consider when using the creative arts in a therapeutic setting (McNiff, 1992, 2004; Mazoolman & Brooke, 2006).

The therapeutic benefits of the creative process have not been given an inordinate amount of attention within this thesis, because it was not a theme that came up in any of the interviews. We established that this was most likely because it is a notion that is almost taken for granted by the participants of had not been a conscious reality for them. In follow up discussions with participants it was confirmed that the creative process of woodcarving is indeed therapeutic, the literature also confirms this (Mazloomian & Brooke, 2006; Rubin, 2005; McNiff, 1992, 2004; Ullman, 1975). However, this might be a consideration for future research; to be more explicit in researching how woodcarving, as a creative practice, renders therapeutic benefits.

We have presented a comprehensive picture of the shared therapeutic and life-enhancing benefits of woodcarving. Each participant has their own lived experience of this phenomenon, but by studying the shared benefits we are provided with a starting point from which to start exploring how this practice can enhance peoples lives and also be used in a more clinical or therapeutic setting.

5.2.5. **Significance for Counselling Practice & Limitations**

As Dr. France has shown us, woodcarving is already being used as a therapeutic tool within the field of creative arts therapy, and although there is no literature pertaining to this specific field of study, the practice does exist. In addition to being used by clinicians such as Dr. France, woodcarving is also being used within Indigenous communities as a form of therapy (personal communication with Dr. France, March 2015). By establishing what the shared therapeutic and life-enhancing benefits of woodcarving are, counselling psychology and other mental health professionals now
have a starting point with which to structure and operationalize this practice as a therapeutic tool. I would propose that this process could be customized and tailored to fit the needs of individuals depending on their unique situation and therapeutic goals.

Let us also remember that woodcarving offers a strength based approach to therapy, that is in alignment with the field of Positive Psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). We learned about Csikszentmihalyi’s theory of flow and the benefits attributed to it; positive emotionality, increased purpose in life, and mobilizing client strengths (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, 1997; Wilkinson & Chilton, 2013; Chilton, 2013; Compton & Hoffman, 2013). Wells also concluded (1988) that achieving flow had a positive correlation with increased self-esteem. It was also offered that woodcarving can provide an opportunity to practice mindfulness. We can therefore assume that regular craft practice could help client improve life quality.

We also discussed how woodcarving can be used to help clients heal from the trauma of abuse, as it has been used by Dr. France with his group of residential school survivors. Within this context woodcarving could be utilized in the field of creative arts therapy using a therapist to help set goals and a treatment plan (Mazloomian & Brooke, 2006). As we can see, there is much potential use for woodcarving within the field of counselling psychology.

Upon reflection of this research there seems to be two areas where this study had limitations. 1) Due to the broad nature of the study, it was not possible to study any of the themes presented exhaustively. Future research could use a more specific mode of inquiry in order to elaborate on these themes (i.e. using more specific questions and not having such a participant led format for the interviews). 2) This study was completely qualitative in nature. In order to quantify the benefits of woodcarvings, other measurement tools could be used.

5.2.6. Final Thoughts

Although the spiritual aspects of woodcarving have been presented within the Lived Time and Lived Relations of Chapter 4, I have come to see that this aspect of woodcarving can permeate any life-world of an individuals' life. When I first realized that
the spiritual aspects of woodcarving would need to be discussed within this research, I tried to discern which part of the Results chapter would include this commentary. However, upon finishing this work, I see now that depending on the individual carver, any life-world of the carving phenomenon could entail spiritual elements. Conversely, for some individuals carving may not hold any particular spiritual significance.

It is my hope that the reader appreciates that any and all of the themes discussed within this work are worthy of further discussion and research. As a preliminary discourse on the therapeutic and life-enhancing benefits of woodcarving, I hope that this work may serve as a starting point for such endeavours. My intention has been to approach the phenomenon of woodcarving in a wholistic and encompassing manner which can translate into the benefits of practicing other crafts. In addition to the themes identified in this research, two other questions arose for me that seem to merit further consideration. What are the negative psychological consequences of losing touch with ones’ culture and what are the negative psychological consequences of not developing or nurturing a creative or craft practice in ones’ life. At this point I would only like to propose these questions to the reader for further consideration and possible inclusion in future research.

While finishing this research, I fortuitously came upon the work of the crafts teacher Karl Hils, who wrote the book *Crafts For All*. It was originally written in German and was translated into English in 1960. In the Introduction to his book he provides an illuminating discussion regarding the role and potential therapeutic value of crafts within post-industrial society. It is so appropriate and summarizes the role of crafts so well, that I will provide the quote in its entirety, including the extensive and richly descriptive footnote.

Every individual inherits something of the craft skill of his forebears, accumulated over many thousands of years, so that he is able to fashion objects unrelated to any particular period\(^1\). With a new era come new tasks imposed by the situation into which the child and adult find themselves. We have first to recognize that the new type of individual already exists in our midst and that he approaches life with new claims to which we must do justice before we can win his confidence; that is the only way of appealing to him.
Craft-work is guided by an inner impulse – sometimes deriving from play – and is a manual art that promotes the development of the complete of integrated person. It is distinguished on the one hand from a ‘regulated’ trade craft and on the other from the aimless finicking labour or an arid manual skill. The skilled trades crafts, manufactures and techniques have at all times grown out of handicrafts. Wherever the craft tool has become a machine, man has abdicated part of his creative freedom.

Craft-work involves a process of shaping or forming. The zest and spark of creative joy are just as characteristic of it as they are of the happy singing and dancing of natural man, of which he is hardly conscious, and for whom it may be a need, a liberation or even a fulfilment and a release from inner tension. Thus composing, constructing, answer to some inner need, some psychic compulsion, the expressions of which are true to nature, authentic, and convincing. This making of an object in accordance with nature must, necessarily, be the early stage of the skilled craft, which must also include and keep alive all those early virtues, even when it has to be governed by utility and ulterior purpose. (p. x)

Upon discovering this work by Hils and reading this caption, I was relieved to know that this research has been guided by and done in such a manner that it is congruent with his work. As Xwalacktun would says, I have endeavoured that this work has been “done in a good way”. In this research we have examined woodcarving as a process of remediation that can reconnect individuals socially, culturally and to Nature. We have seen that woodcarving can enhance peoples lives with practical life lessons and can facilitate healing and emotional growth. It is my hope the reader has been able to grasp and more fully comprehend the very nature of woodcarving and its therapeutic benefits.
References


Green, A. (2013). *The Lived Experience of Young Adult Cancer Survivors.* Vancouver: University of British Columbia


Appendix A.

Consent to Participate – Adult Version (Original)

Identifying the Therapeutic Benefits of Woodcarving

Principal Investigator:
Graeme Hamilton
Simon Fraser University – Faculty of Education – Counseling Psychology

Senior Advisor:
Dr. Annie Ross
Simon Fraser University – Department of First Nations Studies

Secondary Advisor
Dr. Sharalyn Jordan
Simon Fraser University – Department of Counseling Psychology

Research Purpose:
The purpose of this research is to identify and explore the therapeutic benefits of woodcarving. Woodcarving has been a recreational pastime for thousands of years. The focus of this phenomenological study is to identify the shared therapeutic experience of people who engage in this pastime.

Study Procedures:

A. Study Introduction
This study will be seeking participation from members of the Richmond Carving Club and other people who have experience engaging in woodcarving as a recreational and therapeutic activity. You have been chosen to participate in this study because of your personal experience teaching and/or engaging in woodcarving. You will be asked about your personal experience concerning the benefits woodcarving.

B. Personal Interview
You will be asked to participate in a recorded interview (no longer than 60 minutes). This interview will be like a conversation. During this interview, you will be asked about your personal experiences learning and engaging in woodcarving. You will be asked about how this experience has helped you grow as a person and if it has changed the way you see yourself and the world around you. After the interview, the conversation will be written out and then studied by Graeme. He will review this information with you at a later time to make sure what was written down was accurate and reflects what you wanted to say and that his conclusions are accurate.

Risks:
There is a minimal risk of being involved in this study. The topics discussed in the interview will be of a personal nature and could bring up emotional issues. If you
are uncomfortable talking about these topics or no longer want to participate, you can end the interview at any time. If you feel that the interview or participation in this study brings up unresolved personal issues, Graeme will make sure that you are put in touch with appropriate support services. It is our hope that participation in this study will be a positive experience.

**Benefits:**
There will be no direct benefits for you in doing this research. One of the goals of doing this research is recognize the value of woodcarving and how it can be a therapeutic and life enhancing experience for some individuals.

**Confidentiality:**
Your confidentiality and the protection of your personal information is very important to us. All information will remain strictly confidential and will only be used for the purposes of this study. You will not be required to write your name or any other identifying information on research materials. Any identifying information will be changed or left out of the study. All audio recordings will be used only by the researchers and will be kept locked up in a secure location in the office of Dr. Annie Ross and in file protected file servers. Transcriptions will have identifying information changed or deleted. Graeme Hamilton will manage all the data. If someone from outside of the study is used to help with the transcriptions, we will guarantee that they are professional and protect your confidentiality.

**Contact:**
If you have any concerns or questions or would like to know more about this study please contact Graeme Hamilton or Dr. Annie Ross.

If you have any concerns or complaints related to this study or the researcher named above, they must be addressed to Dr. Jeff Toward, Associate Director of the Office of Research Ethics.

When the study is completed, Graeme Hamilton will review the results of the interview and confirm with you that they are accurate. You will also receive a copy of this consent form for your own records.

**PARTICIPANT CONSENT AND SIGNATURE**

Taking part in this study is entirely up to you. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to take part, you may choose to pull out of the study at any time without giving a reason.

Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records and that you consent to participate in this study.
I understand how this study will be held and how I will be involved. I also understand the personal risks to me in taking part in this study that have been described above.

______________________________________________  ______________________________
Participant Signature                      Date: ___/___/___
                                           yyyy/mm/dd

______________________________________________
Printed Name of the Participant signing above
Appendix B.

Consent to Participate – Adult Version (Revised)

Identifying the Therapeutic Benefits of Woodcarving

Principal Investigator:
Graeme Hamilton
Simon Fraser University – Faculty of Education – Counseling Psychology

Senior Advisor:
Dr. Annie Ross
Simon Fraser University – Department of First Nations Studies

Secondary Advisor
Dr. Sharalyn Jordan
Simon Fraser University – Department of Counseling Psychology

Research Purpose:
The purpose of this research is to identify and explore the therapeutic benefits of woodcarving. Woodcarving has been a recreational pastime for thousands of years. The focus of this phenomenological study is to identify the shared therapeutic experience of people who engage in this pastime.

Study Procedures:

A. Study Introduction
This study will be seeking participation from members of the Richmond Carving Club and other people who have experience engaging in woodcarving as a recreational and therapeutic activity. You have been chosen to participate in this study because of your personal experience teaching and/or engaging in woodcarving. You will be asked about your personal experience concerning the benefits woodcarving.

B. Personal Interview
You will be asked to participate in a recorded interview (no longer than 60 minutes.). This interview will be like a conversation. During this interview, you will be asked about your personal experiences learning and engaging in woodcarving. You will be asked about how this experience has helped you grow as a person and if it has changed the way you see yourself and the world around you. After the interview, the conversation will be written out and then studied by Graeme. He will review this information with you at a later time to make sure what was written down was accurate and reflects what you wanted to say and that his conclusions are accurate.

Risks:
There is a minimal risk of being involved in this study. The topics discussed in the interview will be of a personal nature and could bring up emotional issues. If you

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are uncomfortable talking about these topics or no longer want to participate, you can end the interview at any time. If you feel that the interview or participation in this study brings up unresolved personal issues, Graeme will make sure that you are put in touch with appropriate support services. It is our hope that participation in this study will be a positive experience.

**Benefits:**
There will be not direct benefits for you in doing this research. One of the goals of doing this research is recognize the value of woodcarving and how it can be a therapeutic and life enhancing experience for some individuals.

**Confidentiality:**
In order to acknowledge your contribution to this study in a public way, it was agreed that we should use your actual name. By signing this form you are giving permission to me to recognize you and waive your right to confidentiality in this study. This decision was made to be respectful to you as an individual and to your Coast Salish heritage.

**Contact:**
If you have any concerns or questions or would like to know more about this study please contact Graeme Hamilton or Dr. annie ross

If you have any concerns or complaints related to this study or the researcher named above, they must be addressed to Dr. Jeff Toward, Associate Director of the Office of Research Ethics.

When the study is completed, Graeme Hamilton will review the results of the interview and confirm with you that they are accurate. You will also receive a copy of this consent form for your own records.

**PARTICIPANT CONSENT AND SIGNATURE**

Taking part in this study is entirely up to you. You have the right to refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to take part, you may choose to pull out of the study at any time without giving a reason.

Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records and that you consent to participate in this study.

*I understand how this study will be held and how I will be involved. I also understand the personal risks to me in taking part in this study that have been described above.*
Appendix C.

Totem Poles Scotland 2002

For more information, the Totem Poles Scotland 2002 report, which describes the carving cultural exchange that 3 of the participants were involved with in Scotland, can be downloaded from this website:

http://brotus.co.uk/Brotusfiles/poles/report.html