Urban Mixed-Blood Aboriginal People: The Complexities of Understanding Identity

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Abstract

In this qualitative inquiry I share the stories of four mixed-blood Aboriginal people. I tell my story alongside the participants and use counterstory to challenge the stereotypical relationships between Nativeness and Native identity, with respect to racialization, categorization, definitions and labels that society imposes on Aboriginal people. Although a person may possess only partial Native blood, and may not be well-versed in the language or culture, they retain the right to belong to and identify with that culture. I aim to raise awareness of mixed-blood Aboriginal people being recognized as possessing a Native identity. I aim to illustrate the power of storytelling through sharing the meanings of participants' experiences for their lives. I also aim to raise social and cultural consciousness of this small demographic of mixed-blood Aboriginal people who have unique stories to tell. Individuals who choose to define themselves as Native have the right to do so and should not be included or excluded on the basis of blood quantum, the Indian Act, their appearance, their knowledge of the culture, or where they live. Our society needs to accept people for who they are, as complicated and mixed as that may be.

I adopt a decolonizing lens and use Indigenous methodologies to analyze the four participants' stories. I am most interested in understanding what having a Native identity means for mixed-blood Aboriginal people in today's society and what factors influence this identity. These stories can be used to learn from, to build upon, and to increase understanding of issues related to mixed-blood Aboriginal people. I hope to contribute knowledge in areas such as Education, Native Studies, Women's Studies and other disciplines that are interested in stories of mixed-blood Aboriginal people.

Résumé

Dans cette enquête qualitative, je partage les histoires de quatre aborigènes de sang-mêlé. Je raconte également ma propre histoire aux côtés de ces derniers, afin d'utiliser un scénario contraire pour mettre au défi les relations stéréotypées entre l'origine et l'identité autochtone en ce qui concerne la racialisation, la catégorisation, les définitions et les étiquettes que la société impose aux peuples autochtones. Bien qu'une personne possède du sang Amérindien mêlé et n'est peut-être pas profondément imprégnée dans la langue ou la culture en question, elle conserve le droit d'appartenance et d'identification à cette culture. Je vise à augmenter la sensibilisation des individus issus de peuples aborigènes de sang-melé et reconnus comme possédant une identité amérindienne. Je vise à illustrer le pouvoir des histoires narratives à travers le partage des expériences vécues des participants et des significations s'y rattachant. Je vise également à sensibiliser la conscience sociale et culturelle à cette modeste démographie de peuples aborigènes de sang-mêlé qui ont des histoires uniques à raconter. Les individus qui choisissent de s'identifier en tant qu'Amérindien ont le droit de le faire et ne devraient pas être inclus ou exclus selon leur degré de sang Amérindien, ni par rapport à la Loi sur les Indiens, leur apparence, leurs connaissances de la culture ou leur lieu de résidence. Notre société se doit d'accepter les individus pour ce qu'ils sont, aussi complexes et mélangés soient-t-ils.

J'adopte une vision de décolonisation et j'utilise des méthodologies indigènes pour analyser les histoires des quatre participants. Je suis principalement inéressée à comprendre ce que cela signifie que d'avoir une identité Amérindienne pour les peuples aborigènes de sang-mêlé vivant dans la société actuelle et quels facteurs influencent cette identité. Ces histoires peuvent être utilisées pour familiariser, éduquer et augmenter la compréhension des problématiques reliées aux peuples aborigènes de sang-mêlé. Par l'entremise de mes recherches, j'espère pouvoir contribuer à accroître les connaissances dans des domaines tels que l'éducation,

les études Amérindiennes, les études féminines, ainsi que d'autres disciplines qui s'intéressent aux histoires des peuples aborigènes de sang-mêlé.

Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the support and assistance of many individuals who helped me along the way.

A very special thank you to my thesis co-supervisors: Dr. Mary H. Maguire, who was always there for me, encouraging and patient; and to Dr. Christopher D. Stonebanks for your faith in me right from the moment I applied to the program and; Dr. Avril Aitken, for your interest and guidance in my inquiry.

To my friends who have patiently listened and encouraged me when I needed to be encouraged and laughed with me when I needed to laugh, especially my sister Debbie, and my buddies Eryn and Catherine.

To my family who have been more than patient and want me to be finished as much as I do – my sincere appreciation for your understanding, support and unconditional love. A special thank you to my nephew Jon for all your support and my partner Chris for all your encouragement.

And finally to the four participants of this inquiry, thank you for opening your hearts and sharing your stories.

Dedicated to all mixed-blood Aboriginal people, past, present and future

who have valuable, unique stories to tell.

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Chapter One: 46.875%

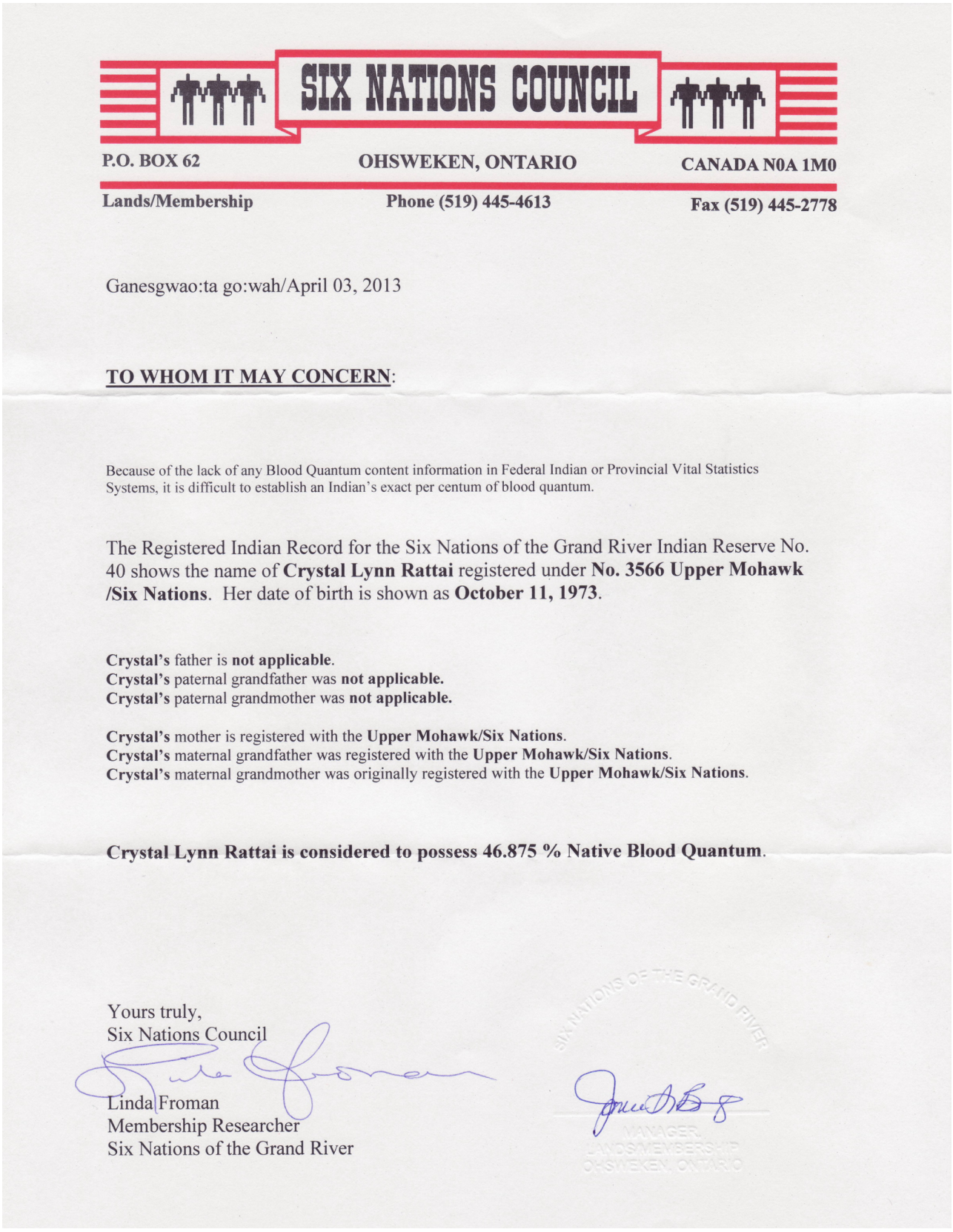
Introduction

> *I have vivid memories of my best friend in kindergarten drawing a picture of us holding hands on the playground. As she proudly displayed her artwork to the class, I was horrified because my skin was coloured Indian red (renamed by Crayola to chestnut in 1999) and her skin was peach coloured. It is one of my first memories of feeling singled out because of my race. Was I really that different? Did everybody see this except for me? Being the only child with Aboriginal heritage in the class, and just one of a handful in the entire community, was difficult. I did not want to be different or stand out from others. I wanted more than anything to blend in, to disappear and what I wanted most was to be just like everybody else. It was after this day that I remember scrubbing myself in the tub until my knees were red to try and wash away the brown. Of course, I did not understand the vast self-esteem and identity issues that plagued me throughout childhood. I did not share this with my family and kept to our code of silence. This is the basis of what shapes who I am today. The need to learn how to define what my Aboriginal culture means is a prevalent theme in my life.* (Crystal Rattai, personal journal, 1997).

46.875%! According to the Six Nations of Grand River Elected Council in Ohsweken, Ontario, the reserve where my mother was born, this is the official percentage of Indian blood that I possess. My mother is full-blooded Upper Mohawk and my father was full-blooded German. Somehow I seem to be missing 3.125% of myself. When I received this documentation on April 3rd, 2013, I promptly wrote a letter back to the band and asked them to explain their claims. The band replied with a breakdown of my family tree. I discovered that my great great grandfather on my mother's side was white. Identity is a complex multidimensional concept that can have multiple contextualized nuances and content-specific means of expression. "Identity, for Native people, can never be a neutral issue. With definitions of Indianness deeply embedded within systems of colonial power, Native identity is inevitably highly political…" (Lawrence, 2004, p. 1). It always seems like some sort of ordeal to identify as Native when people question me, like it is elephant in the room when first meeting people. They ask, "What are you?" or "Do you mind if I ask…", and sometimes I just feel like screaming, "I am tired of

this…yeah I am something else, you are right; I am not exactly the same as you". I have thought about identity all my life. Is identity a choice? How am I going to present myself to the world? Am I going to reveal or try to conceal my identity? I have grappled with these kinds of questions.

Figure 1 – Letter from Grand River First Nation re: Blood Quantum



SIX NATIONS COUNCIL

P.O. BOX 62 OHSWEKEN, ONTARIO CANADA N0A 1M0

Lands/Membership Phone (519) 445-4613 Fax (519) 445-2778

Ganesgwao:ta go:wah/April 03, 2013

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

Because of the lack of any Blood Quantum content information in Federal Indian or Provincial Vital Statistics Systems, it is difficult to establish an Indian's exact per centum of blood quantum.

The Registered Indian Record for the Six Nations of the Grand River Indian Reserve No. 40 shows the name of **Crystal Lynn Rattai** registered under **No. 3566 Upper Mohawk /Six Nations**. Her date of birth is shown as **October 11, 1973**.

Crystal's father is **not applicable**.
Crystal's paternal grandfather was **not applicable.**
Crystal's paternal grandmother was **not applicable.**

Crystal's mother is registered with the **Upper Mohawk/Six Nations**.
Crystal's maternal grandfather was registered with the **Upper Mohawk/Six Nations**.
Crystal's maternal grandmother was originally registered with the **Upper Mohawk/Six Nations**.

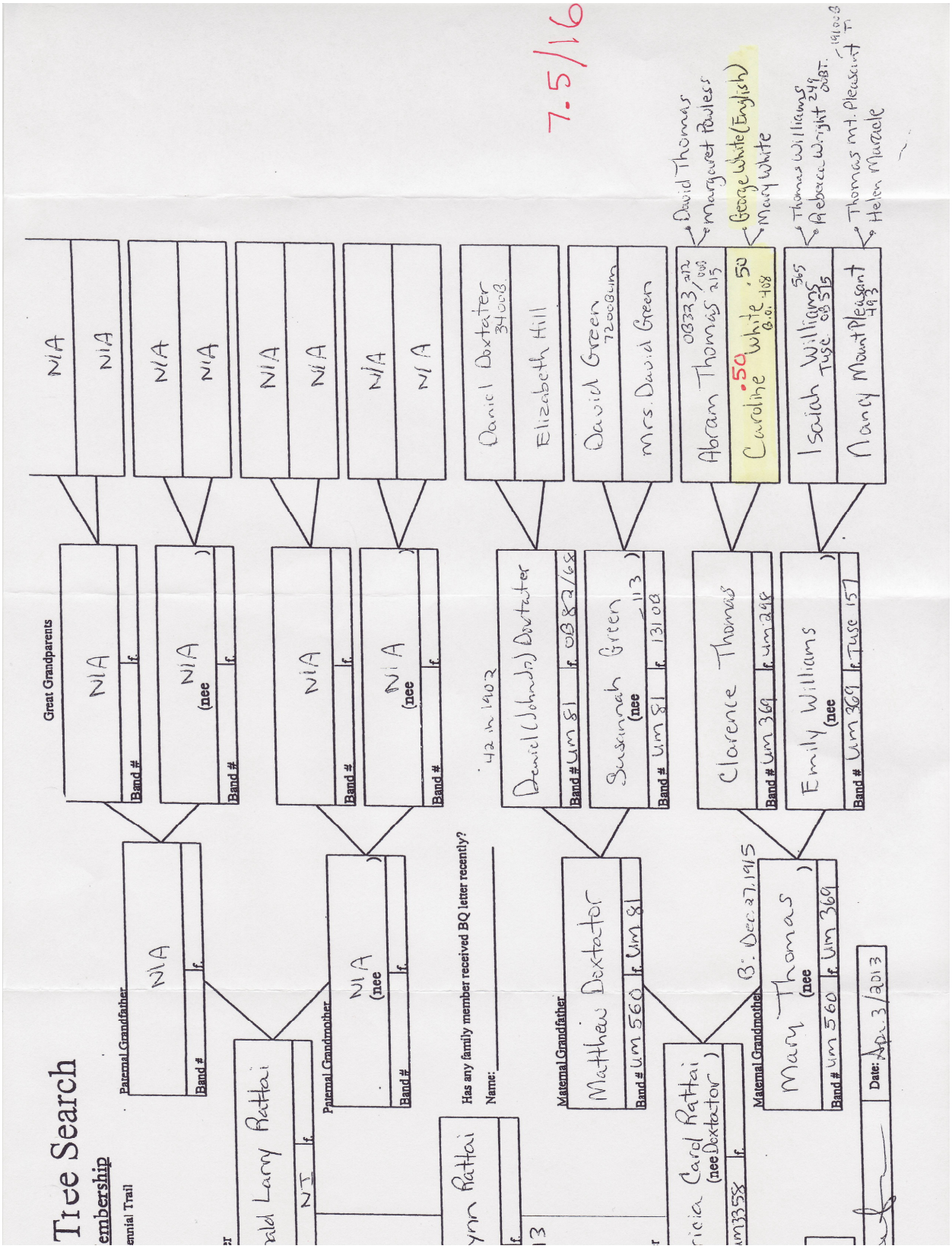
Crystal Lynn Rattai is considered to possess 46.875 % Native Blood Quantum.

Yours truly,
Six Nations Council

Linda Froman
Membership Researcher
Six Nations of the Grand River

SIX NATIONS OF THE GRAND RIVER
MANAGER
LANDS/MEMBERSHIP
OHSWEKEN, ONTARIO

Figure 2 – My Family Tree on my Mother's Side



Throughout history, Aboriginal people have endured many forms of cultural genocide (Anderson, 2001; Battiste, 2000; Lawrence, 2004; LaRocque, 1996). With a history marred by oppression, Aboriginal people have suffered immensely, both physically and psychologically. Abuse, addiction, violence against women and children, suicide, and social breakdown are common themes among scholars when discussing Aboriginal peoples of Canada (Anderson, 2001; King, 2003; Lawrence, 2004). While growing up in Manitoba, I recall that the thought of being Native was shameful and damaging to my self-esteem. As an Aboriginal woman, I find it difficult to see such negative images without being affected emotionally and feeling motivated to act, sometimes with the need to defend my history, or a group, or a cause, but always in the interest of social justice.

In the documentary *Sleeping Children Awake* it is suggested by Elders that, "…the seventh generation since contact with white culture would be those to begin the process of healing and change. That generation has reached adulthood now… the prophecy is coming true," (Magic Arrow Productions, 2010). It motivates me to witness stories of Aboriginal people, such as Shirley Cheechoo, featured in *Sleeping Children Awake,* who have chosen drama as a way to cope with feelings of a past filled with pain. Cheechoo speaks of trying to use *Javex* to clean herself, make her appearance white, and the horrific destruction of her family bond due to living from age four to sixteen in a residential school. She uses this form of expression to stimulate the healing process. My healing takes place mainly through conversation and writing.

Before discussing any particular culture, one needs to locate and define oneself within that culture. bell hooks (1992) cautions about "eating the Other", and explains how it has become fashionable to enjoy racial differences without researchers seeing themselves as

operating within a racist framework. Anderson (2001) warns that treating ethnicity as a 'spice' or a commodity that can liven up dull mainstream culture is exploitative of research participants and human beings. Edward Said (1978), in his ground breaking book *Orientalism*, created a theory that in short is "…a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient," (p. 3). His criticism of the West is in how knowledge is acquired, as the process is not innocent or objective but rather distorts the actual reality of the people being described or discovered. "Orientalism is a framework that we use to understand familiar and the strange, to make the peoples of the Middle East appear different and threatening," (Palestine Diary, 2012). A similar argument can be made for the colonization of Aboriginal peoples in North America. Many Aboriginal scholars have made the comparison between Said's "Orient" and Canada's "Indian" (Grande, 2008, Iseke-Barnes, 2002, LaRocque, 1999, Lawrence, 2004). Emma LaRocque (1999) discusses this comparison in more detail:

> While important and welcome changes are taking place in scholarship, it remains a glaring fact that, until quite recently, the dehumanization of Native peoples in colonizer texts and productions seemed to have escaped the eyes of most scholars and critics… Obviously reflecting profound association with the western myth of civilization, Canadian scholars and fictionalists have given relatively little attention to the ethnocentric and racist basis that informs their interpretation. (p. 127-128)

I view this exploitation as taking advantage of the 'Other', a parasitic relationship in which an observer consumes the culture of the 'Other' and gains something through this connection. In this inquiry my goal is to define myself in the interest of describing my identity and how it came to be within a framework of the history of Aboriginal people.

My Identity as a Researcher

I believe cultural identity is complex, fluid and messy, and not a simple progression that occurs in steps or stages. It becomes too easy to be asked to simply check the box: __ White, __ Aboriginal, __ Other. Culture is often conceptualized as closed, homogeneous and static

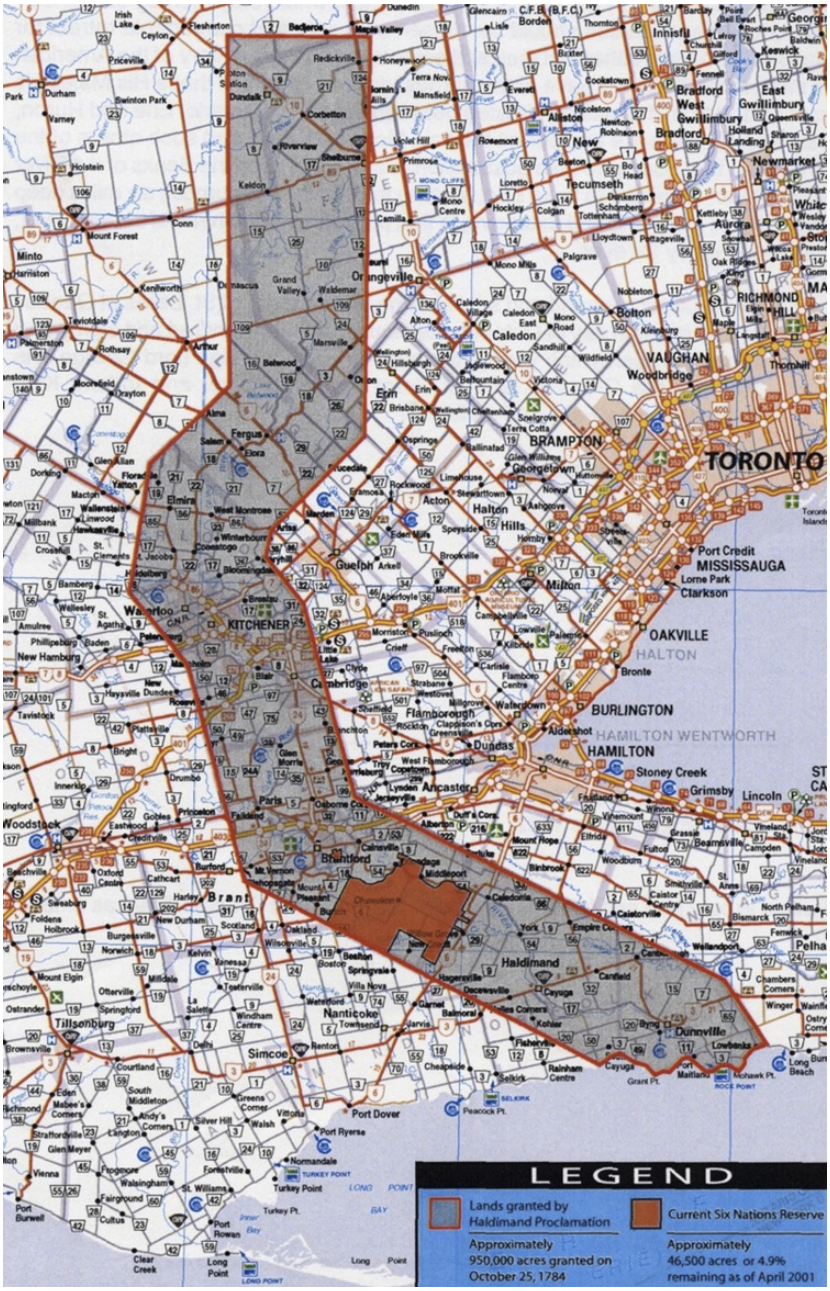
systems, though contemporary ethnographers view culture as being constantly in flux (Kirmayer, Simpson & Cargo, 2003). Lawrence (2003) defines identity as " intrinsically an individual issue… juxtaposed with others' identities, with how they see themselves and see others" (p.4). She states that, "identity has been seen as something that a person does; in other respects, identity is seen as defining what a person is. Because identities are embedded in systems of power based on race, class, and gender, identity is a highly political issue, with ramifications for how contemporary and historical collective experience is understood" (p. 4). Identity is a highly complex and political issue with historical, geographical, race, class, gender, and sexual orientation influences. I discuss some of these issues within my stories in this narrative inquiry.

It took me a long time to get to a point where I could share my stories. Searching for the strength and courage to find my voice, I have moved forward. As Thomas King (2003) writes in his Native narrative, *The Truth About Stories*, "…once a story is told, it cannot be called back. Once told, it is loose in the world" (p. 29). Hilde Lindemann Nelson (2001), in her book *Damaged Identities Narrative Repair* presents the idea of using counterstories to stories told. Counterstories have the capacity "for narrative repair of identities damaged by oppression… and can provide a significant form of resistance to the evil of diminished moral agency," (p. 7). I have come to the realization and acceptance of who I am in order to understand where I would like to go. I look people in the eye now and state my heritage. I better understand my heritage, and not the stories I have been told about my heritage by the dominant White historian. I know counterstories, the lived experiences told by Aboriginal people. On many solitary nights, I have ruminated on my story with a journal in hand as my companion. Speaking up and telling people one's story takes courage; this is not something that comes easily for me. My journey takes time, self-reflection and self-awareness. The path and history has not been kind to Aboriginal people.

I have to feel secure with and accept my story before I am able to share what defines me. Stories have power and control over our lives. Gerald Vizenor, an Anishinabe writer recounts: "You can't understand the world without telling a story. There isn't any center to the world but a story" (King, 2003, p. 32).

I am a mixed-blood person, raised with German culture and traditions from the paternal side of my family. My mother grew up in Ohsweken, a town site on the Six Nations of the Grand River First Nation Indian reserve near Brantford, Ontario.

Map 1 – Map of the Grand River First Nation Reserve
Source: http://www.sixnations.ca/Maps.htm

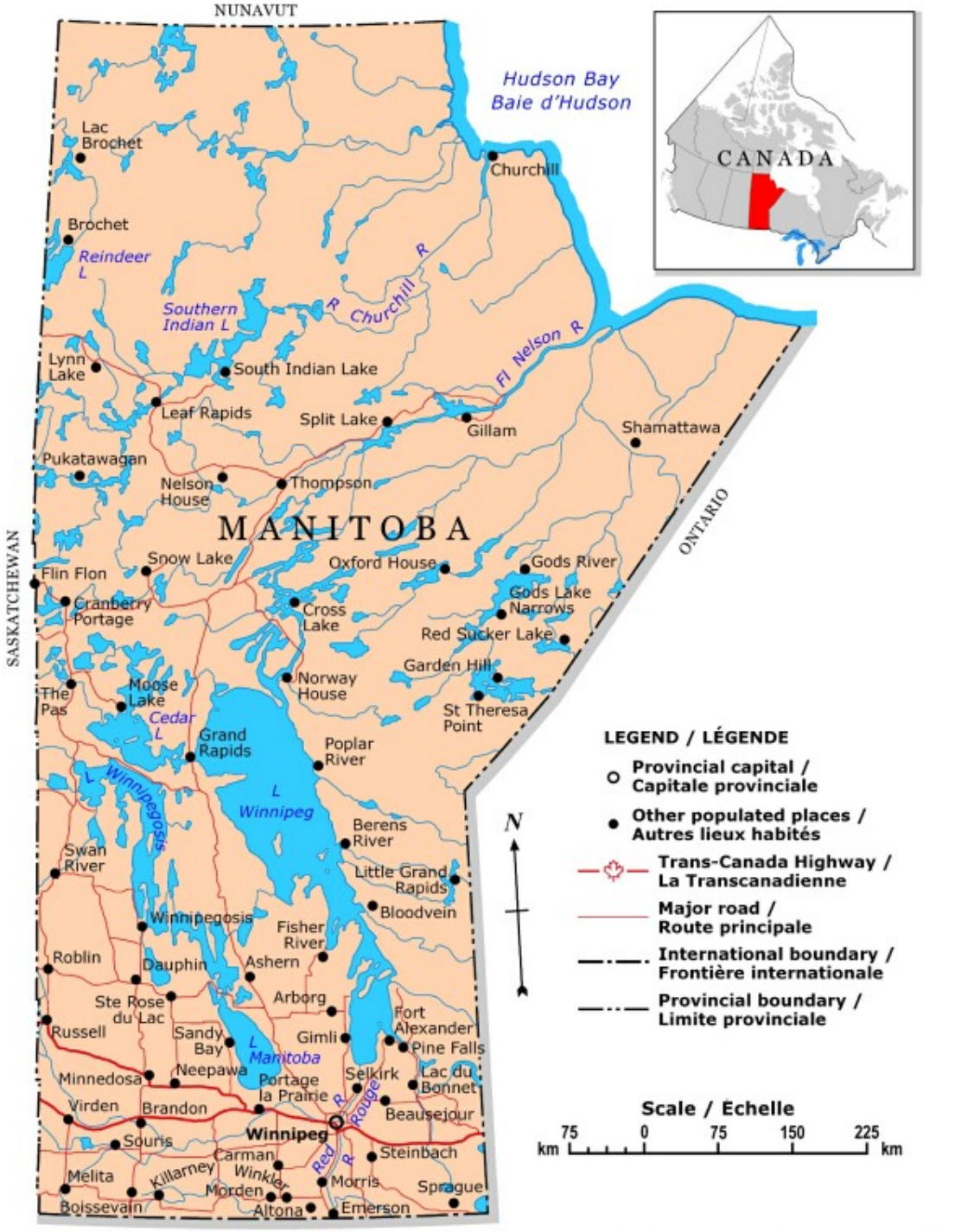


She silenced this part of her life: as a result, I had no contact with my mother's family. This lack of contact was probably due to both a geographical barrier and an emotional one. We never spoke about our Aboriginal heritage or *that* side of the family. Thus, I did not learn the

culture and traditions of both sides of my mixed heritage. My father was a second-generation full-blooded German living in Canada. His parents were born in Canada. Many of their older siblings and family members were born in a small village in Prussia, a country consisting of parts of what is Germany and Poland today. My family settled in a small rural prairie town in Manitoba called Beausejour. This area was mainly made up of people of German, Ukrainian and Polish descent. There was limited diversity in my community with few families belonging to visible minorities or diverse ethnic backgrounds. My role models and most influential teachers were my grandparents who were German. I have a strong connection to the German culture. I recognize and understand the language, though I speak only a few words. I enjoy the bounty of the German cuisine and share the values of my family, which include: a strong work ethic, determination and the importance of family and community. I only knew my father's family: consequently, I was raised in a dominantly 'white' community.

I now choose to define myself as a Mohawk and German woman representing and embracing both parts of my mixed heritage. I have not always named both sides of my racial background. When asked about my heritage, I would define myself as German, and deny any Aboriginal roots when asked about my heritage. This heritage was unfamiliar to me and I felt uncomfortable even mentioning my Aboriginal ancestry. I did not encourage any questions about my heritage, as I felt I would not know the answers, and would quickly change the subject. Recently, I began the journey to reclaim my lost heritage and accept my Aboriginal identity with pride and confidence.

Map 2 – Map of Manitoba
Source: http://members.shaw.ca/kcic1/mapmb.html



As a consequence of my mother's choice to not share her Aboriginal heritage with me, I do not know very much about Mohawk culture and practices such as the language, the ways of life, the community, the ceremonies, or the music. Thus, I have struggled with my Native identity all my life and this is the reason I embarked on this journey to study the experiences of mixed-blood Aboriginal people and their perceptions and construction of their identities. I am interested in the concept of Nativeness juxtaposed with a connection to one's Aboriginal identity and the influences that being mixed-blood have on the individual. Nativeness refers to other's expectations and authentication of what is stereotypically believed to be Native. It is the moment when someone expects *you*, as a Native person, to know about Aboriginal culture and history simply because you are Native.

Bonita Lawrence (Mi'kmaw) is an Associate Professor at York University, where she teaches Indigenous Studies. Her research and publications have focused primarily on urban, non-status and Metis identities, federally unrecognized Aboriginal communities, and Indigenous justice. Kim Anderson is a Cree/Métis writer and educator and is known as an advocate of Indigenous women and families. Lawrence (2004), Anderson (2001) and Valaskakis (1993), in response to questions of how society perceives Native people, they define this social construct as Nativeness/Indianness. Nativeness is an external judgment of a frozen cultural ideal held by individuals and groups in society that is projected onto Native people. Anderson (2001) discusses Nativeness as being a quintessential Native experience that people with Aboriginal heritage are expected to know by society. These experiences include growing up on the land, speaking the language, and being well-versed in Native traditions. However, many Native people like me, share feelings of insecurity because we do not possess the knowledge that our ancestors had. Anderson (2001) states that, "once we are "only half", or once we become

urbanized or non-language speakers, many non-Native people feel inclined to tell us that we no longer exist. We are no longer Natives" (p. 26). "Most urban mixed-bloods have therefore had to contend, at some point in their lives, with the fact that they do not fit the models of what has been held up to them – by whites – as authentic Nativeness" (Lawrence, 2004, p. 135). *We* have internalized that we are *less* Native because we do not measure up to our society's stereotypical views of the *ideal* Native (Anderson, 2001). These stereotypical images are seen in movies, television and media (Adare, 2005; Goldie, 1995; King, 2012; Shaheen, 2009). In Anderson's interview with Emma LaRocque (2001), she explains the phenomenon of the vanishing Indian. LaRocque states that there is a misconception held by society that if we do not know our culture, then we do not exist:

> There developed a notion that Native people were savage and primitive, and as such, were static; had frozen cultures. Change was always seen as assimilation or vanishing. In other words, our cultures became ossified, and the definition of our culture was that change was impossible. The moment we change, we are no longer Native. (LaRocque, 2001, p. 26)

Anderson (2001) claims that, "Those of us who do not have a land-based culture to inform us often turn to symbols of traditions, ceremonies and a pan-Indian approach" (p. 27). In searching for a Native identity, she states that we must be careful not to ossify tradition and use cultural knowledge as the yardstick to measure Native identity. I agree, that with little knowledge of my Native identity, the most logical place to look is tradition. However, I must be careful to ensure that what I seek is not the stereotypical images of a frozen culture but what it means to me to have a Native identity.

I can see the impact of over 500 years of oppression and the importance of Aboriginal women passing on or sharing a Native identity with their children. Sadly, the breakdown of my family happened with my mother at least two generations ago. Alcohol, violence and the

devastation of multiple tragic deaths have plagued my family for generations. She lost her siblings and some of their children long before their time, some to alcohol-related events, drunk driving and illness. Two of my young cousins came to live with us when I was about two years old. I do not remember them. My older sister told me that, being so close in age, I grew very attached to them. With four children in my family, my parents could not afford to keep my cousins with us in Manitoba. Perhaps my mother thought that their father was able to care for them again, so they returned home to their reserve. Shortly after their return, a drunk driver killed my youngest cousin on the side of the road in a hit-and-run accident. His brother was a helpless witness. Unbelievable pain and guilt ripped through my family, first because of having to give their children up and then because of losing one. My mother's past is filled with many incredibly heartbreaking stories. Her reserve family has endured a more severe and polarizing experience than my Manitoba family. The fact that I choose to reclaim a Native heritage and identity is a testament to the success of my family's resilience, survival and strength.

Having worked in several First Nations communities and looking at my own family history, alcohol and violence seem to be prevalent themes in the lives of many Aboriginal people. The difficulties Aboriginal people face are multifaceted, complex and sometimes incomprehensible. I have heard the helpless voices of children who are the most vulnerable members of communities and also worked first-hand as a teacher in First Nations schools on the Poplar River First Nation (Asatawisipe), Bloodvein First Nation, Fort Alexander First Nation (Sagkeeng) and Hollow Water (Wanipigow) First Nation. Many Indigenous scholars describe the effects of colonialism on the culture, identity, language, education and health of Aboriginal peoples as all encompassing (Anderson, 2001; Battiste, 1998; Castellano, 2002; Kirmayer, Simpson & Cargo, 2003; Kovach, 2009; LaRocque, 1996, Lawrence, 2004). For example in

Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision, Marie Battiste (2000) discusses Indigenous people and colonization:

> Indigenous peoples worldwide are still undergoing trauma and stress from genocide and the destruction of their lives by colonization. Their stories are often silenced as they are made to endure other atrocities… It becomes our greatest challenge and our honour to move beyond the analysis of naming the site of our oppression to act in individual and collective ways to effect change at many levels and to live in a good way. (p. 22)

Anderson (2001) argues that individuals need to know where they come from in order to know where they are going. To heal and move forward, one needs to learn about their history and the factors that affect their stories. In learning about my mother's history, I have come to appreciate the magnitude of her choices and how difficult those choices must have been.

I used to identify as Native through my mother. I feel like this Nativeness is what she gave to me. I always thought of my Nativeness as a connection to my mother and not something that is mine. I did not own my Native skin – it was not real and I was not real. I felt like I was Native only because of her, that it was her fault I had brown skin and that made me angry as a child. As an adult, it means that I have to define my own identity. It cannot be hers, as I did not share her experiences as a Native person; my experiences need to be my own. When I feel insecure about being Native, I take comfort in the fact that she grew up on a reserve and she is, in my opinion, an 'authentic' Indian. My feelings about my Aboriginal heritage are complicated and as I learn more about my history my feelings are changing. At first, I did not think I had any value as an Aboriginal person because I did not know what that meant. I did not understand colonialism, the Indian Act, or what it meant to be a status Indian. Therefore, I took comfort in the fact that my mother, having grown up on a reserve, gave credibility to my story. I have now

come to realize my story does not need anyone to endorse it because it is mine. It is important to move beyond these feelings of inadequacy and reclaim an identity for myself.

I can only speculate as to why my mother chose not to share her Aboriginal heritage with her children. I believe it was in the interest of protecting and sheltering us from what she thought would be a difficult life. I believe that she wanted us to thrive in the rural 'white' community in which we were being raised. She did not know the impact of her choices on her children. In trying to resist and repress her culture, she was alienating her children from a connection to a part of her identity. She was depriving us of a Native culture and identity as Native people. Identity and culture are interrelated and generated within one's family. If they are silenced, a person can feel lost, even when that loss is misunderstood. This alienation can lead to difficulties with defining one's identity. I have felt lost for most of my life and have also felt that I never fit in or fully belonged anywhere. My journey of reclaiming my Aboriginal heritage began long before I put pen to paper. Through this inquiry, I feel that I am able to connect with a part of me that I have suppressed for most of my life. I always knew my story was there but was afraid or ashamed to explore my Aboriginal heritage. I believe I can make a difference in my life and hopefully in the lives of others. I want to add to the body of knowledge about mixed-blood people. I hope my inquiry will give an often overlooked and misunderstood perspective for anyone who works with children.

One participant in Lawrence's study of mixed-blood urban Native peoples and Indigenous nationhood shares an account of when she first spoke to her mother about Native issues:

> And yet it was not until I received a student grant and spent two months
> In the Cree community of Moose Factory, Ontario, that my mother finally
> began to talk about her family to me – over the phone, long distance, in short anecdotal
> accounts of the childhood experiences. (Lawrence, 2004, p. 36)

When I received my first teaching jobs in northern First Nations communities in Manitoba, my mother became curious about what life was like for other Native people in Manitoba. She listened to my experiences in awe, asking many questions about: the people, what they were like, the living conditions and the well-being of the community, the school and the children. Through these conversations, we started a dialogue about her experience growing up on a reserve and the nature of the people who lived there. She shared brief stories, sometimes just a comment or two in contrast to my experiences. My mother was proud that her family worked for a living. Most people in her community worked. They had the opportunity to work in nearby communities of Hamilton, Brantford or Toronto as her reserve was not isolated. She could not believe the state of the communities I worked in. Her experience had not been similar. It was one of the few times I recall her candidly speaking about her life on reserve before she moved to Manitoba.

Richardson (2001) states that the caregivers in one's early life can shape their personality in either a positive or a negative sense. The first and most influential teachers in one's lifetime, the family, share their culture, but ethnicity may not necessarily be shared. Families may not follow the practices or even acknowledge their heritage. Children live and learn the cultures to which they are exposed; this includes the values, norms, rights and responsibilities of those in their environment. Ethnicity may not necessarily be shared and families may not belong to social groups and/or share the cultural traditions of their race. Race does not necessarily dictate culture. For example, being Mohawk does not mean I know Mohawk culture. In my family I was exposed predominantly to German culture. In an inter-racial family, a mixed-blood person can belong to more than one cultural group. However, the cultural practices that individuals have been taught and exposed to may not be those they will be perceived to belong to by society. In other words, people will make assumptions about someone who is not from the dominant

culture. These misconceptions and assumptions can affect individuals in both positive and negative ways. Speaking from my own experience, being unfamiliar with my Aboriginal culture made me feel like I was not an Aboriginal person, and I tried to hide this part of me throughout my childhood. I often outright denied being Native. As a child, I simply was not equipped to confront these issues. This denial hurt and challenged my sense of self-worth.

Adler (2001) and Cohen (2000) argue that race does not dictate culture and there are many intricacies of belonging to cultural groups that affect a person's identity including: race, class, language, location, gender, and ethnicity. Anderson (2001) states that many mixed-blood individuals who have not participated in their Aboriginal heritage share experiences and feelings of straddling two cultures but belonging to neither. I have felt all my life as though I did not fully belong to either part of my mixed heritage background. I knew I was different than my German family and had no connection to my Aboriginal one.

My Inquiry Focus and Questions

My goals are to deconstruct and challenge the stereotypical relationships between Nativeness and Native identity with respect to the categorization, racialization, definitions and labels that are imposed on Aboriginal people by society. Terminology, labels and definitions due to the historical relationship of Aboriginal people with Canada represent more than just words. These terms such as status, non-status, mixed-blood, mixed-race, Indigenous, Aboriginal, Native all have significance and meanings attached to them. I want to raise the awareness of society that mixed-blood Native people should be recognized as possessing a valid Native identity. Although a person may possess only partial Native blood, and may not be well-versed in the language or culture, they retain the right to belong to and identify with that culture. I believe that individuals who choose to define themselves as Native have the right to do so and should not be

included or excluded on the basis of blood quantum, the Indian Act, their appearance, their knowledge of the culture, or where they live. If a person chooses to embrace their cultural heritage should anyone have the right to judge them? Do we need a government official or band representative to tell them that they are 46.875% of any race? I believe embracing any part of your cultural heritage should not come with a percentage value attached to it. It will soon also come with an expiry date for most Native people if we continue to go in this direction. Our society needs to start accepting people for who they are, as complicated and mixed as that may be.

Rationale

I have heard stories from mixed-blood Aboriginal people with an emphasis on the ways that they identify themselves as mixed-blood and express their feelings of being racialized and categorized by society. All stories of identity shared by the participants in this inquiry included stories from their childhood, and historically childhood for Aboriginal people in Canada are incontrovertibly tangled and mired in the imposed (foreign) European formal model of "schooling". Stories of school experiences cannot be ignored in the authentic narratives of Aboriginal peoples' lives. In Canada, one's school experience is an essential part of the fabric that forms one's identity and thus needs to be considered when speaking about identity.

In this thesis, it is the voices and perspectives on identity of the participants that take precedence, with the understanding that schooling is a major location where formation of self takes place. With this, I hope my research can add to the knowledge in areas such as education, women's studies, Native studies, Mixed-race studies, women's health and other disciplines that are interested in the stories of mixed-blood Aboriginal people. I hope to raise social and cultural awareness of mixed-blood Aboriginal people who have stories to tell.

Research Questions

I pose three questions to better understand Nativeness and Native identity by exploring the social and cultural factors that influence these concepts:

1. What does having a Native identity mean for four mixed-blood Aboriginal people in today's society and what factors influence this identity?
2. How do the socially constructed categorizations and racialization of mixed-blood Aboriginal people influence these participants' perceptions of their identities?
3. What experiences can the four participants share about being mixed-blood?

Defining the Terms

I understand that some of the terms I use throughout this thesis may be offensive or confusing to some readers. It is not my intention to offend or confuse anyone. With the plethora of terms and terminology that are available and widely used when speaking about race and ethnicity, it is no wonder that I find myself with so many questions and confusion with my own identity. Words and labels are power laden. I acknowledge this potency and plan to speak with care.

Racialization.

Racialization is defined by Solomon (2005) as the process by which racial meanings are attached to particular issues and often treated as social problems in our society. For example, street crime is seen as connected to Asian, Native or Black gang activity by society and thus becomes defined and attached to race in this way (Solomon, 2005). In these incidences, race appears to be a key factor in the ways issues are defined and understood, such as stereotyped assumptions that gang problems are associated with race. Racialization is the lens through which racial thinking occurs.

Racialization structures our understanding of the causes and consequences of events. Sleeter (2010) claims: “One cannot simply assume a given set of cultural practices is meaningful to specific students by virtue of their membership in a racial or ethnic group” (p. 3). When society, including governments, racialize a person or group, assumptions are made using their perceived race as one of the deciding factors for their conclusions. People have made assumptions about my membership to the Aboriginal culture. I have been asked to speak on behalf of all Aboriginal people on many occasions and always feel uncomfortable with this request. How can I possibly know what others who share my Aboriginal culture need? Why is it that I am being given this voice unwillingly?

Race and ethnicity.

Race, is defined in the New Oxford American Dictionary Version 2.1.3, as: "each of the major divisions of humankind, having distinct physical characteristics". Ethnicity is defined in the dictionary as "the fact or state of belonging to a social group that has a common national or cultural tradition". People are the product of their surroundings and histories, and accordingly, this defines who they are.

I make a distinction between race and ethnic identity. Racial identity and racial socialization have been used to refer to "the power differential inherent in a racialized society, whereas ethnic identity and ethic socialization have been used to refer to a variety of minority groups" (French, Coleman & DiLorenzo, 2013, p. 2). Though the difference is subtle and the terms are often used interchangeably, I prefer to see race as non-voluntary; one is born with their race. I see ethnicity as an individual choosing to belong to a culture and therefore ethnicity is acquired. Ethnicity is a choice that is made by the individual. Both race and ethnicity can also be assumptions and the way society defines the "other".

The Canadian government has official policies on race and ethnicity that are included under the title *Canadian Multicultural: An Inclusive Citizenship*, on their website http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/multiculturalism/citizenship.asp?_ga=1.196707177.474162442.1404932468. Some key features include:

> In 1971, Canada was the first country in the world to adopt multiculturalism as an official policy. By so doing, Canada affirmed the value and dignity of all Canadian citizens regardless of their racial or ethnic origins, their language, or their religious affiliation. The 1971 Multiculturalism Policy of Canada also confirmed the rights of Aboriginal peoples and the status of Canada's two official languages.
>
> All Canadians are guaranteed equality before the law and equality of opportunity regardless of their origins. Canada's laws and policies recognize Canada's diversity by race, cultural heritage, ethnicity, religion, ancestry and place of origin and guarantee to all men and women complete freedom of conscience, of thought, belief, opinion expression, association and peaceful assembly. All of these rights, our freedom and our dignity, are guaranteed through our Canadian citizenship, our Canadian Constitution, and our Charter of Rights and Freedoms. (Government of Canada, 2014)

Post-colonial theorist Edward Said (1978) argues that "…men make their own history, that what they can know is what they have made, and extend it to geography: as both geographical and cultural entities…geographical sectors as "Orient" and "Occident" are man-made" (p. 5). He also claims that, "in any society… certain cultural forms predominate over others, just as certain ideas are more influential than others… this form of cultural leadership is what Gramsci has identified as hegemony…" (p. 7). Said's beliefs make a simple definition of race and ethnicity very complex. How can one simply define these terms when there is so much enmeshed in their meanings?

Aboriginal, Native, Indigenous, First Nations, Indian.

The term Aboriginal refers to "the first inhabitants of Canada, and includes First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. This term came into popular usage in Canadian context after 1982,

when Section 35 of the Canadian Constitution defined the term as such" (First Nations Studies Program, 2009).

The term Native is a "general term that refers to a person or thing that has originated from a particular place. The term native does not denote a specific Aboriginal ethnicity… In Canada, the term "Aboriginal" or "Indigenous" is generally preferred to "Native" (First Nations Studies Program, 2009).

The term Indigenous is used to include a variety of Aboriginal groups. Indigenous is most often used in "an international or global context…to refer to peoples of long settlement and connection to specific lands who have been adversely affected by incursions by industrial economies, displacement, and settlement of their traditional territories by others" (First Nations Studies Program, 2009).

The term First Nations is used to describe Aboriginal peoples of Canada who are "ethnically neither Métis nor Inuit. This term came into common usage in the 1970s and '80s and generally replaced the term "Indian", although unlike "Indian", the term "First Nations" does not have a legal definition" (First Nations Studies Program, 2009).

The term Indian refers to the legal identity of a First Nations person "registered under the Indian Act… and is considered outdated and may be considered offensive due to its complex and often idiosyncratic colonial use in governing identity through legislation" (First Nations Studies Program, 2009).

In this inquiry, I use the terms First Nations, Aboriginal, Native, Status Indian, Indian and Indigenous interchangeably throughout this text. From reviewing literature and from my experience, there are many terms that are used interchangeably but denote different meanings. "It is important to recognize the potential these words may hold – but it is also important and

very possible to understand these terms well enough to feel confident in using them and creating dialogue" (First Nations Studies Program, 2009). The term Aboriginal can be defined in many ways. In my experience, it is the most encompassing term and includes: Native, Métis, Inuit and First Nations peoples. I will also use the terms mixed-race, mixed-blood, biracial, bicultural, half blood, when referring to others and myself. I may speak of having a dual identity, dual ethnicity, mixed ethnicity and/or hybridity. I will also use the term Indian, though it is not politically correct, as it applies in the stories that are told or reflects the language used when others have chosen to use this term to define themselves or in their stories.

Narrative, story, and counterstory.

In my writing, I prefer to use the term story rather than narrative and will try to do so, though at times this may be impossible as the terms "overlap" and can be used interchangeably. I like the way Arthur W. Frank (2010) in his book *Letting Stories Breathe* conceptualizes the term story into "…simply this: one thing happens in consequence of another" (p. 25). He further makes a distinction between narrative and story:

> A narrative includes multiple stories featuring characters who share some problem or developmental trajectory. The same narrative can generate stories in multiple genres; narratives of class conflict can be tragedies – the ruthless suppression of the Paris commune – comedies, like Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro.* A narrative sets parameters within which predictable kinds of things happen or similar reasons. Thus, a narrative might also be described as an immanent principle of causality; for example, classes by Marx's definition inevitably conflict with each other. Narratives make no mention of individual persons; stories depend on characters. *Stories* are about particular people living lives animated by some principle of causality: class conflict, or the tension between fathers and sons, or the human need for true love. Characters fall victim to this immanent principle (tragedy) or triumph over it (comedy).
>
> That said, the words *narrative* and *story* overlap so frequently that sustaining this distinction in consistent usage proves impossible. The important points are that the statement of a narrative, as in Marx, is not in itself a story, and stories can be collected into types of narratives. (Frank, 2010, p. 199-200)

Hilde Lindemann Nelson (2001) describes counterstory as "…a story that resists an oppressive identity and attempts to replace it with one that commands respect" (p. 6). Lindemann Nelson (2001) states that counterstories position themselves against master narratives. She describes master narratives as stories that "serve as summaries of socially shared understandings… and we use them not only to make sense of our experience but also to justify what we do" (p. 6). The power of counterstories is that they aim to alter an oppressed person's perception of *herself* and they permit the storyteller to put greater trust in her own moral worth (Lindemann Nelson, 2001).

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I discuss the thoughts of many Indigenous scholars and how they describe the lives of Aboriginal people marred by challenges throughout history and the struggles that continue. I have shared my background, my childhood and the reason I am interested in exploring the stories of mixed-blood Aboriginal people. The stories of mixed-blood Aboriginal people have been lacking in representation, voice and little weight has been given to their significance in the academy and scholarly work to date. I have defined some the key terminology I will use. I also share my background as a researcher and the questions that guided this inquiry.

Chapter Two: A Theoretical Framework Fostering Healing Through Stories

"A life that is not fully narratable is vulnerable to devaluation" (Frank, 2010, p. 75).

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the capacity of stories. I focus on two types of stories: stories that have the capacity to hurt and stories that have the capacity to heal. I discuss factors that relate to my focus on mixed-blood Aboriginal people and identity such as, the Indian Act, residential schools, and resistance. I created a concept map to clarify my thought process. I designed the concept map to visually display and demonstrate the complexity and connectedness of the concepts at play when one tells a story. I use Linda Tuhiwai Smith's (1999) decolonization framework as the lens through which I view my inquiry.

The Capacity of Stories

I share insights and perspectives of mixed-blood Aboriginal people through the use of story. Stories have the capacity to heal and to hurt. I organize my thinking in two ways: the continuous colonization process on Aboriginal peoples in Canada and relate this to stories that hurt and the decolonization process and relate this to stories that heal. Healing stories resist the ongoing colonization process and engage in actions of decolonization. I elaborate on some of the decolonizing methods such as counterstories in this chapter. I also share examples of how stories hurt.

In his book *Letting Stories Breathe,* Arthur Frank (2010) discusses the work and capacity of stories:

> Stories animate human life; that is their work. Stories work with people, for people, and always stories work on people, affecting what people are able to see as real, what are their particularities – that enable them to work as they do? Stories breathe life not only into individuals, but also into groups that assemble around telling and believing certain stories. After stories animate, they instigate. (p. 3)

Stories have the capacity to trap or consume the storyteller. Frank (2010) argues, "…story is as much a trap he must escape as it is a truth to which he is responsible" (p. 12). Stories can be so heartbreaking that they make hearts bleed. Frank (2010) believes stories can trap participants by not allowing them to move forward. This is the danger of a story that finalizes or, as LaRocque (1996) refers to it, a culture that is frozen. Frank suggests that stories should never be finalized because we keep living them. Just as culture is not stagnant, stories also continually evolve. Some of the experiences that we carry with us are devastating but, as we live our lives, our stories continue to evolve and change as we do. Although we carry stories with us, we are not necessarily connected to our past stories and outgrow them. Given our collective history, for the vast majority of Indigenous people in Canada, stories define who we are, but for the sake of survival they are not *all* that we are. I have stories of abuse from my childhood that I now choose to not carry with me. I choose not to retell these stories, though they are a part of who I am. Just because one chooses not to tell a story does not mean that story has not helped create their identity. I have worked at developing my character, and these stories are not how I choose to portray myself. I resist telling these stories as they are no longer relevant. These stories serve no purpose for me. I do not see what I gain by telling them. I cannot stay rooted in the past just as the culture of Aboriginal people cannot stay rooted in its past. As Frank would state, my story is not finalized and I have evolved and continue to grow.

Frank (2010) discusses the issue of authenticity and states that it is a dialogue that can be a dilemma between the storyteller and listener (p. 12). He states:

> authenticity depends on both cultural resources acquired through group participation and recognition by others. Authenticity is thus understood as a claim, an account, and almost always a negotiation that can become a contest… negotiated between persons. (Frank, 2010, p. 192)

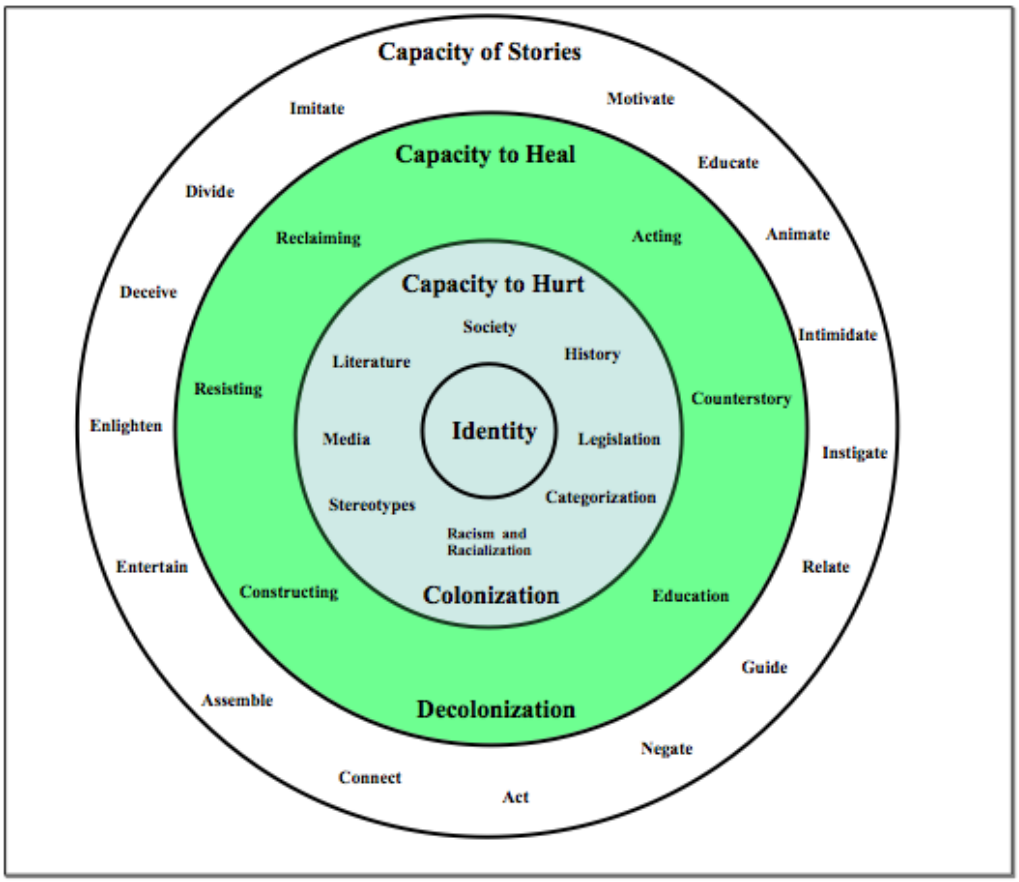
I have difficulty fully accepting Frank's statements on authenticity. I feel my story is authentic despite the fact that I do not have the "cultural resources" or "group participation" of my heritage. I think one needs to be cautious when judging authenticity in this way. I have struggled with the concept of authenticity in all of my writing and research. I believe a story's authenticity belongs to the storyteller alone. The art of selecting which parts of a story to tell and which to omit is difficult. What does it mean to tell an authentic story? If I select certain parts of my life but not others, does that make my story less authentic? If my story is not a stereotypical Native narrative because I did not grow up on a reserve or fit a society-determined profile of what it means to be Native, is my story authentic? All the parts of my story are true as they are my perceptions. Frank reminds his readers that there is a selection process at play and skilled storytellers use this process very well to convey the messages or meanings they want to share with the listener, in essence to use the power of the story. David Brooks, as quoted in Frank (2010), writes about how we are "born into a particular history and culture" (p. 24), though we keep responsibility for "selecting and constantly revising the master narrative we tell about ourselves" (p. 24). I believe that we constantly revise our stories of our identities throughout our lives. We edit, select, and revise the stories of our lives as we move forward.

Frank (2010) argues that socio-narratology studies how stories give people the resources to figure out who they are, and how stories both connect and disconnect people. He states the focus of socio-narratology is on how stories play and create boundaries: who defines boundaries, who crosses boundaries, and what effects those boundaries have. He argues socio-narratology explores how stories inspire people toward good. He also argues that stories can pit people as suitable objects of aggression (Frank, 2010). For example, Tina Fontaine, a 15-year-old Aboriginal girl, ran away from her foster home, in early August of 2014, only to be found dead a

week later, wrapped in a bag in the Red River in Winnipeg, Manitoba (CBC, retrieved from: http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/tina-fontaine-slain-teen-struggled-with-father-s-beating-death-1.2741842, October 2, 2014). The article from the CBC goes on to state, "The teen's death has sparked an outpouring of grief and renewed calls for a national inquiry into missing and murdered aboriginal women and girls" (CBC, 2014). Upon hearing about this tragic story some people will be moved into action and push for an inquiry into the approximately 1200 dead or missing Aboriginal woman in Canada since 1980. After reading the reports from the CBC news regarding Tina Fontaine's tragic murder, I found some people blame her, " At 15 I'm sure she didn't realize the danger she was putting herself in" or "she was probably hanging with the wrong crowd" (CBC, retrieved from: http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/manitoba/tina-fontaine-15-found-in-bag-in-red-river-1.2739141, October 2, 2014). This story inspires some people toward social justice and others towards aggression.

In this inquiry, I examine the stories four mixed-blood Aboriginal people. I am interested in how their stories define their heritage and the factors that affect their identity. I illustrate the way I have organized my thinking in this diagram.

Diagram 1 – The Capacity of Stories



In the diagram, I draw on the socio-narratology theory of Frank (2010), the medicine wheel for identity reconstruction by Anderson (2001), and the theories in regards to colonization and legislation by Lawrence (2004). I also use the decolonizing theory from Smith (1999) and identity repair by Lindemann Nelson (2001). Each of these scholars shares important pieces of how I view identity construction in regards to being mixed-blood and Aboriginal. I include the voices of many other scholars who offer perspectives in regards to mixed-blood identity, critical pedagogy, Indigenous knowledge and the act of storytelling.

I used this conceptual framework to guide how I viewed the stories shared by the participants. I present the framework in concentric circles because all parts need to be connected

and affect the other as a story is being told. Colonization and decolonization are like two sides of a coin, as are stories that hurt and stories that heal. Smith (1999) describes colonialism as a concept "used across a range of disciplines…but it is generally agreed upon that colonialism is but one expression of imperialism" (p. 21). She states that imperialism "was the system of control which secured the markets and capital investments" (p. 21) for European industrialists. Colonialism "facilitated this expansion by ensuring that there was European control, which necessarily meant securing and subjugating the indigenous populations" (Smith, 1999, p. 21). Decolonization strives to undo colonization. Smith (1999) states that decolonization is "deconstruction… taking apart the story, revealing underlying texts, and giving voice to things that are often known intuitively… provides words, perhaps, an insight that explains certain experiences" (p. 3). Decolonization "engages with imperialism and colonialism at multiple levels" (p. 21).

Often times, stories that hurt are held very close to our hearts (we do not easily forget them) and this is why they are located next to the individual's identity on the model. Through these stories that hurt there is ways to heal – one does not need to heal unless there is a hurt. Each part of the model can directly affect the other depending on what is done with the story. In stories that hurt for example, one can develop a deeper understanding of oneself and the willingness to seek out reasons why. One can look at the root of a story, delve deeper and to try to see another perspective – a counterstory. From hurt can come healing – this is the capacity that stories possess.

Capacity to hurt.

When discussing Aboriginal people and identity in Canada one cannot help but look at "…the generations of policies specifically formulated with the goal of destroying our communities

and fragmenting our identities" (Lawrence & Dua, 2005, p.121). In this inquiry, evident in the stories of the mixed-blood Aboriginal participants was the negative impact of the Indian Act. Therefore, I shall provide a brief history and purpose of this legislation as it plays a large part in creating the situations many mixed-blood Aboriginal people find themselves in today. I have also included a brief history of Indian Residential Schools as it has been an incredibly significant abuse on Aboriginal people and a part of our traumatic past.

Background, Historical Context and Master Narratives

The Indian Act, enacted in 1850, changed the course of history for Aboriginal people. The purpose of this act was to categorize individuals and groups; it was the beginning of the Government of Canada "arrogating to itself the authority to define who was or was not a member of an Indigenous nation – designated in generic terms as "Indian"" (Lawrence, 2004, p. 27). Aboriginal people of Canada have resisted this legislation by "engaging in reorganizing political relations with the state" (Smith, 1999, p. 111). In this decolonizing movement Smith (1999) states:

> Challenges have been made by indigenous communities with varying degrees of success both through the courts and through the legislature. The constitutional challenges made by indigenous nations have deeply disturbed the colonial comfort of some states… and forced the issue of indigenous rights on to the agenda. There have been wide-ranging claims which have challenged the legitimacy of the doctrines upon which colonial states have built their foundations" (p.111).

Lawrence (2004) states that, "the Indian Act provides a conceptual framework that has organized contemporary First Nations life in ways that have been almost entirely naturalized, and that governs ways of thinking about Native identity" (p. 25). She argues that few individuals appear to have recognized the depth of the problem that this legislation represents. As a discourse of classification and regulation, this legislation has produced the people it intends to control, and has affected how Native people think of things that are "Indian" (p. 25). Lawrence (2004) refers to the Indian Act as a classification system, a way of thinking, which embeds itself

in every attempt to change it. She believes we have to deconstruct the various categories that have been created by the Indian Act, such as status, non-status Indians and Métis. Examining the history of this "identity termination legislation" (p. 27) is central to this process.

Lawrence (2004) states that identity is primarily about how history is interpreted and negotiated and about who has the authority to determine a group's identity or authenticity (p. 6). She further explains that, in Canada, direct colonial control exerted by a settler state was maintained by a global imperial power. This colonial mentality enabled Canada to create the Indian Act's legal status system. The Indian Act is highly divisive as it externalizes "half-breeds" and creates patriarchal divisions within Native communities, which continuously "bleed off" people without the need for other removal policies (Lawrence, 2004, p.7). She connects the 'Indian' to mixed-blood Aboriginal people and their identities:

> The Indian Act has tied Nativeness to Indian status, whether an individual even identified as being mixed-blood is highly dependent on whether they are a status Indian and whether they come from a reserve… those who had grown up on-reserve or who had spent considerable time in their home communities throughout their lives, even if they were blond-haired and blue-eyed, did not conceive of themselves as being mixed-bloods but simply Indian. Between those who have been legally excluded from Indianness, for whom being mixed-blood appears problematic, and those whose Indianness has been legally assured and who therefore do not see themselves as *being* mixed-blood, the effect of legal categories of "Indianness" on mixed-blood Native identity will be explored. (p. 12)

Lawrence (2004) argues that the Indian Act served two main goals: to remove as many individuals as possible from Nativeness and to force Nativeness to be a state of "racial purity" (p. 51). Removing children designated as "half-breed" from Indian communities accomplished this. If reserve residents became increasingly mixed-blooded, the legislation would facilitate their enfranchisement, as individuals who were "too civilized" to be considered Indian. Lawrence (2004) argues, "when white women married Native men, they also produced "half-breed"

children, who nevertheless were allowed to stay in Native communities as Indians" (p. 52). These children were not considered mixed-blooded.

Thomas King (2012), a Native writer and advocate, argues that the Indian Act "does more than just define Legal Indians. It has been the main mechanism for controlling the lives and destinies of Legal Indians in Canada, and throughout the life of the act, amendments have been made to the original document to fine-tune this control" (p. 358). King (2003) has an interesting way of describing the Indian Act as "a magical piece of legislation that twists and slides through time, transforming itself and the lives of Native people at every turn" (p. 132). It defines who an Indian is and who an Indian is not with amendments that can make Indians "disappear in a twinkle" (p. 132).

Bill C-31 was passed in 1985, and is a piece of legislation that adds a subsequent layer to the identity puzzle for mixed-blood Aboriginal people in Canada. Before Bill C-31 was passed, women could gain or lose their status through marriage. If an Aboriginal woman married a non-Aboriginal man, she would lose her Indian status but if an Aboriginal man married a non-Aboriginal woman, she would gain Indian status. There is now a two-generation cut-off clause when Natives have children with non-Natives, meaning that this legislation will eventually lead to complete legal assimilation in a few generations (King, 2003, p. 143). Lawrence (2004) declares that the central feature of Bill C-31 is its divisiveness. This bill created categories of reinstatement resulting in a wide divergence of outcomes and therefore massively takes the power away from Native people. Also, by not addressing the gender issues of the past, it allows gender discrimination to continue today. Indian status is much harder to maintain and intermarriage is like a "ticking time bomb" (Lawrence, 2004, p. 67). Inevitably, Native people will eventually become extinct in a legal context.

It is a misconception that the Indian Act is a part of the past. Lawrence and Dua (2005) argue that, "the immediate problem facing Aboriginal peoples in Canada is that the status quo of a colonial order continues to target them for legal and cultural extinction, while undermining the viability of communities through theft of their remaining lands and resources" (p. 125). As the Indian Act is a dominant force that continues to identify Aboriginal people and has deeply affected how Aboriginal people see themselves, it is a lens through which I must view this inquiry.

Residential schooling and the 60's scoop.

Another significant factor contributing to the demise of Aboriginal people that directly resulted from internal colonialism was residential schools. Castellano (2002) describes the heartbreak of this piece of Aboriginal history:

> While poverty, powerlessness and breakdown of social order were taking hold in Aboriginal communities under the impact of colonial policy, Aboriginal children were simultaneously being removed to residential schools whose express purpose was to disrupt their ties with "savage" culture and, of necessity, their families. (p. 18)

Patrick Johnston coined the phrase the "sixties scoop" (Lawrence, 2004, p.112) to describe the massive removal of Aboriginal children by the provincial welfare authorities, as developed in the 1951 amendment to the Indian Act. As a result of the "sixties scoop" and residential schooling Aboriginal people have lost their capabilities in parenting skills (Castellano, 2002; Fournier & Crey, 1997; Kirmayer, Simpson & Cargo, 2003; LaRocque, 1996; Lawrence, 2004). Suzanne Fournier and Ernie Crey speak about the devastating effects of the tragic past of Aboriginal people in regards to residential schooling and the re-traumatization of losing their children to child welfare agencies:

> The numerous continuing issues in child welfare will not be resolved quickly. The trauma of deprivation and abuse is still taking its toll on children in the third generation. Aboriginal adults, cut off as children from their roots as a result of foster care and

> adoption placement, are seeking to re-connect with their origins, often without social and emotional support and with disappointing outcomes. (Fournier and Crey, 1997:104-110, RCAP, 1996:3:43-45)

Castellano (2002) states that the role of extended family on reserves today is being assumed in part by community services that have been borrowed from mainstream society. For example, though these services have attempted to adapt to reflect the culture of the community, the effects of colonialism remain present. "However, the notion of the caring, effective, extended family, coextensive with community, continues to be a powerful ideal etched deep in the psyche of Aboriginal people" (Castellano, 2002, p.16).

According to Statistics Canada (2001) 30% of Aboriginal peoples in Canada live on a reserve with a larger population of Aboriginal peoples living off reserve in cities or smaller rural locations. In the 1960's, significant numbers of Aboriginal people began to move to towns and cities in search of employment (Castellano, 2002; Kirmayer, Simpson & Cargo, 2003). Castellano (2002) states that reserves used to be for the most part homogeneous in their make-up, with the exception of status woman who married non-registered persons being required to leave their community and white women who married status men granted the ability to live on reserve as full status Indians. In future years, Castellano (2002) declares, the predicted growth of non-registered people living on reserve will increase, presenting a dilemma of increasing intensity for First Nations administrations and government policy makers in the next twenty years.

Mixed-race identities.

The complexities of defining identity are widely acknowledged across literature in multiple disciplines such as social sciences, humanities and religion (Anderson, 2001; King, 2003; Lindemann Nelson, 2001; Lawrence, 2004; Mihesuah, 1998; Waldram, 2004; Weaver, 2001). Kelly (2011) from the field of social sciences and more specifically, Cultural Studies, describes

identity as "an individual and collective self-perception, a lived experience, and a socio – political category under which groups forge communities, attain political rights, and seek empowerment" (p. 243). Lindemann Nelson (2001) describes identity as "the interaction of a person's self-conception with how others conceive her: identities are the understandings we have of ourselves and others" (p. 6). For the purpose of this inquiry, multiple ways of viewing identity are used in several different contexts. Mixed-race Aboriginal identity is the focus of this inquiry. The challenges of being mixed-race are explored through our stories. Zack (2001), a philosopher of mixed-race heritage, shares her perspective on the recognition of being mixed-race:

> The main problem with "race" in common sense is a failure to recognize that there is no biological basis for racial categories. But, since such common sense illusions about race exist (that is, race is a social fact, socially constructed and practiced and subsequently normalized), it is important to note that they have been accompanied by a general denial of official recognition of mixed-race identity. This denial has supported ungrounded notions of racial purity. If race is (falsely) believed to be real, then mixed-race ought to enjoy the same social status. Therefore, so long as beliefs in pure races persist in society, there would seem to be a need for a theoretical foundation that could be used for political and policy arguments that allow for the recognition of mixed-race identities. (p. 88)

Zack argues that if we have a notion of socially constructed races, then we also have a need for defining terms such as mixed-race, mixed-blood and hybridity.

Society maintains ideologies of racial/ethnic backgrounds and a need to categorize human beings. Mixed-blood people do not fit neatly into any category. For mixed-blood people, the lines become blurred when asked to choose one race to define themselves. Some participants shared the idea of having to choose and/or feelings of denying a heritage are shared in some of the participants' stories. Some participants expressed that being mixed-blood has hurt their self-worth and they shared feelings of shame. I explore the idea that racial categories are inflicted on mixed-blood people through our stories.

The ability to "pass" on one's identity.

Another phenomenon that is inherent to mixed-blood people is the ability to pass as being from or not from their ethnic group. If one chooses not to identify with their ethnic background they are said to "pass" on their ethnic identity. When one is mixed blood they may not have physically characteristics society would associate with a certain ethnic background. Mihesuah (1998) claims that some mixed-blood people might not have been exposed to their culture and have minimal negative feelings about their culture. He also claims that some mixed-blood people can "pass as white and can 'stay white' if they so choose" (p. 202). I certainly was able to pass as other ethnic backgrounds (Mexican, Italian). I was often asked what I "was" and I could choose to expose my Native background or not. Other mixed-blood Aboriginal scholars, such as King (2003) have stated that some Aboriginals are fortunate and *privileged* to pass as something other than Indian, and that one's Aboriginal identity can be chosen or avoided depending on the situation. Passing on one's identity is not limited to mixed-blood people but seems to be something that they have to contend with: the act of being "othered" (Said, 1978). Being something other than white means there is potential to be classified in some way.

Class, gender and location also mediate light-skinned privilege. As a middle-class woman, I have many privileges in society. I am viewed as successful for achieving a university degree and continuing my schooling. I am considered successful for being a teacher and having a stable job. I also have the privilege of a supportive white partner, which means I am part of a two-income home. It is my duty to be aware of these privileges and know that there are many people who do not share these privileges. I can choose to accept or reject my Native identity. If I choose, my Nativeness can be minimized or denied. King (2003) claims that middle-class

Indians can afford the burden of looking Indian (p. 60). He discusses the opposing view of what being middle class and Indian can bring:

> But if we are seen in that middle class or upper class way, if we are able to like some middle North American like to say, make something of ourselves…then you tell us we're a credit to our race, the implication being that the rest of our people are not. Or you divide us up into categories where those of us who have not been successful in that peculiar way that North America measures success are seen as authentic, while those of us who have become doctors and educators and artists and politicians and entrepreneurs are dismissed as counterfeit. (King, 2003, p. 148)

Self-identification vs. being identified.

Being mixed-blood and Aboriginal is complicated in many ways. There are cultural and social aspects. Kelly (2011) discusses the idea of self-identification of Aboriginal people:

> Indian identity is not defined by top-down legal definitions alone; it is a self-conception that arises out of material conditions and lived experiences. There are many individuals who identify as Indian, but do not conform to established criteria. Conversely, there are those who meet relevant blood quanta, yet are acculturated and do not identify as Indian (p. 244).

Aboriginal people in Canada are labeled as either status or non-status Indians. If one has the required amount of Indian blood then this is a choice, because one has to apply for status from the Canadian government. If one does not have enough Indian blood then one is legally labeled non-status. Outside of this legal aspect, the choice of identity lies within each individual. Mixed-blood people decide in which way they will present themselves to the world. Society also imposes on mixed-blood people. Kelly (2011) states that, "many scholars find that race is a construction contingent upon a confluence of historical and geographic factors, rather than any innate biological facts" (p. 246). Lopez (1994) claims that race refers to a "vast group of people loosely bound together by historically contingent, socially significant elements of their morphology and/or ancestry", setting aside biological meanings, "social meanings connect our faces to our souls" (p. 246).

Participants identified themselves as being mixed-blood and Aboriginal. In their stories they share how this identification process affected their everyday lives. Together we share stories of identification and the gray areas we find ourselves in with this process.

Capacity to Heal

I believe stories have a capacity to heal, because Aboriginal people must deal with the work of decolonization. Indigenous scholar, Margaret E. Kovach (2009) argues that "the function of a decolonial objective is to provide Indigenous researchers with a context-specific analytical tool for making visible contradictions and bringing Indigenous approaches out from the margins" (p. 82). Smith (1999) eloquently describes the *two major strands* of language used when speaking of colonization and also offers a definition of decolonization that I use in this inquiry:

> A constant reworking of our understandings of the impact of imperialism and colonialism is an important aspect of indigenous cultural politics and forms the basis of an indigenous language of critique. Within this critique there have been two major strands. One draws upon a notion of authenticity, of a time before colonization in which we were intact as indigenous peoples. We had absolute authority over our lives; we were born into and lived in a universe, which was entirely of our making. We did not ask, need or want to be 'discovered' by Europe. The second strand of the language of critique demands that we have an analysis of how we were colonized, of what that has meant in terms of our immediate past and what it means for our present and future. The two strands intersect but what is particularly significant in indigenous discourses is that solutions are posed from a combination of the time before, colonized time, and the time before that, pre-colonized time. Decolonization encapsulates both sets of ideas. (p. 25)

Kovach (2009) argues that, "the decolonizing embodiment is a holistically layered process where theoretical positioning intersects profoundly with the personal conflicts of navigating two distinct worlds" (p. 83). I try to balance these two worlds in chapter four by moving back and forth between the stories told and the voices of academia. Cree scholar Cam Willett shares his thoughts on this delicate balance, "It's these two worlds that we are living in. The one world you are honoured with the eagle feather and the other world you are honoured with the doctoral

degree" (as cited in, Kovach, 2009, p. 83). Kovach also argues that a decolonizing agenda must be present in all Indigenous research:

> No matter how it is positioned, a decolonizing agenda must be incorporated within contemporary colonial influence on Indigenous representation and voice in research. Furthermore, a decolonizing agenda is a forceful unifier that continues to shape our distinctive experience as an Indigenous collective. (p. 81)

Kovach (2009) also argues that using a decolonizing theoretical lens is suitable conceptually with Indigenous research. She states that, "in focusing on the 'how' and 'why' of a decolonizing lens within Indigenous inquiry, it is then possible to reflect upon the decolonizing embodiment experienced by Indigenous researchers holding dual accountabilities to divergent communities" (p. 80).

Stories that resist and push back against the colonial process help heal and repair broken identities. Lindemann Nelson (2001) argues that a "person's identity is twice damaged by oppression when she internalizes as a self-understanding that hateful or dismissive views that other people have of her" (p. 21). Aboriginal people internalize many stereotypes and racial oppression and sadly sometimes turn this on themselves. In this inquiry, I look at the stories that the participants tell and also offer counterstories for some stories. I also use counterstories told on behalf of the participants by scholars and other Indigenous writers.

With shared experience and co-creation of stories, our journeys can come together to retell our experiences as mixed-blood Aboriginal people. If storytelling can be seen as an art, then "…the effect of art in the dismantling of colonial stereotype is powerful, both for the artist, and in a political sense for a 'lived' society…there is a strong connection between art as a creative process and the healing of self" (Barton, 2004, p. 6).

Resistance and decolonization.

Resistance is a part of the decolonization framework. Aboriginal people need to resist many things such as stereotypes, racialization and identification. Resistance can work through the stories one chooses to tell and believe. Smith (1999) argues that "Indigenous people… have other stories to tell which not only question the assumed nature of those ideals and the practices that they generate, but also serve to tell an alternative story: the history of Western research through the eyes of the colonized" (p. 2). Stonebanks and Wooton (2008) from their work with the Mianscum family, stress the importance of "…being conscious and accountable of your own "honesty" and "truth", in whatever conceptual form that takes" (p. 49). I respect these scholars' views, consciously aware to remain honest and true throughout the writing and data analysis process.

I use a resistance strategy by employing counterstories. Smith (1999) describes counterstories as "powerful forms of resistance which are repeated and shared across diverse Indigenous communities" (p. 2). She argues that pulling apart a story, exposing the text and sharing things that are often known intuitively can provide words and insights into experiences. Smith argues that:

> it is surely difficult to discuss *research methodology* and *indigenous peoples* together, in the same breath, without having an analysis of imperialism, without understanding the complex ways in which the pursuit of knowledge is deeply embedded in the multiple layers of imperial and colonial practices. (1999, p. 2)

Kovach (2009) argues that, "stories of resistance inspire generations about the strength of the culture… Thus the stories, and the content that they carry, must be shared with this appreciation to protect them from exploitation or appropriation" (Kovach, 2009, p. 103). She further states that using stories in inquiry means the researcher must accept the guardianship of bringing these stories into academia at that given moment in time.

Anderson (2001) speaks of what Aboriginal people need to resist against, "the struggle then, becomes a struggle against the systems, policies and institutions that were enforced upon us by the colonizer" (p. 56). I use the capacity of stories as a lens to resist the oppressive factors that participants shared in regards to their mixed-blood identities.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I shared the decolonizing framework that I use as a lens to view the stories of the mixed-blood Aboriginal participants. I presented a diagram to help organize my thinking. In the next chapter, I discuss the Indigenous methodologies I use to frame this inquiry. In Chapter Four, I demonstrate ways in which stories can hurt and heal and share resistance stories and counterstories.

Chapter Three: Indigenous Methodologies

> As the twentieth century unfolds to a new millennium, many voices and forums are converging to form a new perspective on knowledge. Many of these voices belong to the Indigenous people who have survived European colonization and cognitive imperialism. They represent the thoughts and experiences of the people of the Earth whom Europeans have characterized as primitive, backward, and inferior – the colonized and dominated people of the last five centuries. The voices of these victims of empire, once predominantly silenced in the social sciences, have been not only resisting colonization in thought and actions but also attempting to restore Indigenous knowledge and heritage. (Battiste, 2000, p. 26)

Introduction

The voices of Aboriginal people have been silenced for a long time. Marie Battiste (2000) argues that it is through a harmonious blending of Indigenous knowledge with Eurocentric knowledge that steps toward healing and restoration of dignity for Aboriginal people can occur (p. 16). In this chapter I discuss Indigenous methodologies (Denzin, Lincoln & Smith, 2008; Smith, 1999) and the importance of using these methodologies for my inquiry. I discuss Smith's (2000) recommendations for scholars who conduct research for and with mixed-blood Aboriginal people. I describe the process and important tenets of narratology, autoethnography and dialogical narrative analysis. I describe my data collection process and the four participants and their contexts.

I obtained ethical approval to conduct this inquiry from McGill University. This qualitative study immersed me in the stories of four mixed-blood Aboriginal participants. I present the participant stories and my own stories in Chapter Four. The stories offer windows into the lives of mixed-blood Aboriginal people.

Indigenous Methodologies

Indigenous methodologies can be defined as "research by and for Indigenous peoples, using techniques and methods drawn from the traditions and knowledges of those peoples"

(Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 10).

As a mixed-blood Aboriginal person, I feel it is paramount to do this research with and for mixed-blood Aboriginal people. Smith (1999) states that Indigenous methodology:

> is concerned not so much with the actual technique of selecting a method but much more with the context in which research problems are conceptualized and designed, and with the implications of research for its participants and their communities. (p. 9)

My purpose is to discuss the stories that the participants feel define their identity. Over three sessions, we discussed our thoughts and shared our stories and feelings about our experiences with being mixed-blood Aboriginal.

I do not speak on behalf of my participants; I used a collaborative storytelling approach in which I aimed to have the participants retain a sense of ownership of their stories. I did not tell their stories *for* them but provided an opportunity for them to share their stories. I use an Indigenous methodology and qualitative methodologies such as autoethnography to ensure that I respect my participants' stories with respect throughout the research process. Kovach (2009) states that Indigenous research frameworks "shift the power of the researcher in controlling the research process and outcome" (p. 82). She argues a "powerful method for achieving this desire is the use of story, life history, oral history…and other processes that allow participants to share their experiences on their terms" (p. 82). Smith (2000) poses eight important questions that any researcher engaging in Indigenous methodologies should answer prior to undertaking any research involving Indigenous participants. Throughout my inquiry, I was cognizant of these questions:

1. What research do we want done?
2. Whom is it for?
3. What difference will it make?
4. Who will carry it out?

5. How do we want the research done?
6. How will we know it is worthwhile?
7. Who will own the research?
8. Who will benefit? (p. 239)

These questions guided me in thinking critically throughout the process while I engaged with the participants and their stories and shared my own stories. With Indigenous methodologies, it is important to view the research through multiple lenses such as: imperialism and colonialism. Smith (1999) discusses the importance of framing research with the understanding of imperialism and colonial practices:

> While it is more typical (with the exception of feminist research) to write about research within the framing of a specific scientific or disciplinary approach, it is surely difficult to discuss *research methodology* and *indigenous peoples* together, in the same breath, without having an analysis of imperialism, without understanding the complex ways in which the pursuit of knowledge is deeply embedded in the multiple layers of imperial and colonial practices. (p. 2)

Kincheloe and Steinberg (2008) state that with, "…our multi-logical understanding of Indigenous knowledge, we maintain that all identities are historically constructed, always in process, constantly dealing with intersections involving categories of status, religion, race, class and gender" (p. 143) and language. Dunbar (2008) argues that:

> Indigenous scholars and critical race theorists reject the notion of one truth. They argue that there are multiple ways of knowing, depending on whose lens is used. The notion of objectivity as evidence of truth is deemed invalid. They challenge the immorality of subjugation and the concept that a "racelessness" society can exist. (p. 96)

I agree with Dunbar's perspective that a raceless society does not exist. My lived experiences as a mixed-blood Aboriginal person support this assumption. I have often felt tension because of my skin colour. Many people see my colour as a difference and make me aware of my brownness, often by asking the question "what are you?" As a researcher I cannot help

but be conscious of race and ethnicity. Race and ethnicity, with particular interest in mixed-bloodedness, are the focus of what I am doing and how I frame my stories.

Indigenous scholars argue that the design of research is important and that there are many lenses through which research can be undertaken. I use a decolonizing framework (Smith, 1999) to guide this inquiry. I agree with Stonebanks (2008) that one must decolonize "our minds and methods" (p. 67) in the hopes of producing something of value. I integrate methodologies and draw from several perspectives of inquiry (e.g.,Wolcott, 1992) in response to my research questions. I chose methodologies such as narratology and counterstory that focus on the importance of story and complement Indigenous methodologies.

Narrative and identity.

Barton (2004) argues that narrative is a methodology that fits well with Indigenous methodologies:

> As a methodology congruent with Aboriginal epistemology, narrative inquiry could be about witnessing an insurgent effort by Aboriginal people to reclaim confidence in their identities, regain a political voice, and heal from colonial injustices of the past. (p. 7)

Kovach (2009) argues that "story as methodology is decolonizing research" (pg. 103). The use of stories is a powerful methodology for Indigenous research. Stories are how we relate to each other and share our experiences. Bruner (1991) argues that stories are a way in which we organize our experiences and memory of our lives. We retell our lives through stories; we live our lives through stories. Stories are not only a way of constructing human experience but also provide a guide for using the mind, guided by the use of an enabling language (Bruner, 1991; Frank, 2010).

Bruner (2004) claims that there is no other way to describe "lived time" than through the use of stories. Ochs and Capp (1996) state that stories, "…illuminate life as we know it by raising challenging questions and exploring them from multiple angles" (p. 23). We explore stories using multiple voices and truths as well. Frank (2010) claims "stories have the capacity to balance multiple truths" (p. 41). In Bakhtin's sense of "blending multiple voices into a harmony in which they never entirely merge but retain some distinctiveness – the greater the capacity of stories to tell the truth" (Frank, 2010, p. 41). Mishler (2004) states that, "…people story their lives differently depending on the occasion, audience, and reason for the telling" (p. 101). He believes that we retell many versions of our stories. I believe that each time we tell a story, it changes because we change in the telling of it. Sometimes stories are for performance and other times are more connected to our emotions. The power of storytelling comes in many voices and sharing of multiple ways of knowing the world. Stories are the backdrops for our lives.

Polkinghorne (2005) states that "the purpose of the exploration of remembered events is not to produce accurate recalls but to provide an occasion for reflection on the meaning these events have for the participant" (p. 143). Bruner (1991) shares that narrative "truth" is judged by its plausibility and not by its "verifiability" (p. 13). He claims that:

> narrative constructions can only achieve verisimilitude. Narratives, then, are a version of reality whose acceptability is governed by convention and narrative necessity rather than by empirical verification and logical requiredness. (Bruner, 1991, p. 5)

Narratives can provide opportunities to give meaning to lives through story (Frank, 2010; Andrews, Squire & Tambokou, 2008) and focus on the function of stories and storytelling in creating identity (Bochner, 2012). I used a narrative methodology to invite participants to share their stories. I invited participants to tell their stories in as little or as much detail as they could. During our sessions we explored their experiences related to their

mixed-blood Aboriginal heritage. I probed and asked relevant questions to get the participants to elaborate and add more details where possible.

I focused on the participants' perceptions of the meanings that they attached to their experiences, the ways that their stories were constructed and communicated, and the purpose of their stories (Trahar, 2009, Frank, 2010). I hope that my writing invites readers into conversations with the stories and memories that their stories reveal. Ochs and Capps (1996) regard stories as the place where self and society converge steeped in emotions, attitudes and identities, where relationships develop and membership into communities is created. I would argue where membership is or is *not* created. Membership is not created when members of a community try to make others not feel welcome or excluded.

Trahar (2009) suggests that, rather than asking a series of questions, one should invite participants to tell stories that are meaningful for them. The stories that the four participants perceive to be important became evident to me during our sharing sessions and jumped out of at me during our exchanges. For example, one participant shared a story about a racist joke that a colleague sent to all the staff in her organization via their work e-mail account. I could tell that this had great significance to her as she appeared upset and declared that she had "*sent an email to everyone saying that it was totally inappropriate*". The emotional manner in which she told the story demonstrated to me her perceived importance of the information she was sharing.

Critical personal narrative and counterstory.

In this inquiry, I use counterstory to interact, discuss and reflect on the participants' stories. Counterstories are stories that resist and push back against whatever the teller of the counterstory wants to oppose and respond to. "Critical personal narratives are

counternarratives, testimonies, autoethnographies, performance texts, stories, and accounts that disrupt and disturb discourse by exposing the complexities and contradictions that exist under official history" (Mutua & Swadener, 2004, p.16). Lindemann Nelson (2001) describes these critical narratives as a "counterstory – a story that resists an oppressive identity and attempts to replace it with one that commands respect" (p. 6). As Mutua and Swadener (2004) argue, the counterstory is a central genre of contemporary decolonization writing, as it is used to criticize "prevailing structures and relationships of power and inequality in a relational context" (p. 16).

Counterstories explore the "intersections of gender and voice, border crossing, dual consciousness, multiple identities, and selfhood in a … post-colonial and post-modern world" (Mutua & Swadener, 2004, p.16). The counterstory can position itself against the "master narratives: the stories found lying about in our culture that serve as summaries of socially shared understandings" (Lindemann Nelson, 2001, p.6). I used counterstory as a way to push back against the stereotypes and categorization of Aboriginal people. I shared some of my reflections during the data collection process with the participants.

Here is an excerpt of one of my reflections that I shared with Dakota at the beginning of our second session. I talk about my feelings of being mixed-blood and my connection to my mother:

Crystal: **"***We talked a little bit last time about the history of our family, the history of Mom and Dad's marriage and a little bit of your school memories. For myself, I connect a lot my Nativeness with Mom because we got it from her and at points in my life, I feel like I blamed her for it and would get angry at her that I would have to be in brown skin and didn't feel connected to it and I blamed her for not sharing culture with me and that this messed me up. People expected that knowledge from me and I didn't know it, but I kind of learned that I have to come to it myself. That was the start of my thesis journey and, I don't know if you feel the same, or how you feel about it, all I know is the more I learn about the history of Aboriginal people the more I*

> *forgive her and the more I learn about myself"* (personal reflection journal, August 9, 2013).

Reflection was a very important part of my journey. As an educator, reflective practice is a natural part of my teaching practices. I applied the same concepts I use in the classroom while completing this thesis. The model I was introduced to through my personal professional development defines reflective practice as "encouraging critical thinking, reexamination, interaction, professional acts that are consistent with the change, and analysis of these acts" (Lafortune, Lepage, Persechino, Bélanger, & Aitken, 2009, p. 21). I kept a reflective journal and engaged in reflective practice throughout my entire Master's program.

In sharing our reflections on our stories, I felt we were able to go deeper into the stories and give more detail; sometimes, counterstories naturally came out of this process. I had to be a reflective, critical thinker to get at the counterstories and to contradict and tell another version of the story. I had to step back from the story to realize the oppression that was deeply ingrained.

Autoethnography.

I used autoethnography as a methodology for my inquiry. Scholars who use this type of narrative methodology in human inquiry describe and analyze personal experiences to understand cultural experiences (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2010; Trahar, 2009; Reed-Donahay, 1997). Adams and Holman Jones (2008) describe autoethnography as "…the push and pull between and among analysis evocation, personal experience and larger social, cultural, and political concerns " (p. 374). The focus of mixed-bloodedness, ethnicity, and identity are key to my inquiry. Ellis and Bochner (2000) define autoethnography as a:

> genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural. Back and forth autoethnographers gaze, first through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and

> cultural aspects of the personal experience; then they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract and resist cultural interpretations. (p. 739)

I was conscious of and adhered to the principles that Maguire (2006) shares in response to Bakhtin's concept of authoring as a creative/ answerability/responsibility, "the need for researchers to confront issues of voice, consciousness, emotionality and answerability/responsibility in authoring self and others" (p. 346). Thus, it was pivotal to create and establish relationships with the participants in which they felt safe and able to share their stories. Maguire (2006) argues that "...a dialogic view of authoring entails being responsive to the voices of others" (p. 344). In the process of autoethnography, being responsive and having a relationship with the participants is key to the sharing and creation of a story. She also states that autoethnography can challenge traditional epistemologies about whose voices are expressed and recognized (p. 340). These principles are of particular importance to Indigenous methodologies. "Indigenists resist the positivist and postpositivist methodologies of Western science because these formations are too frequently used to validate colonizing knowledge about indigenous peoples… These strategies emphasize personal performance narratives and *testimonios*" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 11). Indigenous people need to tell and/or write and research for Indigenous peoples first and for others.

In the next excerpt, I believe my relationship with Jack facilitated his ease with sharing his perspective. This excerpt emerged from a session in which Jack and I spoke about the difficult conditions that Aboriginal people in the downtown core of Winnipeg, face and his feelings about this situation.

Crystal: *"Do you feel it's more because Aboriginal people are viewed so negatively by society? We have so many issues and burdens that affect us. It takes work sometimes to stay positive."*

Jack: *"That's definitely a big part of it and even as I get older, it becomes even more apparent. Growing up in a small town, I didn't get to see what a lot of the Aboriginal people in Winnipeg are living like. Now that I see the situation, it's hard to see this. There are a large majority of the Aboriginal population who are living in the streets and I find it really difficult to connect with that. I don't blame people but it's hard not to attach a negative connotation to people that live that way."* J.V., (2013) Interviewed by C. Rattai. [tape recording]

Here is an example of a counterstory to Jack's story: I feel Jack has learned to associate negative stereotypical views of Aboriginal people as being homeless and living in poverty, as it is one of the few experiences he has with Aboriginal people living in Manitoba. I also had negative feelings about my Aboriginal heritage when I lived in Manitoba, rather than having empathy and compassion. I blamed the race rather than looking at the person in front of me. I do not feel good about this and it is something I had to admit, face and reflect upon in writing this thesis. Bonita Lawrence (2004) explains that some "…individuals were taught to maintain silence about Indianness as children, as a strategy for survival in hostile environments – the muting effects of a legacy of racial terror, or through learning to associate Nativeness with poverty, degradation, and shame" (p. 260).

I used counterstories to analyze and interpret the participants' stories. I reflected and responded to the stories through writing in order to look for deeper meanings. I was conscious of the lenses I was looking through such as race, ethnicity and gazing more broadly at history and the effects of colonialism.

In my inquiry, I was reflexive, asked questions and looked for meaning within the stories, knowing that "the truths of stories can never be stable truths" (Bochner, 2012, p. 161). Therefore, in my analysis I searched for meaning and social context.

Bochner (2012) states that we see in the past only what is important for the present, and important for the instant in which we remember our past. Narrative analysis treats stories as the ongoing work of enacting or performing memory. Stories give memories recency, salience and emotional impact. I looked for the balance between content and the events being narrated. I looked further at what the stories mean; the perceived meanings by the participants, and what master narrative is being told. After this, I decided which counterstories I could tell.

Background and Positioning of Researcher

My background as a mixed-blood Aboriginal woman, Bill C-31 status Indian, of Upper Mohawk and German descent, combined with the geographical, historical, social, cultural and economic contexts that have located me in the past and present. As well my positions of gender, age, class and sexuality, shape my assumptions and the approach that I bring to this study. My mixed-blood background is the reason that I began this journey and it influences the kind of participants that I sought out and connected with for this inquiry. I was not raised on a reserve, but instead in a small rural town in Manitoba. I do not know much about my Mohawk heritage. Instead, I learned and participated in the German culture of my family, as this was all that I was exposed to.

I know most of the participants in some way or another, as family, friends or through personal connections. During our sessions, I had to make an effort to avoid making assumptions about the participants and their experiences. In some of the interactions we

shared I probably reflected my interpretations and assumptions based on my experiences. For example, some of the stories I shared with the participants were about my elementary school experiences, which may have led them into sharing stories of their own experiences in school. I shared these stories because I felt that my school experience had a profound impact on my life and the way I came to see myself as Aboriginal. I chose the stories I shared with participants because they impacted my life as a mixed-blood Aboriginal person.

I am a teacher and have taught elementary school for 14 years. Four years were spent in Manitoba and ten years in Quebec. My teaching experience shapes how I interpreted the participants' stories. Depending on the stories told, I would view them from my mixed-race background and/or from the perspective of an educator. My background guided and influenced some of my questions and curiosities in our story sessions.

Research Context and Participants

I invited four mixed-blood Aboriginal people to share their stories using narrative inquiry to demonstrate that, although there may be similarities and differences between them, all of the stories are valid in defining Aboriginal identity. Two men and two women identified themselves as mixed-blood Aboriginal. I focused on how they identified themselves and how they perceive their identification to influence their lives. The more important question emerging was: How did living as a mixed-blood Aboriginal person in a colonial, racialized society influence their identities?

I was open to selecting any mixed-blood Aboriginal participants during the data collection period but preferred to choose participants with whom I had some kind of rapport or relationship with prior to the inquiry. I found that having a personal connection with the participants helped them feel comfortable in sharing their personal stories with me as

opposed to sharing information with a stranger. The criteria for participant selection included: people who identified themselves as mixed-blood and Aboriginal, and who were willing to share their life stories. Polkinghorne (2005) declares that the focus of selection is not as much on individuals but on the accounts of an experience that they can share (p. 141). The willingness to share their stories is also a very important aspect of choosing participants. Polkinghorne (2005) declares:

> It is the interviewer's task to help in unpacking an experience and gaining access to deeper levels and more nuanced descriptions of the experience… qualitative interviewing cannot be reduced to a set of techniques or instructions, rather, it relies on the skilled judgment of the interviewer to move the conversation along. (p. 143)

In order to be as skilled and confident as possible in my interactions with participants, I practised with a colleague prior to my meetings. Asking someone to share life stories can be a delicate process, depending on the comfort level of a participant.

Data Collection and Tools of Inquiry

We remember stories because they have impacted us in some way. In the next excerpt, Jack speaks about how some events from his past are much more significant than others. He describes an incident in elementary school that stayed with him.

Jack: *"Things like that still stick with me. I can't remember most of my childhood but these specific events, I do. I can remember exactly how they happened."* J.V., (2013) Interviewed by C. Rattai. [tape recording]

I invited each person to speak freely and in as much detail as they wished. I chose to meet each participant on an individual basis rather than in a group setting. I predicted some of the stories they may share could be very personal and I wanted to ensure they felt comfortable sharing them.

Polkinghorne (2005) states that gathering data with participants depends on their ability to reflectively and effectively communicate their experiences. The data being collected is not

always easy to gather and at times "the researcher is required to dig below the surface to bring up experiential accounts" (p. 142) with the participant. Polkinghorne (2005) states that quality and in-depth data requires multiple sessions with participants:

> Too often, interview-produced data contain only initial reflections of participants without explorations into the depth and breadth of the experience. In order to obtain interview data of sufficient quality to produce worthwhile findings, researchers need to engage with participants in more than a one-shot, 1-hr session; they need to attend to establishing a trusting, open relationship with the participant and to focus on the meaning of the participant's life experiences rather than on the accuracy of his or her recall. (p. 142)

Prior to the first meeting with each person, I contacted each individual via telephone or in person to set up a place and time to meet. I e-mailed each person one of my written texts from my journal to introduce myself and share a sense of what we would be talking about. This next excerpt is a portion of the e-mail I sent to the participants:

> *The first time my differences detrimentally affected me was when I started going to school. Elementary school was a negative experience for me. I was identified early on as a 'problem' child. I was pulled from class for extra resource help and speech therapy. I did not have any speech difficulties, although, I remember spending part of my day one-on-one with a kind-hearted resource teacher. To this day, I enunciate extremely well. I was ostracized and made aware of my differences, as I was one of a few children pulled from class on a regular basis. I struggled with reading and math and did not perceive myself as a reader until the fourth grade. It was in that year that I connected with one of my teachers for the first time. Up until then, I was afraid of teachers and I have abhorrent memories of being shouted at, told I was dirty, and even once called a liar in front of the class. I was terribly shy and introverted, afraid to speak up and ask for help or basic needs (e.g. going to the washroom). School was not a happy place for me. In the first few years of my education, I learned more about racism than the curriculum. We often have this mistaken idea that childhood is a time of innocence and joy, of being untainted by toxins like racism, though young people have fully formed ideas of who they are and how they are perceived in the socio-cultural structure by the early primary grades.* (Crystal Rattai, personal journal, August, 2012)

I developed a rapport with the participants quickly as I knew them in some way prior to our sessions. I intended to be empathetic, non-judgmental, concerned, compassionate and emotionally responsive during our sessions. I also tried to build trust by sharing some of my

personal stories, such as the time, while working in Manitoba, I was asked at a regional team meeting by the school board superintendant to speak on behalf of *"my people"*. The superintendant wanted me to list all the issues and needs related to *"my people"* to a room full of dominantly white professionals. It was clear I was the token Indian meant to disseminate my knowledge for their discussion. Stories such as this helped the participants get to know me better and also helped to encourage them to share their stories with me.

The first time I met with the participants, I gave them a written consent form, read it over with them, and explained each section entirely. I informed them that they could withdraw from the inquiry at any time during the research process without consequence. Once the consent form was signed, I asked participants to share their experiences. I shared some of my own stories and experiences of being mixed-blood and Aboriginal as well. Between the first and second session, I gave a copy of the recording of our session to the participants so that they could listen to it and verify, and add to or delete content. The amount of time between sessions was dependent on the participant's schedule, but was usually no longer than a few days. Between the first and second sessions, I gave the participant time to reflect and think about their life experiences. As travel distance was an issue, the second session was held via telephone. I verified the accuracy of the stories with the participants and clarified meanings and/or interpretations. At this point, participants added or deleted any information they chose. I gave participants the opportunity to select what to share with me and in this thesis.

I recorded our first and second sessions using a laptop with a plan to delete all digitally recorded data from my laptop as soon as it is no longer needed. I stored the data collected on a memory stick. The data is stored in two separate places in locked cabinets.

During the process, I informed the participants that they could stop the conversation, stop the digital recording, or withdraw from the study at any time. I informed them that their stories would be used to learn from and to build upon, and to increase understanding of issues related to mixed-blood Aboriginal people. After each session, I wrote reflective notes of my impressions regarding the participants' stories.

The following excerpt is an example of the reflective notes I took after on session with Jack. I was sad and discouraged by the shame he felt for his Aboriginal identity. I was also trying to understand why he had such negative feelings about himself and toward Aboriginal people in Winnipeg:

> *My heart poured out to him. I remember having many of the feelings he shared: shame, sadness, heartbreak. Winnipeg has a large population of Aboriginal people who are struggling, I would hazard a guess most homeless people in the downtown core of Winnipeg are Aboriginal. They move to the city often from isolated northern communities and their life seems to take a turn for the worst. It is a very difficult situation and people in Winnipeg are pretty intolerant of it. There is definitely some racialization happening here… like homelessness is not a problem in Winnipeg but an Aboriginal problem in Winnipeg and Jack has sadly internalized this.* (Crystal Rattai, reflective notes, August 2013)

Should a participant have experienced a heightened level of emotional distress and required further debriefing of their emotional issues, I offered to refer them to a certified therapist or mental health worker.

Confidentiality.

I made every effort to ensure confidentiality and anonymity to the participants. They had the opportunity to decide which parts of their personal information I added or deleted from my thesis. I used fictitious names for the participants. As most participants came from the same small rural town, fictitious names were also used for any people they discussed in

their stories. I offered to mail a copy of my thesis to the participants of the study if they were interested in receiving a copy.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I explained Indigenous methodologies, critical personal narratives, and counterstory as methodologies that I used for my qualitative inquiry. I emphasized the importance of using Indigenous methodologies to share and analyze stories. I listed guiding questions that helped support my thinking while doing research with Indigenous people. I positioned myself as a researcher and described the tools for data collection for my mixed-blood Aboriginal participants' stories. In Chapter Four, I share the stories selected by the participants, my own personal stories and include counterstories to some of the stories shared.

Chapter Four: Stories and Counterstories

> Urban mixed-blood Native people are *not* extraneous to Indigenous communities…they represent the other half of a history of colonization, the children and grandchildren of people removed, dispersed, and continuously bled off from Native communities as a result of ongoing colonization policies… (Lawrence, 2004, p. 14)

Introduction

In this chapter, the four participants shared their stories of being mixed-blood Aboriginal. I weave their stories of identity, geographic location, school experiences and racialization with my stories and the knowledge of Aboriginal scholars and writers. I use these particular four themes because I found these themes common to all our stories; they were not pre-determined. Each participant shared stories about their identities and school experiences with passion, and these experiences impacted our identities. Two of the participants shared poignant stories of racialization that led to reflection on their identities. The geographic location of the participants was a common theme, as each participant discussed where they lived and the impact it had on their identities. All four themes highlighted from the data are interdependent on one another.

Our voices give multiple perspectives into the lives of mixed-blood Aboriginal people. I also share counterstories; some are from voices within academia and others from the participants and myself. I share the counterstories following the particular participant stories that the counterstory connects and relates to. These stories will be labeled with headings to clearly distinguish them from the participants' stories.

My Mixed-blood Aboriginal Identity

My story begins long before I was born. My father met my mother when he moved to Toronto, Ontario in his early twenties. He was going to school to become an electrician and she lived in Oshweken. It was a whirlwind courtship. They got married in 1966. I do not think these were easy times for mixed-race couples to marry. This was especially true for my mom, as

intermarriage meant she lost her Indian status and all the rights that came along with possessing status. After about a year of living with family in Oshweken, they moved to Manitoba and began their life there. That move was a decision that they surely did not take lightly, but my dad had found a good job in construction and needed to support his family. I believe my mother always wanted to move back to Oshweken. However, as time passed, that never became a reality for her. The reality of losing her Indian status also meant that she could not really ever go back there to stay as a member of the Grand River First Nation.

After marrying my father, due to the regulations stated in the Indian Act, my mother was no longer permitted to live in her home community. She was not permitted to own or inherit property. She knew that her children could not be recognized as Indian and would be denied access to the cultural and social amenities of her community. My mother would not be allowed to return to live with her family on the reserve under any circumstance, even if she were in dire need, very ill, a widow, or separated. The Indian Act heightened colonial regulations for Indian women in general. Native women who married non-Native men were considered enfranchised. Marrying my father came with many consequences for my mother, as she lost her Indian status and along with it, her culture; as a result so did her children. With all these regulations having an impact on her life, I believe her choice to give up her Aboriginal culture was both tragic and thrust upon her. I am distressed that a law enacted in 1876, to enfranchise women who "marry out" of their reserve, has the ability to affect my culture and identity.

My mother and her children regained Indian status following Bill C-31 in 1985. I ask myself how much Aboriginal culture I might be able to pass on to my family. With little knowledge of the culture or connection to an Aboriginal community, how possible and realistic could sharing an Aboriginal identity be? Having a primarily oral tradition of transcending

culture, how much can be learned if the culture is not shared and lived through the generations? If I choose to learn about my culture, I must do research and find what is written, relying on someone else's frame of reference. Equal to formal schooling, family is the most influential teacher. Families should have first-hand knowledge of their culture. Once language and cultural knowledge are lost, it propels the degradation of a culture. What does loss of culture mean for the future of Aboriginal people? I now share my sister's perspective on my parent's marriage.

Dakota's Perspective on My Parents' Marriage

Dakota is my older sister. She is in her mid-forties and identifies as a mixed-blood Aboriginal woman of German and Mohawk descent. She lives in a small town in rural Manitoba. For most of her life she was a single parent to three boys. She has had a range of work and life experiences that offer unique perspectives. Dakota has her Master's degree in Nursing from the University of Manitoba. She has worked for many years in a hospital setting, in many Aboriginal communities as a public health nurse and many years as a Primary Health Care Manager. It is very fitting that she has chosen a job in the health care field as she has been taking care of us all her life. Dakota and I share a strong bond and have spoken many times prior to this inquiry about our Aboriginal heritage and our work experiences in First Nations communities. She has lived this Master's degree with me and was naturally very interested in participating and sharing her stories to be a part of it.

She tells a different version of our parent's marriage than I do. Dakota's placement in our family enables her to remember more as she has experienced more than I have. Each child in a family lives a different experience and has a different perspective on the family story. Lawrence (2004) explains that the stories individuals tell about their parents' cultural loss in their family might not accurately express the full range of the family members' experiences. Gender, class, age, and

position in the family are some of the factors that influence how family members experience Native identity or learn about culture growing up, as illustrated by Dakota's recount of my parent's wedding day.

Dakota: *"Right. I remember one thing she did tell me. Dad was white and German. He had white hair and curly hair when he was born and his parents were both German. Very strong Lutheran German upbringing in the family. Dad went up to Brantford, Ontario, to go to post-secondary education. He was going to be an electrician so he went to this college and met Mom at a bar. They went out as a group. They decided to get married and so they had never been home (Beausejour, Manitoba). So they're getting married and Mom has never met Dad's family. So Grandma and my Dad's sister decide that they are going to come to the wedding. They fly out to Toronto and go to Brantford. It's a big shindig. They get there and they realize, at the 23rd hour, that Mom is full-blooded Native. My Dad didn't think to mention that to his family. The day before their wedding, my Grandma is in the room crying, obviously upset, and my Aunt is saying all this slanderous crap about my Mom and my Dad is saying "It's okay" and trying to smooth things over because he was always a people pleaser kind of person. Then my Mom's brothers were saying to her "Just say the word, and you're out of here. We can walk out. You don't have to do this."* D.R., (2013) Interviewed by C. Rattai. [tape recording]

I cannot imagine getting married under such emotional and racially charged circumstances. I cannot imagine my mother-in-law crying because I was Native. What an upsetting way to start a life together. However, they had a long and happy marriage that lasted 47 years, until my father passed away. As I recall, the relationship between my grandparents and my mother was always pleasant. My mother cared greatly for them and they did for her. We spent every Sunday night supper with them and most of my happy childhood memories centered around being with them on the farm. Without my sister's input, I would never have guessed my parents began their lives together in such a traumatic way. In learning about my mother's history, I have come to appreciate the magnitude of her choices and how difficult those choices must have been.

Participants and Their Contexts

Four people chose to share their stories with me: Dakota, Rand, Jack and Theresa. Each defines them self as mixed-blood Aboriginal and elaborates on this definition and identity in their stories. Jack is a mixed-blood Aboriginal man living in Winnipeg, Manitoba. He is in his mid-twenties and grew up in a small rural Manitoba town with a similar background to the small town I grew up in. There was little diversity in his life prior to moving to Winnipeg. Jack has recently completed his Master's degree specializing in School Psychology at the University of Manitoba and is working as a school psychologist in Winnipeg. I have known Jack for many years. We have not spoken often about our mixed-blood heritage and this inquiry offered an opportunity for us to share these stories with each other.

Theresa is a mixed-blood Aboriginal woman in her mid-twenties. She lived on a small reserve outside of Winnipeg for most of her elementary and high school life. After graduation from high school, she moved to Winnipeg. Theresa has recently completed a health care aid course and is looking forward to working in this field. I met Theresa through a friend and we have spent some time together at various social gatherings such as dinner parties, weddings and birthday parties. Prior to this inquiry, Theresa and I had never spoken about our mixed-blood Aboriginal identities. When she heard about my thesis, she was very interested and volunteered to participate. Theresa identifies as Lebanese-Syrian and Ojibwa. She offers a unique perspective, with her Middle Eastern background and shares some insights on this as well.

Rand is a mixed-blood Aboriginal man, in his mid-forties. Similar to the other participants, he grew up in a small town setting in rural Manitoba. He graduated from high school, went to university for one year, and then decided to work in construction. I have known Rand for many years. He is a close friend and was my roommate in university. When hearing about this inquiry, Rand was interested and volunteered to share his stories. He is now working

in Alberta with many Aboriginal people and offers stories from his experiences living in Alberta as well. In the next section I share the participants stories of identity.

Stories of Identity

I asked the participants to share some of their experiences with mixed-blood Aboriginal identity and what this identity has meant to them. In this excerpt, Jack and I discuss his mixed-blood background and his feelings about this. Jack has a difficult time identifying as an Aboriginal person and shares how he defines this identity for other people when asked.

Jack: *"Well, when I think about my identity as an Aboriginal person, one of the first things that I think about is… (pause) Well, I have darker skin and I guess I have the appearance of an Aboriginal person. So I always get the question from friends or whoever, it could be someone I meet for the first time. They'll always ask me "What are you?" or "What's your background?" I get that question quite often and I've got mixed blood. I'm part Aboriginal but I'm also half French and part German as well. So when people ask me a question like that, the first thing I'll say is "Oh, well I'm French." Then they'll say something like "Are you just French?" and I'll say "I'm also German" and telling people that I'm part Aboriginal is always the last thing that I tell people. I always say that I'm half French, I'm also German, and I'm a little bit Aboriginal. I'll always say something like that as if it's a very small part of me. It's something I've always done growing up and something I still do to this day. Why? I'm not sure why I do that, it's just something I've always done. When I think about it, maybe it's just because I'm ashamed. It's the first thing I think is that I'm ashamed at that part of my heritage. It's the reason why I'll say it last. And I really don't know why I do that."*

Crystal: *"Maybe it's because it's not always safe to define ourselves, I think. Because, especially if it's a new person, you don't know their viewpoint on Aboriginal people so it's kind of right out there and you have to step right out there and you don't know if they are going to be rude about it or polite about it. It's sort of a risky question, I find. I don't always trust people's intentions in asking the question, I guess. I have been mistreated too many times in the past."*

Jack: *"Yeah… it's a loaded question."* J.V., (2013) Interviewed by C. Rattai. [tape recording]

Jack chooses to highlight his French and German heritages and downplays his Aboriginal background. He is not comfortable announcing his mixed-blood background or identity and

would rather avoid the question of ethnicity entirely. In this next excerpt, Theresa shares how she defines her mixed-blood Aboriginal identity. Similar to Jack, she expresses her difficulty publicly sharing this identification. She chooses to highlight her Lebanese background and downplay her Aboriginal heritage.

Theresa: *"Well, I identify myself as a mixed-blood person. My father is actually Lebanese-Syrian and my mother is First Nations. I know that during high school, I always kept the Native side of me hidden because I didn't actually look Native. My mom doesn't really look Native either but she is full Native. I've always kind of identified myself as Lebanese because I'm more proud of their culture. Their culture is very beautiful and it just seems that there are a lot of negative stereotypes towards Aboriginals so, because I don't look it, I try not to identify myself that way. Growing up, I had my Lebanese side and I had my Native side, and I'm not even close to any of my cousins on that side. My mom didn't really let me hang out with them as much as my Lebanese cousins because even she is kind of ashamed."* T.A., (2013) Interviewed by C. Rattai. [tape recording]

Jack and Theresa share similar ambivalent feelings about their Aboriginal heritage. Both use the word "*ashamed*" to describe these feelings. Similar to Jack and Theresa, I at different points in my life silenced my Aboriginal identity. Silence was a protective strategy that I used while growing up in Manitoba. I shared classes in school with some students who I perceived to be racist. Thus remaining invisible was safer and easier for me to deny any Native identity rather than openly express it. I did all that I could to fit in with my peers and remain invisible. I shared similar feelings to Jack and Theresa and I carried shame about who I was.

Counterstory.

Many Aboriginal people carry shame about their identity, which is a complicated emotion to cope with. One has to think about why so many Aboriginal people feel shame. If an individual is not connected to their culture, the past, the stories that affect them then feelings of shame and insecurity are possible. It was not until I read about the history of Aboriginal peoples in Canada and the effects of colonization that I *started* to understand more about myself. The

more I read and research, the more I understand the painful journey Aboriginal people have endured.

The media, and in particular the motion picture industry, adds another layer to these feelings of shame. Jack Shaheen (2009), in his book *Reel Bad Arabs* discusses the manner in which groups such as Arabs, Native Americans, Jews and Blacks have been vilified in Hollywood films. Shaheen studied over 900 Hollywood films. He states, "regularly, studios manufactured and released injurious stereotypes… For decades, many racial and ethnic groups… suffered from the stings of reel prejudicial portraits" (2009, p. 97). He states that only Native people have been more vilified than people from the Middle East. Shaheen (2009) argues that Native Americans were projected as strange savages who thrive on violence. Portrayed in this light "it becomes easier to accept rather than challenge" (p. 124) these stereotypes. Thomas King, in his book *The Inconvenient Indian,* also discusses Hollywood's relationship with the stereotypic image of Indian as villain or savage in film as well. He states:

> Between 1894 and 1930, Hollywood made well over 100 films that featured Hollywood's notion of "real" Indian people and "authentic" Native culture. This was the period of the silent film and the short featurette. After 1930, when you could hear the crack of the rifles, the thundering hoofs of the ponies, and the blood-curdling screams of the painted warriors, Hollywood knocked out another 300 films, which means that in 116 years between 1894 and 2010, Tinseltown conjured up an average of 3.5 films a year. (King, 2012, p. 194-195)

Is it any wonder that Aboriginal people feel shame for who they are? Being bombarded with images of savage Indians in film is yet another way Aboriginal people struggle with their identity.

In this next excerpt, Dakota shares stories about her Aboriginal identity. She connects her Aboriginal identity to our mother and grandmother and has positive meaningful memories

about a time in her childhood. Dakota also shares her feelings of visiting our mother's reserve as a child and her reflections from this experience.

Dakota: *"Okay. So I grew up mostly German. I am half German and half Native but I had very limited education around Aboriginal people and their culture. My mom is full-blooded Mohawk. For me, probably because I was the oldest of all my siblings and I did have the fortunate experience of meeting my Aboriginal grandparents and remembering them, I always felt really close to my mom's mother, our grandma. That was always an interest to me and I always wanted to know, because she was probably my favorite grandma."*

Crystal: *"You have nice memories of her?"*

Dakota: "*I do. Every time Mom would have a baby, out Grandma would come and she would be a really good grandma so it was always a real positive experience for her to come. I liked getting to see her and I remember those experiences well."*

Crystal: *"And you remember going there (the reserve) too, whereas I don't have memories of Grandma and I don't remember going there but you even have memories of being there."*

Dakota: *"I have memories of being there. It was probably about Grade 5, maybe Grade 4. Marvin was just a baby and you were maybe 3 or 4…. so going to the reserve, I thought it would be really cool because there would be kids that were like us and we're not fitting in totally in our culture here. So I thought going there I would maybe fit in better."*

"But going there, to mom's reserve, I wasn't accepted at all. It was actually worse because the kids didn't want to play with me, I wasn't brown enough, and I wasn't Indian enough. They would make fun of me for being white. I remember coming home from that and thinking "Well, that's just great… where do I fit in?" If I don't fit in with our German, Polish, Ukrainian community, and I don't fit in with the reserves. Even growing up, I felt very different from my (German) cousins. They were always very patronizing and there were always comments. So we didn't even fit in in our own family anywhere. There was always a little bit of an edge there." D.R., (2013) Interviewed by C. Rattai. [tape recording]

Dakota shares feelings that many mixed-blooded people have; that one does not feel they fit in anywhere. Dakota does not feel connected to her mother's reserve after visiting it and she does not feel fully accepted by her German family. Listening to Dakota's story, I am reminded of a passage written by James McBride (1998) in Claudine C. O'Hearn's book *Half and*

*Half…"*Being mixed feels like that tingly feeling you have in your nose when you have to sneeze – you're hanging on there waiting for it to happen, but it never does. You feel completely misunderstood by the rest of the world," (p. 184). Mixed-blood people are not necessarily understood or accepted by their extended families. Simply put, we are different. We may not look the same as the rest of our families; we have different cultural heritages and may participate in different cultural experiences. In this next excerpt, Theresa describes not feeling like she *'fit in'* with her family and speaks of being called an '*outcast'* by her relatives.

Theresa: *"Recently, I went to my mom's place and they were having a party, and everybody was First Nations there. I walk in and my younger cousin says, "Ha, you're an outcast!" just out of the blue and that kind of caught me off guard because these are my cousins. I sat down and realized that put me off, I didn't say too much. I didn't say anything that whole evening but I looked at myself. I don't have that really strong accent, I don't look Native, and I don't uphold their values. I could get a Treaty number but I've never sought out one."* T.A., (2013) Interviewed by C. Rattai. [tape recording]

Theresa's story saddens and fascinates me. The idea of not 'fitting in' is pivotal to my opinions and feelings on being a mixed-blood individual. Because my heritage was a mystery to me, and I was not legally considered to be Native for half of my life, I often have difficulty simply identifying myself as mixed-blood. I have questioned what I should call myself and how I should define who I am. I envision my identity as an Aboriginal woman much like Philippe Wamba (1998) describes his mixed-blood identity, as a "sophisticated cultural chameleon, attempting to blend with my shifting surroundings…" (p. 167). However, just like Wamba, I never fully feel that I could become either of my mixed backgrounds.

Counterstory.

From my experience, First Nations communities are very close-knit. The population is often small in number and the people who live in these remote places must rely on each other. Many First Nations communities are isolated geographically, with limited services from the

outside world, and the people need to rely on their community for support. I believe that these living conditions foster close bonds. When I worked on a reserve in northern Manitoba, I did not *feel* Indian and also was not, in my opinion, the right *kind* of Indian. I felt like an impostor pretending to identify as Indian while I was there, and I thought that these people were 'authentic'. When I met a kind man on the reserve who had bright red hair, fair skin and blue eyes, I did not question his Nativeness. His name was Patton. I do not know what Patton's ethnic background was. He was not from the reserve I worked on but from another, and, in my opinion, he had more of a right to belong in the community than I did. He knew many traditional Native skills, such as hunting, fishing, trapping and skinning a moose, which he did to feed the new teachers and staff the first days I was there. He was the type of fellow who commanded respect when someone looked at him. He stood tall, stoic, and appeared to be in control. Interestingly, the residents of the reserve did not fully accept him and they were quick to point out that he was not from their community. Even though, Patton had married someone from that community, had children and lived there for many years.

On another isolated fly-in northern Manitoba reserve that I worked at, I was not accepted as a Native woman. The Aboriginal people of the reserve challenged my Native identity and I was viewed as assimilated into a dominant White culture. I was called a derogatory slang Ojibway word for “white woman”. I was shocked because, during my life, white people defined me as Native or at least non-White. As naïve as I was, I thought that I would be accepted and looked forward to being in a community for the first time with people who were like me. However, I was wrong. I was thinking in stereotypes… trying to make all Native people the same. My racialization of the Aboriginal people who lived in this community was disrespectful. I had very little in common with the residents on this reserve. I had not grown up there or even

on a reserve, lived their experiences, could not speak their language, could not understand the hardships they had endured. I did not understand their culture, which was different than my Mohawk background. It was not proper to assume my Mohawk heritage alone would gain me acceptance into this Aboriginal community.

Through my experience working on the reserve, I learned that not all Native people are alike; each Native group has its own history and experiences. Each group has their own music, language, ceremonies and system of beliefs. This was a huge misconception on my part; the realization that Native people are not all the same revealed my own prejudices and stereotypes. I learned that I was a Mohawk woman and I had no idea what that meant. The only Aboriginal people I had ever met were Cree and Ojibway people from southern Manitoba. There are no Mohawk settlements in the province that I grew up in. I recall the first time I met another Mohawk person outside of my family. I was 29 years old at the time. I spent most of my life not having met another person from my cultural background.

Colonization was so deeply embedded in how I defined my identity that all I shared with *anyone* who asked about my heritage was that I am Native. I learned from my mother that I am a member of the Turtle Clan and part of the Upper Mohawk tribe that is part of the Six Nations. Through researching the Indian Act and the work involved in this Master's program, I have learned the importance of being more specific with my language in how I define myself. I feel that if I define myself as Native I am not representing truly who I am, which after confronting my own shame for being Native does not feel good. If I define myself as Mohawk I feel I am demonstrating pride for who I am. I am not hiding my ethnic background any longer. In order to counter years of oppression, the language one uses must change. I connected negative feelings to the term Native because it was how I felt I *had* to define myself. Native in my limited

vocabulary was the only alternative to Indian. I was not equipped with more inclusive language. I now prefer to use the terms mixed-blood Aboriginal or Mohawk.

In this next excerpt, Rand discusses his changing perspective on his Aboriginal identity over the course of his life.

Rand: *"For me, when I grew up, I think we mostly grew up as white kids but we were never treated as white kids. We were always treated as Natives. We never lived on a reserve; never really saw our Native side of the family or anything like that. My mom never talked about any of their customs or any of their stuff so I don't really think of myself as overly Native. But now, I think that's what I'm seen as. I'm working with a bunch of real Natives and they treat me fine. They've always treated me fine. They just think of me as one of the crew.*

I'm not ashamed of it anymore. Not at all. Before, I never met any Natives. It was just whatever you saw on TV, probably all negative stereotypes. Now, most Natives I do know I'm working with. They work just as hard as anybody else, probably even harder because they hired lots of them." R.R., (2013) Interviewed by C. Rattai. [tape recording]

Rand speaks about working with '*real'* Natives as though it is the most natural way to describe each other. I understand what he means by this comment because I have also lived the representation of colonization of Aboriginal people. I have had my identity altered by legislation. I have seen the stereotypical Hollywood, high school textbook Indian all my life. 'Real' Native signifies those who have grown up on a reserve, have knowledge of their culture, and 'look' the part or identity. When one is a mixed-blood Aboriginal, one often does not feel 'real'. There are many willing to collude with the individual on this idea. The colonial oppressive system of classifying Native people is so ingrained in us that we unknowingly classify ourselves. Lawrence (2004) describes this phenomenon of classification this way:

> …the apparent consensus from all quarters within the dominant society that "real" Indians have vanished (or that the few that exist must manifest absolute authenticity – on white terms – to be believable as Indians) functions as a constant discipline on urban mixed-blood Indigeneity is meaningless and that the Indianness of their families has been irrevocably lost. …such myths about the meaninglessness of a "watered down" Nativeness is being actively suppressed in families, in order to escape nonwhite

> oppression and claim a space in triumphant white culture. The result is a real difficulty, especially on the part of younger urban mixed bloods, in seeing the value of their Native identity… Most urban mixed-bloods have therefore had to contend, at some point in their lives, with the fact that they do not fit the models of what has been held up to them – by whites – as authentic Nativeness. (p. 135)

Crystal: *"I hope some day Aboriginal people wake up… those like Rand, Jack and myself and realize we've been tricked. I hope we realize who we are and that who we are is important. There's no difference between 'real' Indians and fake ones. There is no 'real' to start out with – what does that even mean? We came from a beautiful people and culture. It's been a passage of time, circumstance, out of our control, that made us who we are. Essentially all our lives we've been brainwashed… told a story that wasn't ours. We believe it. We believe we are less. We believe we are not real. We carry shame for so many things. And if we don't carry shame anymore it's still has been a part of the making of who we are. Why can't we happily exist as mixed-blood people? Why do we have to be either one or the other? Why can't we honour the many ethnicities that make us who we are. For me, being able to learn about my Aboriginal heritage, embrace it - but also celebrate my German background is important. No one should be able to say I am this and not that. Categorization is still occurring today. If you are Native but marry a white person the debate still exists that you should be evicted from your reserve. This is happening in Kahnawake today. It makes me sad for those mixed-blood children that will lose their connection to their reserved – just as I did."* (personal journal, September 18, 2014).

Counterstory.

Another comment Rand makes that I found interesting was his statement that *"...most Natives I do know I'm working with. They work just as hard as anybody else, probably even harder because they hired lots of them"*. I find it interesting that Rand comments on Native peoples' work ethic. Why? Is it because Native people have stereotypically been criticized for not being hard working? Would we make this comment about white people? Not likely. Castellano (2002) comments on the importance of labour markets for the success of Aboriginal people:

> For most Aboriginal people, the capacity to fulfill family responsibilities of support is dependent on participation in labour markets. Success in the labour market in turn depends substantially on geographic access and effective, relevant education. (p.27)

The First Nations communities that I worked in did not have many employment opportunities. Also, schooling was offered only until grade nine. Then students who wished to continue their education had to move to Winnipeg. In my opinion, there are substantial barriers to employment and education for the residents of these communities. In this next section the participants share stories of their school experiences.

Stories of School Experiences

All participants included stories of their experiences at school. For example, Dakota tells a story of her early experiences in elementary school in which her classmates were teasing her about the size and texture of her hair. Dakota had what some might call *"black"* hair when she was little.

Dakota: *"When I started kindergarten, I didn't really notice the difference between me and other kids but when I look back at kindergarten pictures, there was one kid that was probably Asian and there was me, and everybody else was blonde haired, pretty much. German, Ukrainian, Polish. A total Anglo-Saxon community. Then there's me with black hair and fuzz head (laughs). My hair was crazy. So when I was going to school, kids would often call me "Fuzz Head" or they'd call me black. They didn't call me Indian or Native. I really did have "black" looking hair.*

I remember grade 2 or 3, one of the girls had all of the kids in the corner and they started laughing but they don't include me so I said "What's going on?" and no one would tell me and then someone said "She just called you a blackboard, cause you're black and you're skinny". The skinny part was good (laughs), the black part not so much. Then I really felt bad after that. I guess because I was so young, I still I remember it so it probably stuck with me. So I had teasing and stuff like that when I was in elementary school." D.R., (2013) Interviewed by C. Rattai. [tape recording]

Just as skin colour can be an identity marker, so can hair. We categorize people by

the type, colour and texture of their hair. My hairdresser says I have *"black"* hair like my sister. She tells me I should be *"happy to be nappy"* because in her opinion my hair is *"fun to work with"*.

In this next excerpt, Dakota speaks of her youngest son's experiences in elementary school and the intervention program the school implemented to support students' '*cultural*' needs.

Crystal: *"Do you find the experience any better for your children?"*

Dakota: *"My youngest struggles. He's Italian, German, and Aboriginal. He's the baby. I know he struggled mostly because he has speech issues. He's got that in the back of his pocket where he's gotten teased and bullied because of his speech issues. I guess the school felt he was struggling a bit too much so they put him in a cultural awareness program because of the 25% Aboriginal. They put him in a place where they built teepees. He did it because it was great to get out of math class, but he's thinking "Why are they taking me out?" He's pretty accepting, too. His best friends are of different cultures, he doesn't care. He doesn't see culture. He sees people and I think that's the best thing we could do for anybody. Just be accepting of other people because everybody is different. Two Indians aren't the same and two Ukrainians aren't the same."*

Crystal: *"Crafts that substitute for learning about a culture?"*

Dakota: *"Yeah, and they had storytelling from Aboriginals. It's not that he minded going but he would come home and say, "Mom, they're singling me out." They were isolating him and sending him, not to a "reserve", but to a grouping where he has to learn about "his" culture. He's Mohawk. They're not learning anything Mohawk. They're learning about whatever is predominant here, probably Cree or Ojibway. I think the Mohawks actually fought with the Cree and Ojibway way back when. They're promoting 'an Indian… is an Indian… is an Indian', and lumping him in the stereotype."*

Crystal: *"It's always well intentioned but they completely miss the mark."*

Dakota: *"Exactly. And we do that at work all the time. We mandate people to take cultural awareness training and they leave there saying "I didn't put anybody on a reserve. What does this have to do with me?" It just leaves people with an even worse taste in their mouth. Instead of reducing racism, you're enhancing it and giving people more reasons to hate difference rather than acceptance. We've got to change the way we do things."* D.R., (2013) Interviewed by C. Rattai. [tape recording]

In the last excerpt Dakota speaks about the use of cultural awareness programs imposed by the school system to help her son with his *"difficulties"*. I think if the school would have spoke to her prior to placing her son in the program they would have had an opportunity to discuss Dakota's perceptions of her son's feelings. Dakota believed her son's issues centered more on his speech difficulties and not his identity.

Counterstory.

"They're promoting 'an Indian… is an Indian… is an Indian', and lumping him in the stereotype." Dakota raises an excellent point here. Categorization is the same stereotypical attitude that I had when working on the reserve; all Native people are the same. Categorizing Aboriginal people in this negative way is dehumanizing. As a parent, Dakota seemed irritated that her son was pulled out of class to receive, what the school thought was in his best interest, a cultural awareness program. As an educator, I am saddened that although there have been great strides made in education to improve pedagogy in regards to diversity, there are still signs such as *'cultural awareness programs'* that perpetuate stereotypes. How is this program in which my nephew participated not racialization, a gross assumption, and a stereotypical violation on him? It is disappointing that, as recently as 2009, we hear of schools still providing this kind of programming.

Thus, we need to continue to push for educators to better understand critical pedagogy and critical race theory. Critical race theorists state, "that racism is neither aberrant nor rare; it is a part of the system, ingrained in politics, legal, and educational structures that it is almost unrecognizable. It is so enmeshed in our social order that it appears normal and natural to people in this culture" (Taylor, Gillborn & Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 4). I do not know which is better, a school that attempts to try to socially educate a child about what the school assumes is that

child's culture, or no education on culture at all. When I was in elementary school, I never heard race and ethnicity mentioned in the classroom. It was not until I reached high school History class that I learned about "savage Indians".

I have memories of the history lessons on the Iroquois. An image of an Iroquois warrior with his head shaved and a prominent Mohawk on top his head, and his arm pulled back with a hatchet ready to be flung, and a scowling painted face displayed in my mind. I still see images of this Iroquois warrior scalping a helpless unarmed white man. If my memory is correct, the caption below these images read 'the savage Iroquois warrior'. I always felt that all eyes were on me during those lessons, being the only Native person in the class.

I offer another example of high school History lessons, Sierra Adare (2005) shares in her book *"Indian" Stereotypes in TV Science Fiction: First Nations' Voices Speak Out* as a counterstory:

> First Nations peoples live with stereotyping every day of their lives. A perfect example of this comes straight out of history books that Hollywood picked up on from day one. When America's educational system does include "Native American" history, it breezes through Pocahontas, Sacajawea, and the Trail of Tears and on to the *real* "Indians" who where defeated during the "Indian Wars" of the late 1870s. By focusing on the nomadic and warrior traditions of the Great Plains Nations, textbooks used in American schools have perpetuated "Indian" stereotypes that cause everybody to imagine teepees, feather bonnets, trade beads, fringed buckskin clothing, and painted pony warriors with deep copper-colored skin and long, black braids every time they see the words "Native American". The comment "Gee, you don't look like an Indian" arises from this stereotyping so faithfully followed by Hollywood today. (p. 16)

In this next excerpt, Theresa talks about her high school experiences. She describes teasing incidents she endured that she attributes to her Middle Eastern and Aboriginal backgrounds.

Theresa: *"There have been some incidents…There is one that happened in high school. It never really happened to me but the cousins I was talking about on my mom's side, the Native cousins. Fighting with the teacher or something or the kids*

> *picking on them. After 9/11, anybody who was Arab was kind of being looked at sideways because of the terrorist attacks. Right away, I would jump in and defend my Lebanese cousins because we're not terrorists or anything. But for my cousin who is First Nations, she was usually acting up anyways and getting into fights with teachers and stuff but I would just put my head down and not even say anything to her. Most of the time, she deserved it. She needed to be yelled at in school. It was just kind of embarrassing, really."* T.A., (2013) Interviewed by C. Rattai. [tape recording]

What strikes me from Theresa's excerpt is that she felt her cousin *"needed to be yelled at in school"*. My natural reaction to this comment is that no one should be yelled at but rather her cousin needed to be supported, listened to and given and outlet for her anger. Finding the cause of her cousin's anger and her need to act out would be a good first step and then helping her deal with this conflict whether it is with another student or an internal conflict.

In the next excerpt, Jack tells a story about a lesson in elementary school that focused on racism. He describes the lesson, how he felt during and after, and his perceived outcomes of the class discussion.

Jack: *"This makes me think back to a time, I think it was second or third grade. I don't know why the teacher brought this up at school. She gave us a bit of a talk about racism. It was a whole-class discussion. She brought everybody together in a circle and she was talking about racism and its effects, and how it can be really hurtful to people when you're racist. Saying things about people's skin colour, saying things about how they look. I don't know what event brought that up. I do remember that afterwards that day, all the kids in the class were being really, really nice to me. Overly nice! They were saying, "Oh, do you want to come outside and play tag?" The rest of that day was like that and I found that really weird, like I kind of knew what they were doing. I don't know if the racism talk was about me and my skin colour."*

Crystal: *"How many kids of colour were in your class?"*

Jack: *"Not many. We lived in a town where we would have definitely been the minority. I actually think I was the only one like that in the class. I just remember kind of figuring out what they were doing. They were being super nice to me but it was really fake at the same time and that didn't make me feel good. It just made me stand out. I felt stupid. Again, shame is a feeling that comes to mind. I was thinking, "Why are you doing this?" It made me feel worse. I guess the kids'*

intentions were to make me feel good but when I think back to it, it wasn't a positive experience."

Crystal: *"And did the effects of that talk last longer than that day? Or did you feel like it was kind of a one-off?"*

Jack: *"I'd say the next day, things kind of went back to normal. It was just this one day that was so weird and I guess that's why it still stands out to me. The weirdest thing from that story is that it still stands out to me – plain as day. The kids were so different that day but did it really affect things in the long run? I wouldn't say so. It's just that one day and that's why it felt so fake to me. Although other kids in the class might think that was such a positive experience for him (laughs), to be included. In the long run, I think I might have actually felt less included because all these kids had this idea to try and make me feel included.*

It was after that talk when kids started acting funny that I really noticed, and I started to think to myself "Was this talk about me?" I didn't really even know it at the time because we were pretty young. Kids weren't really being mean or anything before that. I remember feeling like, was I really that different from them? I didn't feel that different from them before that. I guess that's why I bring up that story. It's so clear to me in my head. I remember that exact day and exactly what the teacher said." J.V., (2013) Interviewed by C. Rattai. [tape recording]

It is interesting to compare the changes in curriculum over time and the attempts at anti-oppressive education. Jack is approximately fifteen years younger than I am. He remembers being taught a lesson that focused on respecting diversity. He describes the setting and focus of the lesson, "*She brought everybody together in a circle and she was talking about racism and its effects, and how it can be really hurtful to people when you're racist. Was this talk about me?"* Jack exclaims. Sadly, from Jack's perspective, his formal education did not offer much insight or comfort about his mixed-blood background. The lesson on diversity managed to do more harm than good. As Jack states, "*I remember feeling like, was I really that different from them?"* Rather than feel included in his peer group, the lesson made Jack feel ostracized and highlighted his differences. I ask myself if I have ever made a student feel this way unintentionally. I am conscious and try not to make assumptions about the students in my class. However, it is

difficult to teach about diversity and have students naturally experience this in a relatively homogenous environment with little diversity.

In this next excerpt, Jack continues to speak about his later elementary experiences in which he was teased about his appearance.

Jack: *"From there, going up through the grades, things got more different too. I remember one story from Grade 5 or 6. I remember getting lots of questions like "Why is your skin so dark?" I think I would say something like "My skin stays tanned from the summer" or something ridiculous like that. The kids would always say "You're so different from us, why is that?" and I didn't know what to explain to them. I didn't feel like I should say it's because I'm Aboriginal. They would always bug me about that. I remember one time, for example, I wasn't really answering this one kid. He was bugging me about my skin color and I remember him randomly winding up and he punched me right in the face. Then he started to make "pow-wow" noises and running in circles around me. That kind of stuff still stands out to me to this day. Of course, it doesn't make you feel good and it's a very shameful kind of experience. It still sticks with me to this day. I just remember, growing up, when kids are really immature and they don't know the effects that their behaviours have on other kids, and it's a really vicious experience that you can have when you're growing up.*

Those are the things that stay on your mind. So those are some of the experiences from my childhood, growing up in school, but I wouldn't say that everything ended when high school was over." J.V., (2013) Interviewed by C. Rattai. [tape recording]

Noteworthy here is that most of the stories participants shared are negative. These negative aspects of having a mixed-blooded heritage seem to as Jack states, *'stay on your mind'* or Dakota says, *"stick with you"*. These negative experiences are an important part of defining our identity. One must look to the past and then overcome and challenge these negative feelings and come to terms with them in order to reclaim Aboriginal identity.

In this next excerpt, Jack speaks about his secondary school experience and his inner turmoil regarding being accepted into a Master's degree program.

Jack: *"I just got my Master's degree as a psychologist. I can remember the day that I interviewed to get into the program. It was a great interview and things went really well. Near the end of it, the people that were interviewing me asked me*

> *"So, we see that you got an Aboriginal award when you were in university. Are you Aboriginal?" and I said "Yeah, I'm Aboriginal" and they said to me "We want to know if you would like to be recognized as Aboriginal because this would really help your chances of getting into the program". I thought about it but…it's great that my chances of getting in to the program are higher, but does that really make me feel better as a person, to be told that because of my skin color or my heritage, I have a better chance of getting into the program? To me, that doesn't make me feel good about myself. What I told them is "That's great, I really want to get into your program but if I'm going to get in, I really want to get into your program by my own merit. I'm an Aboriginal person but I don't want to be recognized that way if that's what is going to get me into the program." That's what I told them and I don't know how they thought that would make me feel. It doesn't make you feel proud to be an Aboriginal person if you're going to get an advantage over someone. I don't know how other people feel but that's how that came across to me. That still stands out to me and I'm really proud of myself that I told them that I want to get in on my own merit. If I had gotten in based on my skin colour, whenever I'm having trouble in the program, would I feel like I'm worth it? Would I feel as if I'm going to succeed in this program? Probably not, because I would think back to that time. I would think I only got in because I'm Aboriginal. I don't think I would feel like I deserved it, and I'm really glad with the choice that I made."* J.V., (2013) Interviewed by C. Rattai. [tape recording]

I can relate to Jack's comments on feeling like you do not deserve an advantage over anyone else. It is something I still struggle with and have difficulty admitting to others. I do not want to be given advantages such as access to programs or better chances of being hired for jobs. I feel like I do not deserve this. This special treatment makes me question my academic abilities. It is also the reason I am selective about sharing my status and with whom I disclose that I have a status card. I feel uneasy when people ask me. I am afraid of the attitude people hold against me for getting special advantages.

In this next excerpt, Rand shares stories of his school experiences and his strategies for dealing with childhood bullies.

Rand: *"In school I always got negative feelings from most of the kids, I thought. I used to get in lots of fights but then, if they called me Indian or anything else, I would always hit them. Then they just quit calling me those names. It didn't matter what the size of the kid was or whatever, you fought them. And then the other ones would leave you alone. Hit first and ask questions later and they leave you alone*

after. I always got called derogatory names. I just learned how to be a smart-ass and burn them right back. Like "You're an Indian" and I would say "Well, you're Ukrainian". It's the same thing.(long pause) Some teachers were okay. Some I think were racist"

Crystal: *"Did you find it was better when you changed schools?"*

Rand: *"Yeah, because there were actually more Native kids there. The preppy white kids had their own group and then the rest of us got in our own little cliques. Now, the most racism I get is actually from older people, and some of the farmers. They're hicks and they're always going to be hicks. They always have some stupid comment and it's like "really?" It's 2013, wake up!"*

Crystal: *"How often would you get teased?"*

Rand: *"Sometimes every day, sometimes maybe once a week. It was sporadic. You always tease each other, even older kids tease each other. It's almost constant but Native teasing was quite a bit. That's what I would take personally.*

I remember one kid was teasing me. He called me "Topsoil" and I chased after him, got him off his bike, and I kicked him in the face, kicked his teeth out. That kid used to bug me all the time. He was just a mean little brat. I finally caught him and after that he didn't bug me anymore." R.R., (2013) Interviewed by C. Rattai. [tape recording]

I do not condone violence as an answer to racism and abuse, but I do understand Rand's feelings of anger and hurt from being teased and bullied due to his skin colour. All participants shared various stories of being teased or bullied because of the way they look. As Rand states in this conversation, kids "…*always tease each other, even older kids tease each other"* and this may be true. However, bullying and teasing points to the greater need for educational initiatives with a focus on social justice that include *all* children. Not programs geared toward those who are different as in my nephew's cultural program and not 'one-off' lessons as in Jack's case, which can neatly be tucked back into a folder for next year.

Stories of Geographic Location

In each of the participants' stories they made reference to the place they lived and how this affected their identity. Geographic location can affect our identity in positive and/or negative ways. Where someone lives can affect his or her views on Native culture. These discourses can shape how Indigenous people see themselves as citizens. Lawrence (2004) states that looking deeper at mixed-blood identity across Canada needs to take into account the different perspectives that mixed-blood peoples in different regions have adopted toward their Indigenous culture (p. 9).

In this excerpt, Rand is discussing various attitudes from people living in the prairies that he has encountered. He compares southern Manitoba, where he grew up, to southern Alberta, where he is currently working. In both locations, he has encountered racist attitudes.

Rand: *"Being out in Alberta now, there are lots of Natives out there and the reserves aren't that poor. Nobody talks about sniffing out there. That's right around here (Manitoba), I think. You don't hear derogatory remarks like "Oh, what are 'you' doing here at work?""*

Crystal: *""Collecting a cheque from the government. We have to pay for everything for Natives." I hear that here all the time in Manitoba. I don't hear that anywhere else."*

Rand: *"I hear that all the time. What are they talking about? I never got a cheque from any government. I've paid my taxes every year. It's false views and I think half of them are propagated by the government. I think they're honestly trying to break Native rights in this country. I think that's going to kick them in the arse because a lot of the guys I'm talking to are pretty militant now and they are getting more educated, reading about their past. They're a pretty militant bunch of guys.*

Have you ever heard that Indian radio station, Brocket 99 from Alberta? It's all just complete slurs and total racism. I've just met two of the guys that live on Brocket and they say "Those frickin' white guys made that!" It wasn't even Natives that made it. It was white guys that made it."

Crystal: *"A radio station? No I have never heard of it."*

Rand: *"Well, it was just jokes. It was a big joke that went on through the Internet and I used to hear it all the time from rednecks, and it was totally derogatory. The worst Native stuff you could ever hear. They said, "That's not us! That was white guys that did that!" I thought it was just some of the Natives that like to joke about being Native an awful lot."* R.R., (2013) Interviewed by C. Rattai. [tape recording]

In both locations, Rand has encountered negative attitudes toward Native people. I had not heard of the radio station *'Brocket 99'.* Upon further investigation, I found that it is a series of recorded tapes from 1986; a parody of a radio station broadcast from the Piikani Nation reserve in southern Alberta. I listened to a sample and found some of the most vulgar, derogatory, stereotypical horrendous racial slurs marketing themselves as comedy. The tapes have a cult following and still remain for sale online. An award – winning documentary by Nilesh Patel titled *Brocket 99 — Rockin' the Country* was made about the phenomenon.

In the next excerpt, Jack shares his feelings on the Aboriginal population that lives for the most part homeless and in poverty in the downtown core of Winnipeg. He connects his feelings for the situation he sees with his mixed-blood Aboriginal identity.

Jack: *"Yeah, and there's so many different perceptions about what an Aboriginal identity looks like and what 'those' kind of people look like. I think about some Aboriginal people that are homeless and live on Portage and Main or something like that, and personally, I don't want to be associated with people like that. If someone associates me with people like that, it makes me feel really ashamed. That's not how I am and I don't like to be seen that way. It even affects how I think about Aboriginal people. I think, that negative stereotype that has been put on Aboriginal people has truly affected me to my core, y'know? When you go into Winnipeg, you see all these people living in the streets who are hard done by and I don't like to be associated with people like that and I'm sure a lot of people with Aboriginal heritage think the same way. It's really really sad. The situation that many people find themselves in."* J.V., (2013) Interviewed by C. Rattai. [tape recording]

It is heartbreaking that many Aboriginal people in Winnipeg live on the streets of the downtown core. This indicates larger social issues plaguing Aboriginal people. Jack sees this

population as a negative stereotype being projected onto him, but I feel it is not a stereotype but a harsh reality faced by a vulnerable population of Aboriginal people living in Winnipeg.

Similar to Jack, in this next excerpt, Theresa connects the negative stereotypes she hears and the difficult conditions, such as poverty and homelessness, Aboriginal people face to her identity. Theresa shares her thoughts about the negative stereotypes with which Aboriginal people in Manitoba must contend. These images have affected her so much that she chooses to identify with one side of her mixed-blood heritage and disregards the other.

Theresa: *"I look around and there are so many negative stereotypes and the sad reality is that a lot of First Nations people are those stereotypes. I go downtown and there's so many homeless people and 90% of them are First Nations. They're the ones that are drunk all the time and they're the ones who are asking me for money. There is a lot of that, it's just a lot of negative stereotypes. That's why I choose to identify myself as Lebanese."* T.A., (2013) Interviewed by C. Rattai. [tape recording]

I find it disconcerting that Theresa has internalized the *"sad reality"* of Aboriginal people and it has affected her in this negative way. To *"choose to identify as Lebanese"* and not as Aboriginal is a phenomenon familiar to many mixed-blood Aboriginal people.

Rand, Jack and Theresa, share their perceptions of being Aboriginal people in Manitoba and the factors that affects their identities. Manitoba is the setting of our stories and is the backdrop to the participants' lives. Living in Manitoba has shaped me and affected my views, values and opinions. I shared similar views as Jack and Theresa; I felt shame due to the Aboriginal people I saw in the downtown core of Winnipeg. I had to unlearn much of the racist, oppressive dialogue that was playing over in my head in regards to Aboriginal people. A tactic early on for me was silence about my Native identity as a protective strategy that I used while growing up. I felt that it was safer and easier to deny any Native identity.

Counterstory.

Lawrence (2004), in one of her studies, interviewed a Cree Métis woman who described her experience of being treated as an "Indian Princess" as she grew up in middle-class Ottawa. This woman described an incident when she was traveling in Manitoba, in which she got into a disagreement with a restaurant manager. She was accused of lying and perceived that she was being mistreated because she was Indian. This woman stated that, if she had to grow up in this sort of environment, she would not feel comfortable in openly expressing her Native identity, as she did in Ottawa (Lawrence, 2004, p. 123). In Manitoba, it is often not safe to identify openly with Nativeness.

I learned to see the Native people around me as 'Other'. Although I knew that I was different, I viewed differences as the 'Other'. When I was in high school, we traveled to other towns to play sports. One place in particular that was part of our school board, was a reserve named Sagkeeng First Nations. I viewed the Anishinaabe girls as 'Others' and I did not want my friends and teammates to associate me with them. At that time in my life, I was moving as far away as I could from having a Native identity. When I was faced with other Native people, I would minimize that part of me or hide it altogether. I was fearful that my peers would tease me or hurt me in some racial way. As I changed and grew as a person, my views of Aboriginal people and my feelings about my mixed-blood identity also changed. One's experiences shape, mold and change one's views in regards to identity.

In this next excerpt, Dakota offers a different perspective on Aboriginal people from Manitoba through her experience as a public health nurse. She has worked with many Aboriginal people and in First Nation communities throughout her career.

Dakota: *"I know as a public health nurse, people who have had 4 years of university education and should know way better, who work in First Nation communities, that exhibit lack of judgment and share prejudicial attitudes. A co-worker of mine emailed a joke to all the public health nurses including our supervisor, knowing*

> *full well that I'm Aboriginal, but thinking I wasn't like the rest of them so it would be okay. When we changed Manitoba's slogan recently to "Spirited Energy", there was a media campaign about it. The 'joke' took the campaign slogan and inserted it on top of a photo of a drunken person with Aboriginal descent passed out on some steps, probably the Legislative Building. She emailed this picture around. I sent an email to everyone saying that it was totally inappropriate. But it's still funny to people. But how can somebody of that level of education even forward something so ridiculous? What does that tell me about her as a person?"*
> D.R., (2013) Interviewed by C. Rattai. [tape recording]

During our session when Dakota says, *"I wasn't like the rest of them so it would be okay"* is an all too common phrase I have heard in my life. It is usually precedes some sort of racist comment or joke that the teller will lead with to warn me they are about to say something racist but because I am *"not like the rest of them"* I should be okay with it. It also reminds me of the phrase *"oh, but I didn't mean you"* which will usually follow a racist statement to somehow placate me in the hopes they have not offended me. I was not able to locate the exact image that was circulated by Dakota's colleague, however the next image is a similar representation of what Dakota would have received in her e-mail.

Photo 1 – Manitoba Spirited Energy image retrieved from https://www.google.ca/search?q=manitoba+spirited+energy&client=firefox-a&hs=EGZ&rls=org

I also think, what kind of systemic oppression still exists in our society, that a health organization whose mission is to care for the most vulnerable people of our population encourages blatant racist attitudes. Dakota's story brings another topic to the table. If something is a joke, is it okay to be prejudiced? I do not think so. I find that many racist attitudes and opinions get shared under the guise of humour. From my experiences, this happens often in Manitoba and much more than I have experienced in other regions in Canada. A similar argument can be said for Rand's *"Brocket 99"* story. Sadly, these types of overtly racist media have power. They erode peoples' sensitivities, compassion and humanity in regards to some of the most vulnerable people in our society.

Counterstory.

Lawrence (2004) argues that in western Canada urban mixed-blood Native people are living in a society that remains actively colonialist:

> In western Canada, all but the most light-skinned urban Native people must negotiate a society that is fundamentally still actively colonialist, where rigidly segregated spaces, a regime of tacitly organized police violence, and one of the highest rates of imprisonment in the world ensure that Nativeness, particularly in urban centers, is contained in zones of fundamental illegality where universality does not apply". (p. 8)

She explains further that these "zones of fundamental illegality" refer to areas that are inhabited by "Others". This is a way to dehumanize Native people. In Winnipeg an example of a "zone of illegality" would be the downtown core where many Aboriginal people live.

My conversation with Dakota continued with our talking about the conditions we found when working in some northern Aboriginal communities and the difficulties we faced when living in isolation. In the next excerpt I discuss working with non-Aboriginal colleagues in a First Nation community.

Crystal: *"I find it happens everywhere. It was more prevalent for me when I worked on a reserve because there would be a lot of stereotypical negative talk about the Aboriginal women by some of my co-workers, jokes about how many teeth they had. Terrible things were said about the Native people and they would kind of forget that I was sitting in the room. I would think "Oh my gosh". Someone would notice and say, "Oh, we didn't mean you". At this point, I would think "Ok, night is over, time to go." You said it and obviously you've made your opinions quite clear and your character known."* D.R., (2013) Interviewed by C. Rattai. [tape recording]

In my colleagues' minds, I did not belong to the First Nation community in which we lived and worked. During our discussions about the community and teaching, I was allowed membership as I too, was an observer of the community. My colleagues viewed me as an outsider to the community like themselves and in so doing I was not seen as a Native person. This 'honorary whiteness', as Lawrence (2004) defines it, that I was given among my colleagues vanished as soon as I challenged racism and I became the 'Other' again (Lawrence, 2004, Said, 1978). The membership was revoked. I can only assume my colleagues' did not like when I objected to and rejected their commentary about the community. They would, at times, make racist jokes or stereotypical comments about Native people. I never felt so alone and so much like the 'Other'. However, when I lived in the First Nations community, I felt that I did not fit in with them either. I was the 'Other' to both groups. In those instances, it seemed that I did not belong anywhere.

In the next exchange, Dakota and I talk about some of the issues we saw when working in First Nations communities such as the cost of living, the availability of fresh foods in grocery stores, and housing.

Dakota: *"Picking up from there, why don't we look at why people have no teeth? How many dentists do you see in First Nations communities? What kind of fluoride programs are there? What kind of toothpaste is available and how much does it cost? If you look at the root cause. I don't care what color you are, you could be*

green, and you could put them in an isolated community on a First Nations reserve, make them live there, and let's see if the outcome is any different in those same conditions. With the poor construction of houses the province got ripped off on when they built. There is mold everywhere. As a public health nurse, I've seen it. The water sometimes looks like diarrhea. I wouldn't drink that water, it's disgusting. No other community would get away with that."

Crystal: *"And the amount of people that have to live in the square footage…"*

Dakota: *"You can't even own your house. You have five families crammed into a three-bedroom bungalow. Nobody lives in those conditions here, it's like a third world country. Say there is an incident because over-crowding because it does cause other problems. If you need police response, how long does it take? 3-4 days. Take away the rules and society and have no police, and what's going to happen? Take away small engine repair. Reserves are famous for broken lawnmowers, broken cars, and there's nobody on the community that can fix small engines.*

Before you make a big judgment, maybe you should look at the conditions people are living in and the resources that they have available to make things happen in the community"

Crystal: *"And how wonderful they have it because they're getting a free paycheck from the government. That is the attitude here."*

Dakota: *"Social assistance isn't pro-rated for where you live. You can get just as much money living in Winnipeg where milk is 3 dollars a jug versus Pauingassi First Nation where it's fifteen. You're money isn't going to stretch as far. And there's no services."* D.R., (2013) Interviewed by C. Rattai. [tape recording]

Dakota raises some very important issues in regards to living conditions in First Nations communities. When I lived in Poplar River First Nation, almost twenty years ago, the cost of milk was approximately $13.00 for a four-liter jug, which was about $10.00 more per jug than it would have been in Winnipeg at that time. It was difficult and expensive to make healthy food choices if one shopped only at the local grocery store. I chose to have some foods shipped to me by plane by my family but not everyone has this luxury.

Counterstory.

James Anaya is a United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous peoples. He visited many First Nations communities across Canada, including northern Manitoba and concluded the following:

> Canada consistently ranks near the top among countries with respect to human development standards, and yet amidst this wealth and prosperity, aboriginal people live in conditions akin to those in countries that rank much lower and in which poverty abounds. At least one in five aboriginal Canadians live in homes in need of serious repair, which are often also overcrowded and contaminated with mould… Aboriginal women are eight times more likely to be murdered than non-indigenous women and indigenous peoples face disproportionately high incarceration rates. For over a decade, the Auditor General has repeatedly highlighted significant funding disparities between on-reserve services and those available to other Canadians. The Canadian Human Rights Commission has consistently said that the conditions of aboriginal peoples make for the most serious human rights problem in Canada. (Anaya, 2013)

In this next excerpt, Dakota and I talk about a suicide intervention training called ASIST an acronym for the Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training that we attended with other First Nation peoples across Manitoba. The training is meant for people "who want to feel more comfortable, confident and competent in helping to prevent the immediate risk of suicide" (ASIST, July 30, 2014).

Dakota: *"People are brainwashed because they don't want to give the wrong answer. Do you remember, we were in Winnipeg, and they brought down people from First Nations communities to take ASIST training and there was a gentleman there from someplace isolated. One of the guys was there because they were hoping to save some of their soccer players. Six of the soccer players had already committed suicide and there are 8 or 9 left, and they're teens. He was sent there to maybe foster hope for the rest of the soccer players. Even when they were drawing their pictures and making their community plan, what are you going to do, who can help you? One of the plans said "call 911". Does 911 even work in their community? No, well why are you putting that as a resource? Because it's the right answer for Winnipeg. The instructors didn't even pick up on that. But that is their answer, and that's not even an option because the resources aren't the same. They didn't want to be wrong"*

Crystal: *"Do you remember this? What was the dream for your community, if you could have one dream? Do you know what it was?"*

Dakota: *"No."*

Crystal: *"To have a road. We were talking because we lived down in the south, about all of these grand health center ideas and programs, and all these people shared their answers before them, and their dream was to have a road."*

Dakota: *"The things we take for granted."*

Crystal: *"Yeah, it was pretty humbling because you don't realize there are so many things we take for granted. It's amazing. That silenced me and still sticks with me."*
D.R., (2013) Interviewed by C. Rattai. [tape recording]

In the First Nations communities Dakota and I worked in, suicide rates were a significant concern. Anaya (2013), in his UN report also stated that suicide rates among First Nations and Inuit people on reserve were "at more than five times greater than other Canadians... One community I visited has suffered a suicide every six weeks since the start of this year".

Crystal: *"Alright, anything else that comes to mind about being mixed blood? How do you feel about your Nativeness today?"*

Dakota: *"One thing I didn't say is I did do my thesis on Aboriginal women promoting health in their communities and I did a lot of research and I feel like what I really wanted to do with my research and my education and my schooling was, I think there's so much negative research with Aboriginal people and we can always talk about how many people have diabetes and how many people have heart attacks and how many people have addiction issues, and abuse and violence, on and on. Aboriginal people always win for the number-one in all the bad things known to man.*

In Canada, in Manitoba, specifically for sure. My thought always is we have to do something positive because if I was a teenager or if I was a kid growing up in a First Nation community, if I knew that my chance of getting diabetes was 85%, my chance of being an alcoholic is 78%, heart disease is 90%, stroke, etc., why wouldn't I drink? Why would I care? In Manitoba, and I know it's not the same in other places, but a jug of milk is 14-16 dollars. A jug of milk in Beausejour where I'm from is 4 dollars. Chips are filling and they're 2 dollars a bag, maybe 3 dollars if you go more north, but the salad… I wouldn't eat the salad out there. It's ridiculous, it's brown, no one here would eat it, it's disgusting.

I've flown to First Nation communities with my work. I've had to go up there for different teaching sessions. I went to the grocery store and just took a look. One time I was there, there were two peaches that were disgusting. If they were in

> *your cupboard, you would throw them out. You would not eat them, you wouldn't even feed them to your dog. And they wanted 8 dollars for two peaches. Who can afford that? That's ridiculous*
>
> *What's really interesting in Manitoba is there's the Manitoba Liquor Commission, so that a bottle of alcohol will cost you the same in Beausejour, the same in Winnipeg, will cost the same way up north. There's a liquor commission so that all alcohol has to be charged the same. There's no milk board, no vegetable board. It's way cheaper to feed your kids unhealthily than it is to feed your kids healthily. So you want to know why diabetes rates are up in Aboriginal communities? It's not because they're Aboriginal, it's because they don't have access to really good food and their genetic disposition predisposes them to that. That's the only reason."* D.R., (2013) Interviewed by C. Rattai. [tape recording]

When I worked in the First Nations communities, I recall that there was almost no fresh produce available for purchase and I could not justify spending the exorbitant price being asked for the little produce that was stocked in the store. Most people I knew who lived there had to bring their groceries in with them on the plane and/or send canned goods and non-perishables on a barge that left from southern Manitoba in the summer.

In this next excerpt, Dakota continues sharing her thoughts on First Nations communities and the challenges for students due to the lack of high school education provided in their home communities.

Dakota: *"This is why I felt really strongly that all Aboriginal people should be role models. We need to be role models and do positive research for people so you can see that there is more to life than having diabetes and dying of heart disease at age 40 because it doesn't have to be that way. Even my thesis advisor, who I totally respect and admire, he's like a mentor, we were talking about the social determinants of health and the things that you can change. One of the things I said you could not change with Aboriginal culture was education. He debated me on that. He said that you can change the level of education, it's totally within your power to change that. I looked at him and said "Do you really think, if you're living five hours from Winnipeg and your closest 9-12 school is there, that you can change that determinant? Do you honestly believe that that is possible for somebody in Grade 9 to get a high school education that's not offered in their community, and they have no money or family that live outside of the community?" He actually let me go.*

> *Then you take kids from an isolated community that have never even seen McDonald's, never had a cheeseburger, and then you plunk them in downtown Winnipeg? What do you think is going to happen with no support? There is no other outcomes than what happens. It doesn't matter what color, what culture, or what race, the same outcome will occur."* D.R., (2013) Interviewed by C. Rattai. [tape recording]

Counterstory.

In Manitoba many of the First Nations communities are isolated. "Manitoba has 63 First Nations, including six of the 20 largest bands in Canada. Twenty-three First Nations are not accessible by an all-weather road. This accounts for more than half of all Manitoba First Nations people who live on reserve" (Government of Canada, https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100020400/1100100020404, retrieved September 18, 2014). The students who lived on the isolated First Nations communities I worked in could only attend school until Grade 9 and then had to leave their communities to go to a Grade 10 - 12 high school located in Winnipeg because no education was provided for them after completion of Grade 9. The number of students who could actually handle this difficult transition was low. After visiting First Nations communities, Anaya (2013) explains:

> I can only conclude that Canada faces a crisis when it comes to the situation of Indigenous peoples of the country. The well-being gap between aboriginal and non-aboriginal people in Canada has not narrowed over the last several years, treaty and aboriginals claims remain persistently unresolved, and overall there appear to be high levels of distrust among aboriginal peoples toward government at both the federal and provincial levels… An equally important measure for improving educational outcomes, and one that could be implemented relatively quickly, is to ensure that funding delivered to aboriginal authorities for education per student is at least equivalent to that available in the provincial educational systems… As was stressed to me throughout my visit, it will be difficult to improve educational outcomes without addressing the substandard housing conditions in which many aboriginal people live.
> (Retrieved from: unsr.jamesanaya.org/statements/statement-upon-conclusion-of-the-visit-to-canada, July 30, 2014.)

Education is not meeting the needs of Aboriginal children (Battiste, 1998; Canadian Population Health Initiative, 2003; Monture-Angus, 1995). Marie Battiste (1998) states, "…we cannot continue to allow Aboriginal students to be given a fragmented existence in a curriculum that does not mirror them, nor should they be denied understanding the historical context that has created that fragmentation" (p.9). In the past, "Native cultures were studied as artifacts" (Ghosh & Abdi, 2004, p. 133). Ghosh and Abdi (2004) discuss the misconceptions about Aboriginal peoples and claims there are many studies that indicate the extent to which Aboriginal people were stereotyped, at times romanticized, in textbooks and popular media. Native people were portrayed as lazy, cruel, uneducated, unscientific, dirty and alcoholic (Ghosh & Abdi, 2004; King, 2003; Kirmayer, Simpson & Cargo, 2003). History was distorted to suit the colonizers.

Stories of Racialization

In this next section Jack, Dakota and I share stories of racialization. In each of our stories the common thread is that we have been made to feel uncomfortable by someone in authority who comments on our Aboriginal background in an inappropriate way. In this next excerpt Jack shares a story about a job interview he had with a Winnipeg school board in which he was questioned about his mixed-blood background.

The job interview.

Jack: *"I just had a job interview a few months ago to get a job as a psychologist. Even there, the interview went great and we didn't talk about being Aboriginal at all during the interview. Once the interview ended, the interviewer specifically said, "Okay, the interview is over now. But I wanted to ask you, I see that you won an Aboriginal scholarship years ago". I said, "Yes, I did". She asked "Does that mean that you are Aboriginal?" and I said, "Yes". She said, "That's a really great thing to hear, we're really happy about that". I remember one thing she said in particular. "This would mean that you would be really great working with the kids in the inner-city part of Winnipeg where there is a large Aboriginal population". I think she meant it as a great thing. She meant it as a compliment, but to me that came across as "clumping me in" with a group of kids like that – being I a guy that's never even spent any time with other Aboriginal people. Just*

because I have Aboriginal heritage, does that mean I'm going to be great with all these kids or able to connect with them? I don't see how that is."

Crystal: *"It's an assumption."*

Jack: *"Yeah, it's like saying someone that's Ukrainian is going to be great with all the other Ukrainian kids that are around Winnipeg. It didn't make any sense to me. But people do mean it as a compliment, I guess, but I don't always take it that way. Why do people always have to bring that up all the time? Overall, it feels like I'm a statistic and they're trying to get their stats up."*

Crystal: *"Yeah, and I feel like you then become a credit to your race. It's like "good for you, and now you're going to be a positive example for these kids"."*

Jack: *"Yeah, they told me I'd be a great role model for these kids. But why can't anyone be a good role model for these kids? Just because I have Aboriginal heritage, this doesn't mean I'm going to be able to understand the culture and customs of all these kids. How many Aboriginal races are there and how many groups are there? Just because I'm a mixed Aboriginal person doesn't mean I'm going to be able to understand their experiences any better than anyone else. It's just based on my skin color, right?"* J.V., (2013) Interviewed by C. Rattai. [tape recording]

I know we do not always want to be a credit to our race and I resent it when people imply that I am. When Aboriginal people are seen as having positive qualities or accomplishments and this is viewed as a pat on the back not for the accomplishment but because we are Aboriginal, it is racism. It is as though the expectations for Aboriginal people in society must be so low that when we accomplish something it is a good thing for all Aboriginal people. We would never make this comment to a white person. We would never tell a white person they are a credit to their race and a role model for all other white people. However, I do think there is much to be said for positive role models. When Jack stated, "*Just because I have Aboriginal heritage, does that mean I'm going to be great with all these kids or able to connect with them?"* my first instinct is to say no… but maybe? As educators, we do not always know the impact we have on children. Growing up with minimal contact with other Aboriginal people in a school system that had predominantly white teachers, I believe I would have liked to have seen at least one teacher

in my *whole* school career that was of an ethnic minority. If I had had an Aboriginal teacher during my education I think it might have made a positive impact on me. *All* my teachers were white. I think seeing someone who was different in that teacher role might have helped me see there were possibilities for me. In an ideal situation I would have connected and formed an attachment to an Aboriginal teacher. I feel Jack was offended by the comments the interviewer said about his Aboriginal heritage and I agree with him that there is more to connecting with kids than the colour of your skin, but having all those other wonderful qualities and being of an ethnic minority can positively impact your students.

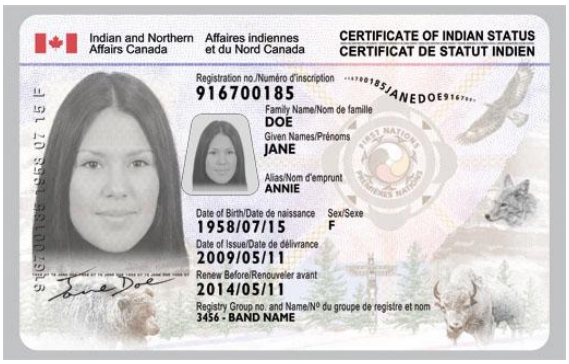
Getting a treaty card.

In this next section Dakota shares a story about when recently she had to get her treaty card renewed. Treaty cards expire and when this happens, one has to go in person much like one would to the driver's licensing bureau and have the card renewed every few years. It is usually not a pleasant experience and the offices in which this can be done are limited. The Government of Canada has guidelines that must be followed in order for a person with Aboriginal heritage to qualify for a treaty card. On the Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development website it explains the new secure status card and also which cards are still valid in circulation:

> The Government of Canada is committed to working with First Nations and all partners to improve the quality of life of First Nations people in Canada. As part of this commitment, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) has introduced the new Secure Certificate of Indian Status (SCIS), commonly referred to as the Status card.
>
> The Secure Status card is a credible identity document that meets the needs of Status Indians. Service providers will also appreciate the secure Status card's modern security features that provide better protection from the abuses of fraud and identity theft.
>
> Currently, there are four VALID types of Status cards in circulation. After the new card is launched, your current Status card will continue to be valid until it reaches its renewal date. (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, 2014,

September 22 retrieved from https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100032424/1100100032428)

Photo 2 – Example of an Indian Status Card
Retrieved from: https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100032424/1100100032428



Dakota's experience with getting her treaty card was quite unpleasant and fraught with racism and condescension from the government employee she had to interact with. She elaborates on her experience in this excerpt.

Dakota: *"I entered the downtown Winnipeg Government of Canada building recently to renew my treaty card that had expired last August. Discouraged by the 15 person deep line up in the stuffy windowless office, I knew it was going to take my afternoon. I noticed the granny-like lady in front of me in line, with a handful of young children waiting, as well. She looked tired and I felt sorry for her having to look after the busy little ones and wait in this long line.*

*"**I don't want to hear any complaining about waiting! We've just started our lunch hour!** So there's only one of us that will be looking at applications and it's gonna be a **long** wait! If your tired, sit down, but I **don't** want to hear any complaining or if you are rude your request will be denied!" aggressively shouted a large man from behind the counter to the mass of people. He definitely set the tone for the visit. Beside him, on the wall, I noticed the bold sign: "**Respect is mutual. If you are rude your service will be denied."***

While waiting I witnessed this man be rude to each and every person that approached his counter. Though, how he treated the lady with the children in front of me was grotesque. She had clearly been in contact with this office prior to her visit, seemed to know what she needed and how she had to go about getting the proper forms filled out. She stated she had faxed in some documents to the office weeks before to which the gentleman had no recollection. She mistakenly called the person she addressed the forms to "Melanie" rather than "Melodie" and the man would not help her. She was near tears when she had to without any

> *privacy plead her case and beg for his help, as her granddaughter needed her treaty card for her medication, as she was very sick. The whole scene that played out before me was disgusting and I felt awful for this woman.*
>
> *After about 45 minutes of waiting, it was my turn to approached the counter to pick up the forms I needed, thinking to myself it would have been so much nicer to have those forms available to pick up on the way in, so one could fill them out while you wait, but efficiency was not a priority in this office. I said to the man, "I'm here to renew my status card because it has expired." To which he forcefully and arrogantly replied, "You **don't** get to **renew** nothin'! It's an application process. It's not like it used to be you know! It's much more legal now." "Uh, ok. I guess I am here to **apply** for a status card," I replied. After producing all the requested identification I had to fill out the forms and go back into line and wait for approximately another 45 minutes. I again approached the same gentlemen after he yelled right at me, "NEXT!" As I produced my completed forms on the counter, he stated in a condescending slow loud voice, "If my pen **magically** touches your paper in **any** way, this is a legal document, you're gonna have to initial it!" and then he went over the documents. As the order of my names listed on my passport was not in the same order on the forms he had to number them to correctly correspond. This clearly irritated him. I then initialed where he pointed to do so. He then concluded the application process by surmising, "Being that this is a government document and you only had to initial once you did… **pretty**… **darn**… **good**." All that was missing was a little pat on my head. Good little Indian.*
>
> *I left feeling speechless. Of course after the fact, I wish I would have said something to this man. Something that would have shown him that how he was treating people was wrong. That I thought it was a gross abuse of his power to be so condescending, to shout at people to behave themselves, to go out of his way to not be helpful to an elderly woman and to be just plain rude. But I couldn't. I left feeling a little violated by his attempt to degrade me and angry at the system that made me do this."* D.R., (2013), Interviewed by C. Rattai. [tape recording]

I find the stark contrast between the very sanitized language found on the Aboriginal Affairs website as they are, "…committed to working with First Nations and all partners to improve the quality of life of First Nations people in Canada" (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, 2014, September 22 retrieved from https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100032424/1100100032428) and that used by the employee in Dakota's

story incredible. Perhaps the Government of Canada is not as committed to improving the quality of life of Aboriginal people as they would like to be perceived.

Crossing the border.

After hearing Dakota's story, I was reminded of an incident that occurred to me a few years ago in Quebec. I drove to the border crossing and rolled down my window. I have done this many times before and was prepared for the standard questions to come my way but this crossing into the United States was a little different and one I will not forget.

"Where you headed?" the white-bearded border guard asked. I replied with the usual gas and groceries that I am sure he has heard routinely. We did our little dance but before he returned my passport and let me go he asked, "Are you an Indian?" Knowing I was in a position of absolutely no power, I pushed down my disappointment, smiled and replied "Yes". He continued, "Full-blooded Indian?" I told him no and then had to explain my ethnic background. He was surprised and then asked, "What do you do for a living?" staring at me like he had never seen a Native person before. To be quite honest, there are not many Native people I have come across since living in the Eastern Townships. I continued in my polite tone and told him I was a teacher. He seemed fascinated and wanted to know where, what grade etc, so I indulged him with my answers. He smiled at that point, shook his head, handed me my passport and just as sweet as can be, with a hint of pride or something more said, "Well ***good***… ***for***… ***you***! That is wonderful!" Good little Indian.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I shared stories of identity, location, school experiences and racialization through the lens of being a mixed-blood Aboriginal person. The stories are meant to add or provide understanding of the sometimes, misunderstood views about mixed-blood people. I

intertwined counterstories throughout this chapter to reshape and organize some of the oppressive feelings and language I encountered in this process. In the next chapter, I share my reflections and implications for educators.

Chapter Five: Reflections and Conclusion

Theresa: *"I'm always very flattered because I have a different look to me. I don't look fully Middle Eastern so people don't really know what I am. People will always come up and ask me "oh, what are you?" and I like to say "well, what do you think I am?" They'll throw in Spanish, Portuguese, or something really exotic but I've never once gotten Native. And I'm happy for that. If someone were to tell me that, I'd be disappointed. I don't want to look like that. I see a lot of Native people around downtown and a lot of them really don't take care of themselves."* T.A., (2013) Interviewed by C. Rattai [tape recording]

Introduction

In this chapter, I reflect on the concepts of identity and educational experiences. I offer suggestions for mixed-blood Aboriginal people who struggle with their identities and share a model for guidance in identity reconstruction. I discuss implications for education and use critical indigenous pedagogy as a source for suggestions and reflective thinking on inclusive classrooms.

Reflections on Identity

Throughout this Master's program I used reflection as a tool to further my thinking and question myself: my beliefs and my assumptions. Dunbar (2008) states that stories are powerful tools for reflection.

> Stories provide data that have a focus on ways in which cultural and social constraints act upon individuals. They are a powerful tool for reflection. The language used is an act of epistemology. Bruner suggests that storytellers take meaning from the historical circumstances that gave shape to the culture of which they are an expression. (Dunbar, 2008, p. 90)

All four participants shared stories about their mixed-blood Aboriginal identities. Although the participants were successful, educated and productive members of society, some carry shame about their identities. The depth of shame ranged from little to none to a great deal. For example, Theresa's quote at the beginning of this chapter demonstrates much shame for her

Aboriginal identity when she explains she is happy people do not recognize her as Native: *"I've never once gotten Native. And I'm happy for that. If someone were to tell me that, I'd be disappointed."* The depth of shame each participant expressed was linked to how openly they identify themselves publicly as Native. Jack states, *"I'm a little bit Aboriginal"* and *"It's the first thing I think is that I'm ashamed at that part of my heritage"*. These statements demonstrate his discomfort in expressing his Aboriginal identity in public. Theresa explains that she *"always kept the Native side of me hidden"*. Interestingly, these participants were the younger individuals who express explicitly these feelings and they shared limited positive connections with other Aboriginal people. Jack described his negative experiences by saying, *"I think about some Aboriginal people that are homeless and live on Portage and Main… I think, that negative stereotype that has been put on Aboriginal people has truly affected me to my core"*. Theresa described her negative experiences by saying, *"They're the ones that are drunk all the time and they're the ones who are asking me for money"*. Thus their experiences have shaped their perceptions of Aboriginal people. These participants carry much hurt about their mixed-blood Aboriginal identity.

The participants' perceptions of their identity changed as they had more positive experiences such as Rand getting to know other Native people and working with them on a construction team, or Dakota who also works with and knows socially other Aboriginal people. Both Rand and Dakota came to a new awareness about or reflected on their life experiences. They stated that they had little or no shame in their Aboriginal heritage and shared positive stories. Rand says, *"I'm not ashamed of it anymore. Not at all. Before, I never met any Natives. It was just whatever you saw on TV, probably all negative stereotypes. Now, most Natives I do know I'm working with"*. Dakota stated, *"I did have the fortunate experience of meeting my*

Aboriginal grandparents and remembering them, I always felt really close to my mom's mother, our grandma."

It was not difficult for Rand and Dakota to express their mixed-blood Aboriginal identities. For Rand, meeting other Aboriginal people and working on a team alongside them positively affected his perceptions. For Dakota, having a connection and attachment at an early age to the Aboriginal side of her family positively affected her perceptions.

Growing up, I knew I was different, due to my ethnic background, from most people in my small town. Richardson (2001) claims that we do not need to see our own image to learn to recognize the ways we are different from the "Other" and from the image of the "Other". During my experience in northern Aboriginal communities I felt the true magnitude of my mixed-blood paradigm taking shape. My awareness that I straddle two heritages but neither ethnic group completely accepted me as belonging was a difficult and emotional realization for me. I was forced to question many ideas I had about ethnicity and culture and I realized how intricate these issues are. For me, it took learning and understanding the history of Aboriginal people to overcome my shame. I tried to reach for belonging and wanted to fit in with an Aboriginal community but realized I had to first create that connection within myself. I had to realize I had a damaged identity. I then had to repair my negative self-worth in order to work at repairing my damaged identity. I realized that my identity repair would be a life-long journey.

Recommendations for Mixed-blood Aboriginal People

Resist, reclaim, construct, act – A medicine wheel approach.

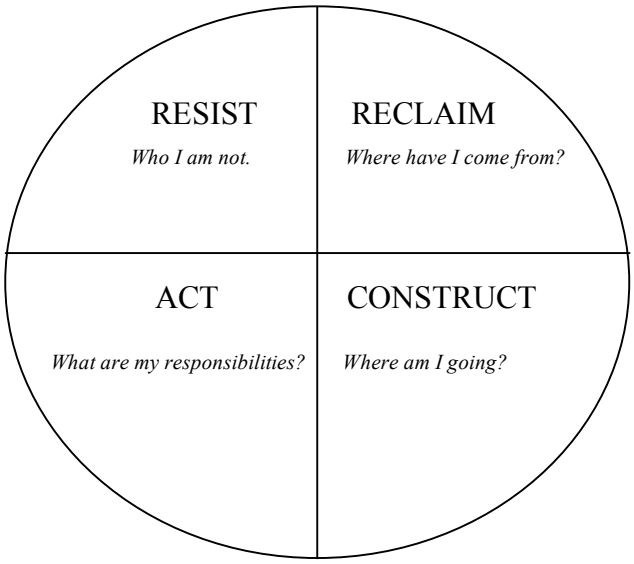
After reading Anderson's book, *A Recognition of Being* (2001), it was as though, for the first time, someone was speaking directly to me as a mixed-blood Aboriginal woman. I felt somebody else understood! My eyes would fill with tears as I felt my story and my life were

represented in text. I connected to this book in a way that I have with no other. Thus I strongly recommend mixed-blood Aboriginal people read this book. Anderson shares a medicine wheel model for reconstructing identity. She uses the questions put forth by Sylvia Maracle, a Mohawk woman, traditional teacher, and community leader, as a guide for the process of reconstructing Native womanhood. The defining questions are the following:

> In trying to walk the traditional path there are four lifelong questions we ask ourselves: Who am I? In order to answer that I have to know: Where have I come from? And once I know where I have come from, I have to know: Where am I going? And once I know where I am going, I need to know: What is my responsibility? We ask ourselves these questions and every time we think we know the answer to one, it changes all the others. (Anderson, 2001, p. 16)

The model that Anderson has created, which she describes as a medicine wheel, represents a way in which Aboriginal people can reconstruct their identity. Anderson, a mixed-blood Aboriginal woman, presents the medicine wheel as a way to reclaim an Aboriginal identity but not replace any mixed-blood identity a person may have. She argues that, "Our definition and self-determination as individuals and as nations involves calling on the past to define the future" (Anderson, 2001, p. 15-16). I agree that it was in learning about the history of Aboriginal people that I started to understand the impact of living in a colonial society. Until this point, I thought negatively about myself and people of my heritage. "Who am I?" is a fantastic question to start with in order to begin reflection and reparation. Figure 4 is the medicine wheel that Anderson has organized with the four guiding questions.

Figure 4: WHO AM I? (Anderson, 2001, p. 16)



Anderson (2001) describes how the journey around the medicine wheel of resist-reclaim-construct-act eventually brings one to a place where one must pause and reflect. The medicine wheel is a place where one can think about what one has learned and begin to ask new questions that can guide the individual around the wheel again. Using the model that she has created would not be easy. The challenge is to commit to loving oneself enough to want a better life, to effect change and to impact the future by moving forth with a positive self image. Social change is a slow and sometimes difficult process. Following Anderson's model could be a journey of self-discovery and learning. Each Aboriginal person constructs their own identity and hopefully the effects are a positive change for the next generation. One needs to move away from the shame, racism, violence and self-hate in order to repair one's identity and effect change for the future.

Reflections on School Experiences

As an educator, the participants' stories about their school experiences were of great interest to me. I knew from my personal experiences that elementary schools with little diversity

could be challenging for those who are different. Therefore, I was not surprised to hear that the participants say that they had some difficulties in the education system. What I found most compelling was that, due to the range in ages of the participants, I saw a shift in education initiatives, philosophy and temporal changes in their experiences. I saw an evolution from schools not talking about diversity as though it does not exist to specific lessons targeting diversity.

For those who were in the education system fifteen years later, there was an introduction to diversity lessons and discussions happening in the classroom, much like a *"Folklorama"* approach in which all the emphasis was on difference. *Folklorama* is a cultural festival held each year in Winnipeg, which celebrates diversity and promotes cultural understanding through food, music and dance. Therefore, in the classroom the emphasis would be on celebrating diversity by learning about other cultures ethnic food, songs, and dances, which is interesting. However, this sort of approach is lacking because it does not engage "students in provocative thinking about contradictions of ideals and lived realities" and treats culture in a trivial and superficial manner (Gillborn & Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 33).

Ten years later, a *"pull out"* model for cultural awareness programs was used to address the needs of ethnically diverse children. I do not like this model as it addresses the needs of some children but excludes the others. This approach limits who learns about culture when I feel all children need to learn about others and be accepting of difference. I much prefer that the whole class learn about diverse cultures together. I prefer to use teachable moments to address ethical needs in the classroom and bring in diversity as much as possible. Change is occurring in the education system but there is still much work to be done.

Implications for Educators

All participants made a strong case for programs such as the Quebec Education Plan's *Ethics and Religious Culture* program, cross-curricular competencies such as *Citizenship and Community Life,* and quality preschool programs that teach empathy and positive social development. My examples are from the Q.E.P., as this has been my hands-on experience for the past ten years. Governments need to continue supporting and putting funding into programs that teach students that all people possess equal value and dignity and promote a "pursuit of the common good" (Quebec Education Plan, 2008, p. 297). Educators need to continue to "ensure that students take part in the democratic life of the classroom or the school and develop a spirit of openness to the world and respect for diversity" (Quebec Education Plan, 2001, p. 50). Students may in a safe and respectful classroom environment share their own beliefs and construct their own identity. Curriculum that is specifically designed for ethics and social justice are paramount for supporting children in their growth and development. I feel that programs cannot be the only resources that educators think about to support identity construction in their classrooms. Educators need to be conscious of their students' needs in all aspects of school life.

Sandy Grande (2008) offers a framework for thinking about indigenous knowledge and critical pedagogy and she defines this as *Red Pedagogy*. Grande (2008) states that *Red Pedagogy* is an "indigenous pedagogy that operates at the crossroads of Western theory – specifically critical pedagogy – and indigenous knowledge" (pg. 234). She states that *Red Pedagogy* "… asks that we examine our own communities, policies, and practices, that we take seriously the notion that knowing ourselves as revolutionary agents is more than an act of understanding who we are" but rather and act of "reinventing ourselves" (pg. 234). Grande (2008) states that *Red Pedagogy* works to "remember, redefine, and reverse the devastation of the original colonialist "encounter"" (pg. 234). Grande (2008) states that beginning with the

disconnect between indigenous knowledge and Western theory is a good place to start. Lawrence and Dua (2005) argue that we all cannot become "Indian experts" nor should we, but I feel some sort of balance can be struck. I agree with Kincheloe and Steinberg (2008) that teachers need to be "dedicated to the search for new perspectives… and…look at lessons from the perspectives of individuals from different race, class, gender, and sexual orientations" (p. 139). I believe as an educator, one should be knowledgeable of different perspectives such as: Indigenous, African American, White, poor and wealthy, and bring these perspectives into the classroom.

Educators need to understand that "there is no unitary indigenous curriculum to be factually delivered to students in various locations. Not everyone who identifies with a particular indigenous culture produces knowledge the same way, nor do different indigenous cultures produce the same knowledges" (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008, p. 144). I feel the diversity of indigenous cultures is a very important point and one that connects to the stories told by the participants. In the words of one participant, *"an Indian…. is an Indian… is an Indian"* leads to assumptions made about culture and people. If teachers try to offer a one-size-fits-all lesson, they run the risk of making gross generalizations, feeding into stereotypes and potentially harming the students they have the best intentions of educating.

Effecting change in Aboriginal peoples' views of identity in relation to self, family, community and nation can positively impact children within our schools and society. Perhaps the next generation will not have to repair their damaged identities and carry the shame and hurt as the last generation did. Seeing hope and possibilities rather than blame and shame. Our education system in regards to critical pedagogy and anti-racist curricula needs to move forward and continue to support all children in our classrooms. Some immediate and easy to implement

changes can occur, such as teachers being more aware of the diversity of the materials they choose to use. Consciously thinking about whose literacies are being supported and valued is necessary to support a diverse learning environment. Using stories that represent many cultures and diverse points of view that stray from the mainstream Western hegemonic materials that so often dominate our classrooms should be a priority. Teachers should try to create learning situations that expose children to other cultures. Educators must put conscious effort, thought and sensitivity into this, as we must deal with issues, problems and needs arising out of the relationship between the dominant and minority cultures.

The educative process, neither its contents nor its products, is free from cultural influences (Adler, 2001). My bookshelf is full of academic texts relating to education: *Mastery Teaching* by Madeline Hunter, *Reading Essentials* by Regie Routman, *Beyond Levelled Books* by Franki Sibberson, *The Art of Teaching Writing* by Lucy Caulkins, and many more. The leaders in these prospective fields never mention the need for a culturally sensitive approach and, for the most part, focus on the very narrow view of literacy as reading and writing. If one teaches children without being conscious of their social well-being in the classroom, all this pedagogy is deficient in meeting their needs. I ask whether we are doing enough?

Gary Howard, in his book *We Can't Teach What We Don't Know* discusses the importance of recognizing race in the classroom. If we remain neutral or "colour-blind", as Howard (2006) says, we are assuming that it is acceptable to erase racial groups, ignore differences, and try to achieve the illusion of sameness in the classroom. This colonial attitude, though it may have the most noble of intentions, treats race as non-existent and irrelevant, and people of colour become invisible. Ignoring race and believing that race, racism, do not exist, negates the feelings, experiences and identity of people of colour. Howard (2006) argues that by

treating race as a taboo subject, race is put into a category of discomfort and this becomes problematic. Racism becomes a topic we avoid; our discomfort may take over and we may lead our students away from confronting difficult issues in the classroom. As educators, we have an ethical duty to make the classroom an accepting and inclusive space for all students.

Educators need to be aware of their privilege and bias and realize the position of power they may have in the classroom. "White educators, like fish immersed in the normalcy of water, have been swimming unaware in the medium of our own dominance" (Howard, 2006, p. 50). Howard states that we too often attribute failure to the culture and characteristics of the child rather than to the inherent structures of dominance in the larger society. In our lack of awareness, teachers can perpetuate the legitimizing myths that have kept white people in control for centuries. Educators need to open their minds and hearts to the reality of dominance and work towards maintaining an anti-oppressive environment in schools.

As an educator, it is paramount to realize the impact one has on children. Children listen and believe every word we say. So many times parents tell me stories about their children debating with them about how to do homework or use a reading strategy and the child's main argument is that, *"Ms. Rattai said…"*. What educators do is important. What educators say is has a lasting impact. If one is teaching about culture or religion or math, one needs to understand the influence one has on children. I had a group of pre-service teachers come into my class to do a practice lesson on Native Spirituality. Unfortunately, rather than doing the research about the Cree culture and people before coming to teach my grade one and two class and selecting appropriate materials to read and share with them, it appeared to me they had put little thought into what they were trying to accomplish. They opted for the *"Folklorama"* approach. At the end of the lesson, I was fairly certain if you asked my students anything about Cree people, they

would not have even known Cree *are* people. My students did however have fun constructing a teepee on a slab of wood. I agree with Lawrence that we cannot all become *"Indian experts"* but having a sound knowledge of what I am teaching and putting critical thought into what and how I will deliver the material is crucial.

Future Research Considerations

I collaborated with four mixed-blood Aboriginal participants of various ages. It would be interesting to know if the depth of shame and/or acceptance resonates with other Aboriginal people as it did with what the participants voiced. Does having positive experiences with one's Aboriginal heritage mean one is more likely to identify and express an Aboriginal heritage? Does the age of the participant become a factor? If one is older, does that mean they have more skills to cope with their identity? What other factors affect mixed-blood identity? How are mixed-blood Aboriginal people sharing an Aboriginal heritage with their children? How is the current situation at The Kahnawake Mohawk Territory going to affect the woman who "marry out" and are evicted from their homes? What about their children? How is "marry out" handled on other reserves across Canada? Does this remain an issue for Native women and children?

It would also be interesting to examine the perceptions and experiences with mixed-blood Aboriginal children in a school setting. Would we find a depth of shame with this age group? How would the mixed-blood Aboriginal children in different school settings perceive culture and identity construction in the classroom? Have the recent changes to the Quebec Education Plan affected their feelings toward their mixed-blood identity? What other anti-oppressive and anti-racist pedagogy is happening in schools today and how is this affecting a mixed-blood child's identity?

Reflections

This has been one of the *most* challenging and yet rewarding experiences of my life. I am writing this last section, knowing so many times throughout this process I believed I would not complete this thesis. Completing this Master's degree has been a very long journey. At times, I felt that I was climbing a mountain, other times as though a weight was crushing me to my knees and every time I looked up there was still more to go. I believed I was not worthy and did not deserve to have a voice in academia. I am so grateful to have shared this experience with my advisors, Mary and Christopher. Your guidance gave me the strength I needed to move forward when I just wanted to stop. Although the writing has been tough, the nuances of mixed-bloodedness and defining one's identity has always been close to my heart. I feel privileged to have been trusted with the stories of the participants who spoke so candidly and honestly about their lives.

Listening to their stories at times made me laugh and at times made me cry. All the while, I would go away thinking about my own life and identity and build from there. I see that we are all on different paths in this journey and our experiences have created and will continue to create who we are. Most of all, I believe we want to be confident and accepted for who we are.

Empathy and understanding can be our greatest gifts when examining the scope of the multi-faceted and complex enigma of social issues that plague Aboriginal people. Each of our stories may be similar or different but each holds a perspective of what it means to be an Aboriginal person today. Emma LaRocque (1996) states that, "…freezing Native culture in the past makes it virtually impossible for Native people to engage in contemporary rights debates such as freedom of religion, speech, personal choice, citizenship or women's rights" (p. 90). We need to stop looking for that ideal Native tradition and story and live in a contemporary world, whether we live in urban, rural or reservation settings.

My aim is to share insights into the perceptions of an under-represented group of mixed-blood Aboriginal people. I used a decolonizing framework, along with the capacity of stories, were used to organize the data, the stories and the counterstories of this inquiry.

The participants shared their perceptions on mixed-blood Aboriginal identity, school experiences, geographical locations and racialization. From these stories and counterstories, I shared implications for educators as well as a medicine wheel framework for identity reconstruction.

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Appendix A

Sample E-mail

Greetings,

Hope you are well and enjoying this wonderful summer!

I am writing to invite you to participate in a research study I will be conducting this summer for McGill University to complete my masters in Education and Society. I am looking to speak with individuals who identify themselves as mixed-blood Aboriginal living in urban settings (not on a reserve).

The purpose of this study is to challenge the stereotypical relationships between Nativeness and Native identity; with respect to the definitions and labels that society imposes on Aboriginal people. I plan to demonstrate that although there may be similarities and differences between people's stories, all stories are valid in defining an Aboriginal identity. I propose three questions to gain a deeper understanding of Nativeness and Native identity by exploring the social and cultural factors that influence these ideals:

1.What does having a Native identity mean for mixed-blood Aboriginal people in today's society and what factors influence this identity?
2. How does the socially constructed categorization and racialization of mixed- blood Aboriginal people influence your perceptions of identity?
3.What experiences / stories can you share about being mixed-blood?

If you are interested in participating in this study please let me know. Every effort will be made to protect your anonymity. You may withdraw at any time. The study consists of 3 meetings that will take place in the month of July and can be done at a place and time of your convenience. If you are interested in participating in this study or if you would like more information, please contact me via email or phone at xxx-xxx-xxxx.

Have a great day!

I look forward to hearing from you.
Crystal Rattai

Appendix B

Participant Consent Form

Urban Mixed–Blood Aboriginal People and Identity

Researcher: Crystal Rattai

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and understand any accompanying information.

The purpose of this inquiry is to discuss and share our experiences with the stereotypical relationships between Nativeness and Native identity; with respect to the definitions and labels that society imposes on Aboriginal people. I would like to raise awareness of mixed-blood Aboriginal people as being recognized as possessing a Native identity.

You are agreeing to participate because you are a mixed-blood Aboriginal person living in an urban setting (off reserve). You will be one of four to six participants enrolled in this study.

You understand that your participation involves giving your own time to meet with me on one or more occasions, at a date that is convenient.

You will be audio recorded but at any time, you can stop the recording.

You can ask questions before and at any time during our meetings.

You understand that I will contact you and you will have the opportunity ensure accuracy of the information that you provided me and add or delete any part of your story.

You understand that this study poses no risk to yourself or to your family.

You understand that I will aim to maintain your confidentiality and not associate your name with your story / data.

When writing the thesis, I may change small details or wording of our meeting to ensure that community members who may be familiar with your life events do not easily identify you.

You also are aware that if you were to disclose any involvement with child abuse I am obligated by law to report this to the authorities.

You understand that I am conducting this study for my Masters of Arts degree. You also understand that I will work closely with McGill University faculty thesis supervisors Dr. Mary Maguire and Dr. Christopher Stonebanks who will have access to the data collected.

In any report writing and publication of the study, you understand that there will be no direct reference to yourself and / or the agency where you work.

During your participation in this study, you will not have to assume any financial costs.

If you agree to participate you understand that I agree to send you a summary of my findings for your feedback.

I will also mail you a copy of my study findings if you so desire upon my completion.

There is an attached form that you will be invited to sign if you would like to receive a copy of the study findings.

The benefit to participating in this study includes your personal contribution of lived experiences or testimony to the knowledge of Aboriginal people.

You understand that your stories may be used to learn from, to build upon, and to increase understanding of issues related to mixed-blood Aboriginal people.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from this study at any time, and / or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification on new information throughout your participation.

The researcher is Crystal Rattai, graduate student, Department of Integrated Studies, McGill University. You can contact me by telephone at xxx - xxx–xxxx (home) or xxx–xxx – xxxx (cell phone). The thesis advisor is Dr. Mary Maguire, professor at McGill University. I can contact her by telephone at xxx-xxx-xxxx or by email at mary.maguire@mcgill.ca.

If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above named persons or Lynda McNeil Research Ethics Manager at xxx-xxx-xxxx or by email at lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca. A copy of this consent for has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Participant's Signature **Date**

Researcher and / or Delegate's Signature **Date**